Canon and Hermeneutics in Times of Deconstruction. What New Testament Scholarship Can Achieve Hermeneutically in the Present

Oda Wischmeyer

Translated by
Wayne Coppins[1]

1. Canonization – Hermeneutics – Decanonization

The Christian *Bible*,[2] together with the *Quran*,[3] belongs to the canonical collections of *Scriptures* of late antiquity[4] that rest upon the older Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures of Israel[5] (*Tanak* and *Septuaginta*) and thus reach back far into pre-Christian times, while also retaining religious authority in the present and laying claim

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[1] For the German version of this article, see O. Wischmeyer, "Kanon und Hermeneutik in Zeiten der Dekonstruktion. Was die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft gegenwärtig leisten kann," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Schulz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 623–78; O. Wischmeyer, "Kanon und Hermeneutik in Zeiten der Dekonstruktion. Was die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft gegenwärtig leisten kann," in *Auf dem Weg zur neutestamentliche Hermeneutik. Oda Wischmeyer zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Schulz (Tübingen: Francke, 2014), 13–68.

[2] In what follows *Bible* consistently designates the two-part Christian canon. On questions of terminology, cf., in general, S. Scholz, "Die Bibel: Texte – Kanones – Übersetzungen," in *LBH* (2009): XXX–XLI.

[3] On the *Quran* as a late antique textual collection, cf. N. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung. Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009); A. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010); A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx, eds., *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[4] The Holy Scriptures of Israel, the *Biblia Hebraica* or the *Tanak*, are consistently called *Scriptures* here. They are older and do not belong to late antiquity. In a larger framework, it would, however, also be necessary to consider the late antique legal corpora here, Codex Theodosianus (cf., by way of introduction, P. E. Pieler, "Codex Theodosianus," in *LexMA* 2 [1983]: 2208–9) and the collections of Justinian (cf., by way of introduction, P. Weimar, "Corpus iuris civilis," in *LexMA* 3 [1986]: 270–78).

[5] On the terminological questions of Scripture/Scriptures, canon, and Bible from the perspective of ancient Judaism, cf. E. J. C. Tigchelaar, "Wie haben die Qumrantexte unsere Sicht des kanonischen Prozesses verändert?" in *Qumran und der biblische Kanon*, ed. M. Becker and J. Frey, BThSt 92 (Neukirchen-Vluyn Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 65–88; E. Ulrich, "The Jewish Scriptures: Texts, Versions, Canons," in *EDEJ* (2010): 97–120; E. Schuller, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Canon and Canonization," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 293–314.

to respectively distinct hermeneutics for themselves, which keep alive older hermeneutical approaches[6] and continue to generate new ones. For *Tanak, Septuaginta, Bible*, and *Quran*, canon and hermeneutics are related to each other. The canonical Scriptures develop their own doctrine of understanding (hermeneutic) and corresponding methods of textual interpretation (methodology). At the same time, these canonical collections of Scriptures equally lay claim to the following argument: "*Canonical Scriptures need and develop their own doctrine of interpretation and understanding.*"[7] Canonical Scriptures are without their own hermeneutic unimaginable. For this reason, to speak about canons is always also to speak about hermeneutics. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this argument, in different forms, also plays a leading role in the respectively current theological hermeneutics.[8] Biblical hermeneutics is its own hermeneutical field of work within Christian theology.[9]

The conviction that canonical textual corpora need a hermeneutic of their own is not, however, based on a genuinely religious – let alone theological – premise. It does not have its origin in the religious textual collections of antiquity and is not restricted to religious textual corpora. Rather, the connection between distinct processes of canonization and interpretation is already a phenomenon of Greek culture – more specifically, of the early reception history of the Homeric epics, which united in themselves the religious, cultural, literary, and pedagogical standard-setting functions (κανών[10]) for Greco-Roman antiquity.[11] The first methodological and hermeneutical rules were developed for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[12] In Hellenistic Alexandria, the basic rules of

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[6] Hebrew Bible: contemporary Judaism; Septuaginta: contemporary Orthodox churches.

[7] This claim is, to my knowledge, only clearly formulated in G. G. Stroumsa, "The Christian Hermeneutical Revolution and its Double Helix," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers, P. W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, and L. Teugels, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 10: "Indeed, there can be no Scriptures without hermeneutics, which seek to overcome the constantly threatening cognitive distance, the distance and tension between conceptions reflected in the Scriptures of old and in present perceptions."

[8] Cf., by way of introduction, U. H. J. Körtner, *Einführung in die theologische Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006); A. C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); A. C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[9] On this, cf. O. Wischmeyer, "Einführung," in *LBH* (2009): IX–XXIX.

[10] For canon as "yardstick" or "standard," see H. Ohme, "Kanon," in *RAC* 20 (2000): 1–28. Ohme develops the interpretation of the term from the "expression of the striving for exactness" (2) in art, music, and philosophy and, further, from the "model" in the "context of the *Horos*-conception," i.e., the "standard of righteousness" (4). As Latin equivalents Ohme mentions *regula* and *norma*. See also Ohme's discussion of the legal dimension of the term and on canon as table (date of Easter, list of bishops, etc.). Cf. also J. A. Loader, H. von Lips, W. Wischmeyer, C. Danz, J. Maier, N. Sinai, and S. Winko, "Kanon," in *LBH* (2009): 310–16.

[11] On the pedagogical function of Homer in pre-Christian and Christian antiquity, see C. Römer, *Das Phänomen Homer in Papyri, Handschriften und Drucken*, Nilus 16 (Vienna: Phoibos Verlag, 2009). The catalogue of the exhibition of the Austrian National Library documents, among other things, examples of student transcriptions from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, essays on themes of the epics, and small school lexicons on Homeric vocabulary.

[12] On Homer philology and Homer hermeneutics, cf. R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); G. J. M. Bartelink, "Homer," *RAG* 15 (1991): 116–47 (with literature); J. I. Porter, "Lines and Circles: Aristarchus and Crates on Homeric Exegesis," in *Homer's Ancient Readers. The Hermeneutic of Greek Epic's Earliest Ex-*

Homer hermeneutics were applied to the *Septuaginta* by Jewish exegetes. Christian exegetes took over this hermeneutic and applied it not only to the first part of their canon but above all to the relationship between the two canon parts of their *Bible*. Vergil's writings had a similarly general canonical status.[13] This was based – beyond the ways that it functioned as a literary model – on a certain cultural and political ideology of Rome, which was then taken over via the church fathers into the Middle Ages in a Christianized form.[14] The status of Vergil's epic distinguishes itself thereby from other literary canons of antiquity, which were subject to the literary *aemulatio* and were accordingly open.[15] While the religious canons in late antiquity came to a certain conclusion, in the course of the Middle Ages and the modern period, alongside Vergil, new

egetes, ed. R. Lamberton and J. J. Keaney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 67–114; A. A. Long, "Stoic Readings of Homer," in *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutik of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*, ed. R. Lamberton and J. J. Keaney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 41–66; P. S. Alexander, "'Homer the Prophet of All' and 'Moses our Teacher': Late Antique Exegesis of the Homeric Epics and the Torah of Moses," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers, P. W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, and L. Teugels, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 127–42 (an instructive comparison of late antique Homer hermeneutics and Mishnah hermeneutics); M. Finkelberg, "Homer as a Foundation Text," in *Homer, the Bible and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Finkelberg and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 75–96; S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London: Routledge, 2003); O. Wischmeyer, "Überlegungen zu den Entstehungsbedingungen der Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments," in *Rondo. Beiträge für Peter Diemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Augustyn and I. Lauterbach (Munich: Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, 2010), 7–17; M. Finkelberg, "The Canonicity of Homer," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 137–52. The parallelism between Homer and the Jewish *Scriptures* as foundational texts is especially emphasized by Stroumsa, "The Christian Hermeneutical Revolution and its Double Helix." Cf. also M. R. Niehoff, "Philons Beitrag zur Kanonisierung der griechischen Bibel," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 329–44.

[13] On this, see W. Suerbaum, "Der Anfangsprozess der 'Kanonisierung' Vergils," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 171–220.

[14] On Vergil in the church fathers, cf. J. den Boeft, "*Nullius disciplinae expers*: Virgil's Authority in (Late) Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers, P. W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, and L. Teugels, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 175–86. In his *Oratio ad sanctorum coetus*, Emperor Constantine the Great appeals to Vergil's Fourth Eclogue and gives the text of Vergil an allegorical interpretation: Vergil is said to have spoken φανερῶς τε ἅμα καὶ ἀποκρύφως δι' ἀλληγοριῶν (I. A. Heikel, ed., *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1: *Über das Leben Constantins. Constantins Rede an die Heilige Versammlung. Tricennatsrede an Constantin*, GSC Eusebius 1 [Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1902], 182). See further S. Freund, *Vergil im frühen Christentum: Untersuchungen zu den Vergilzitaten bei Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Novatian, Cyprian und Arnobius* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003). On Vergil in the Middle Ages, cf., by way of introduction, L. Rossi, "Vergil im MA," in *LMA* 8 (1997): 1522–30.

[15] On this, see P. von Moellendorff, "Canon as Pharmakón: Inside and Outside Discursive Sanity in Imperial Greek Literature," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity*, ed. J. Ulrich, A.-C. Jacobsen, and D. Brakke, ECCA 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012), 89–101. On the literary canon, cf. A. Vardi, "Canons of Literary Texts in Rome," in *Homer, the Bible and Beyond; Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Finkelberg and G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 131–52. On the question of whether there was a canon of historiographical writings in antiquity, cf. D. Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan, and Christian Societies in the Greco-Roman World* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004); D. Mendels, "The Formation of an Historical Canon of the Greco-Roman Pe-

literary canons were formed that to a considerable degree owed their *raison d'être* to the long, complicated process of nation building, which proceeded in very different ways in individual cases.[16] Alongside and prior to the national literary canons, the great national-language translations of the Bible with their confessional connections, such as the Luther translation and the King James Bible, played a canon-like role of their own. In summary, the connection between literary and religious canons is a component of Greco-Roman culture, to which the culture of ancient Judaism also belongs; another component is the development of corresponding canon hermeneutics. Both components were passed on through the Middle Ages and received new valences in modernity in the sphere of literature. The close relation between canons and hermeneutics is not restricted to religious canons and therefore also not exclusively or primarily a theological theme. Rather, it must be placed in the larger cultural context of exemplary textual collections and their interpretation.

In the times of deconstruction, both entities have been contested and weakened in different ways. Religious and foundational classical and national literary canons are questioned with respect to their limited, exclusive, normative, and authoritative position. Or they are deconstructed as normative and formative textual collections[17] (de-canonization). Or they are subjected as collections of exemplary literature[18] to a constant process of new formation (recanonization). At the same time, deconstruction often understands itself as an anti-hermeneutical discourse that is meant to oppose every kind of normative doctrine of understanding.[19] The two entities of canon and hermeneutics are thereby called into question. At the same time, the originally close structure of canon and hermeneutics is disturbed in principle. This disturbance surfaces especially clearly in scholarship on the Bible. The historical contextualization of the two parts of the *Bible* (the two-part Bible of the Christian churches) and their individual writings has led to a constantly increasing awareness of the heterogeneity of

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riod: From the Beginnings to Josephus," in *Josephus and Jewish History*, ed. J. Sievers and G. Lembi, SupplJSJ 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3–20.

[16] Cf. R. Rosenberg, "Kanon," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 2, ed. K. Weimar, H. Fricke, and J. Müller, 3rd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 224–27. The tendencies to develop canons of "world literature" (Goethe), as we find them in Harold Bloom, are also based on the national canons. See H. Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002); GV = H. Bloom, *Genius. Die hundert bedeutendsten Autoren der Weltliteratur*, trans. Y. Badal (Munich: Albrecht Knaus Verlag, 2004). Cf. C. Grube, "Die Entstehung des Literaturkanons aus dem Zeitgeist der Nationalliteratur-Geschichtsschreibung," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 71–108.

[17] Calling into question the semi-canonical national and confessional translations of the Bible, such as the Lutherbibel, also belongs in this context. The many new translations present a very distinct deconstructive potential.

[18] On this, cf. Grube, "Die Entstehung des Literaturkanons."

[19] Cf. E. Angehrn, J. A Loader, O. Wischmeyer, W. Wischmeyer, U. H. J. Körtner, G. Stemberger, H. Bobzin, K. Pollmann, C. Lubkoll, M. Habermann, "Hermeneutik," in *LBH* (2009): 245–54 and S. Kreuzer, O. Wischmeyer, M. Hailer, L. Fladerer, G. Kurz, and J. Greisch, "Interpretation/Interpretieren/Interpret," in *LBH* (2009): 289–96. For criticism of an interpretation that has hermeneutical ambitions, cf., in general, Susan Sontag's manifesto *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966). See also note 157.

the biblical canon. From this perspective, the canon-supported conception of a "biblical scholarship," which underlies, for example, the structure of the German-language Roman Catholic University exegesis,[20] does not reflect the different linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical conditions under which the Old and New Testament textual collections emerged. Here, the ecclesiastical understanding of the canon continues to be presupposed, which leaves unconsidered the general tendencies toward decanonization and the rejection of canonical hermeneutics associated with it. In the last century, the division of biblical scholarship into Old and New Testament scholarship has taken place in German Protestant theology.[21] With this development, the historical differences are structurally prioritized over the canonical principle of unity, though without completely abandoning the canonical paradigm, which is given with the terms *Old Testament* and *New Testament*. Accordingly, the question of the relationship between canon, hermeneutics, and historical deconstruction likewise continues to be virulent in the sphere of Protestant theology. How can *New Testament scholarship* – which is programmatically related to the formative canonical textual corpus of the emerging Christian religion, *the New Testament*, and guided by canon-hermeneutical lines of questioning, on the one hand, and yet operates at the same time in the paradigm of historical scholarship, on the other hand – react to this challenge and what role does it play in this situation?[22]

In my 2004 book *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments* I described the aforementioned challenge as follows: "Decanonization leads the New Testament texts to a new understanding that no longer presupposes the holiness and normativity of the texts and thus their singular character and significance as a given but discloses the specific literary character and material significance of the texts in the interpretation and in this framework also makes plausible and discusses the canonization of the interpreted texts from a reception historical perspective."[23] With this a new specification of the relationship between canon and hermeneutics in the times of deconstruction is opened up. The *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik*[24] shows that within the framework of decanonization, answers cannot be given by *one* discipline or by *one* hermeneutical concept – neither by theology nor by literary studies – but rather that philology, literary studies, and cultural studies as well as philosophy and theology are all occupied with the specification of this relationship. The question of responsibility or jurisdiction depends on the respective

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[20] Cf., however, also the Anglo-American model of Biblical Studies.

[21] Cf. the founding of the *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* in 1900. On the whole context, cf. M. Ohst, "Aus den Kanondebatten in der Evangelischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 39–70.

[22] On the post-canonical academic concept of investigating the literature and history of early Christianity instead of the New Testament, cf., for example, the editorial in the first issue of the journal *Early Christianity* (2010). Cf. also the editorial of *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009), 1: "We regarded the New Testament as part of Patristic Studies." It would also be possible to regard it as part of Jewish Studies.

[23] O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments. Ein Lehrbuch*, NET 8 (Tübingen: Francke, 2004), 205.

[24] O. Wischmeyer, ed., *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik. Begriffe – Methoden – Theorien – Konzepte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

underlying understanding of canon, which can be conceptualized in a normative or deconstructive way.[25] In my publications on this topic I started from the model of a historical stratification of methodological and hermeneutical textual interpretations.

In this essay I continue this approach with a concentration on the perspective of New Testament scholarship. *I advocate the thesis that New Testament scholarship in the context of present-day textual studies is the instrument that discloses the understanding of the texts of the New Testament.* Ever since its emergence as a distinct discipline, New Testament scholarship has been a child of historical deconstruction – more precisely, of decanonization – and thus obligated to historical reconstruction as well as historical deconstruction and construction. At the same time, through its embedding in the canon of disciplines of theology, it is always a participant in the discussions of the current Christian biblical-hermeneutical landscape,[26] which, alongside the textual academic disciplines of Old and New Testament scholarship, also encompasses normative theology as well as practical-theological, ecclesiastical, and devotional application. New Testament scholarship *has a distinct voice of its own*[27] in the broad discourse of biblical hermeneutics, which reaches from general hermeneutics within the framework of classical and modern doctrines of understanding[28] via methodologically grounded hermeneutics of Old Testament scholarship[29] through to the extremely lively and creative scene of "engaged approaches"[30] and postmodern *readings*[31] as well as new theological-systematic approaches that start from the doctrine of Scripture, whether these be grounded with reference to the early church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, pietism, or rationalism.[32] Canonical approaches, approaches obligated to decan-

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[25] Cf. J. A. Loader, H. von Lips, W. Wischmeyer, C. Danz, J. Maier, N. Sinai, and S. Winko, "Kanon," in *LBH* (2009): 310–16.

[26] It is so extensive that a single person can scarcely gain an overview of it. The different approaches and discussions in the English-language and German-language literature, which have largely been developed independently of each other, presents difficulties. The *Lexikon der Biblelhermeneutik* brings the different approaches together. See O. Wischmeyer, ed., *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik*.

[27] O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*.

[28] On this, see again Stroumsa, "The Christian Hermeneutical Revolution and its Double Helix," 10 and J. A. Loader, O. Wischmeyer, W. Wischmeyer, and C. Schwöbel, "Biblische Hermeneutik," in *LBH* (2009): 90–95.

[29] C. Dohmen, and G. Stemberger, eds., *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996); C. Dohmen, and G. Stemberger, eds., *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019).

[30] For an introduction, see U. H. J. Körtner, "Kontextuelle Bibelhermeneutiken," in *LBH* (2009), 344–45.

[31] For an introduction, see A. Runesson, "Reading," in *LBH* (2009): 481; M. F. Foskett and J. Kah-Jin Kuan, eds., *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Missouri Chalice Press, 2006). The term "readings" has the advantage of being less loaded, on the one hand, and of representing the basic approach of reception aesthetics, on the other hand. I have therefore selected it for my comments that follow: *New Testament readings* (note 44).

[32] For an introduction, cf. J. A. Loader, A. Christophersen, U. Wiggermann, U. H. J. Körtner, G. Stemberger, and M. Scholler, "Schrift/Schriftprinzip," in *LBH* (2009): 521–27. Among recent contributions from the side of a "theological" or "ecclesial" hermeneutic, renowned New Testament scholar Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014) deserves special interest. Cf. O. Wischmeyer, "Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*. Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014," in *Hermeneutik oder Versionen der biblischen Interpretation von Texten*, ed. G. Benyik (Szeged: JATEPress, 2023), 603–9.

onization, approaches that take up pre-modern hermeneutics, modern approaches, and postmodern approaches stand alongside and against one another. The diversity and openness of present-day biblical hermeneutics also includes its transparence for Jewish and Islamic hermeneutics,[33] which, for their part – sometimes on the basis of post-modernism – make their own creative recourse to ancient, late ancient, and medieval hermeneutics.

In this field, the intention of my essay is to sound out the perspective that New Testament scholarship itself offers and presents its central role for the task of a hermeneutic of canonical texts that is grounded in textual scholarship within the context of ongoing decanonization and criticism of hermeneutics. Accordingly, from the perspective of a New Testament scholar, I will discuss how the argument "*canonical Scriptures need and develop their own doctrine of understanding*" came into being, the extent to which it can bear weight, and the further-reaching thesis that in times of deconstruction this argument must be reformulated as follows: "*What the Scriptures of the New Testament need is not their own doctrine of understanding but rather a reflection on their reception history.*"

2. New Testament Readings

Decanonization affects first and with special severity the canon itself. Accordingly, I ask first the following question: "Into what perspective does the term *canon* place the *Bible* as a whole and the *New Testament* in particular?

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[33] Jewish and Islamic scriptural hermeneutics are important and adjacent areas for New Testament exegetes. For the Jewish *Scriptures*, see, by way of introduction, M. Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) (charity as hermeneutical term); Dohmen and Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments*; H. Liss, "Jüdische Bibelhermeneutik," in *LBH* (2009): 3081; J. L. Kugel, "Early Jewish Interpretation," in *EDEJ* (2010): 121–41; N. B. Dohrmann and D. Stern, eds., *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. D. Stern, "On Comparative Biblical Exegesis – Interpretation, Influence, Appropriation," in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, 1–19. For the Quran, see, e.g., I. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: Brill, 1920); P. Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica* 36 (1989): 173–210; J. Waardenburg, "Gibt es im Islam hermeneutische Prinzipien?" in *Hermeneutik in Christentum und Islam*, ed. H.-M. Barth and C. Elsas (Hamburg: E.B-Verlag, 1997), 51–74; U. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); N. Sinai, "Die klassische islamische Koranexegese. Eine Annäherung," *ThLZ* 163 (2011): 123–36. Cf. also the meetings of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin: "Jewish and Islamic Hermeneutics as Cultural Critique" (especially the Report of the Summer Academy: "The Hermeneutics of Border. Canon and Community in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" [http://www.wiko-berlin.de]. See also the new *Handbook of Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, ed. G. Tamer, 5 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2024–). Already published: G. Tamer, ed., *Handbook of Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, vol. 4: *Qur'ānic Hermeneutics in the 19th and 20th Century* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2024). A more general perspective can be found in C. Cornille and C. Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, Interreligious Dialogue Series 2 (Eugene: Cascade, 2010).

2.1 Reception History: The Canon as a Reception Phenomenon

From the perspective of New Testament scholarship, the New Testament canon belongs to the *reception history* of individual early Christian writings.

On the one hand, this historical perspective connects the early Christian writings to the history of the Hebrew *Scriptures* of Israel and their Greek translation, i.e., to the *past*. In this way, the historical depth dimension of the texts becomes clear. For the collection of writings that became the *New Testament* is formally only a smaller second part of the Christian *Bible*, as it is first handed down in a materially visible way with the large majuscule manuscripts of the fourth century. The large first part of the *Bible* is an expanded Greek version of the Hebrew *Scriptures* of Israel, which, in turn, contain small Aramaic textual parts. Whether and to what extent the version called *Septuaginta*, which we have before us in the large Christian *Bibles*, can be designated in its canonical final form as a closed and normative Jewish Greek scriptural canon, which the Christian church then claimed for itself and after whose model the second part of the Christian biblical canon was created, is – despite the Septuagint legend[34] of the Letter of Aristeas, which Aristobulus, Philo, and Josephus take up – controversial.[35] In any case, the individual New Testament writings were related from the beginning to their Greek Jewish pre-text, and this means that they were not without *Scripture* and not without a prehistory. The second, smaller part of the *Bible*, which in the course of time became the *New Testament* in the Christian communities and which the late ancient Jewish community, for its part, did not receive, was originally composed in Greek[36] and contains literary genres that differ clearly from the genres of the *Septuaginta*:[37] such as the two central early Christian literary genres of Gospels and letters, which early ecclesiastical writers called "the *Kyrios* and the *Apostolos*," i.e., Jesus and Paul,[38] a designation that has fundamental significance for the hermeneutic of the later *New Testament*.[39]

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[34] On this, cf. K. Brodersen, ed., *Aristeas. Der König und die Bibel. Griechisch/Deutsch*, trans. K. Brodersen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), 166–223. All Jewish and Christian ancient sources can be found in bilingual format there. At any rate, the translation legend and the origin legend of a closed, textually unchangeable and inspired collection of Greek Jewish *Scriptures* comes from a pre-Christian time! On its interpretation, see T. Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24–63.

[35] Cf. the doubt expressed with respect to this in L. J. Greenspoon, "Septuagint," in *EDEJ* (2010), 1219: "The very fact that these three translators [Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian] were active well into the Common Era casts doubt on the often-cited assertion that Christian adoption (or cooption) of the Septuagint led to its speedy and complete rejection by Jews."

[36] Note, however, the traditions about the Gospel of Matthew being originally composed in Hebrew: Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.

[37] On this, cf. now G. Theißen, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments als literaturgeschichtliches Problem*, Sch.Phil.-Hist.Kl.HAW 40 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007). The thesis that the Gospel genre can be derived from the biographies of the prophets (cf. H. Koester and M. Beintker, "Evangelium," in *RGG*[4] 2 [1999]: 1735–42; ET = H. Koester and M. Beintker, "Gospel," in *RPP* 5 [2009]: 528–33) has not established itself.

[38] Cf. the collection manuscript Papyrus 45 and 46.

[39] Acts is attached to the Gospels and has no weight of its own. The Revelation of John was hotly disputed. On the Revelation of John, cf. the differentiated remarks in Dionysius of Alexandria in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25: "But for my part I should not dare to reject the book, since many brethren hold it in estimation; but, reckoning that my perception is inadequate to form an opinion concerning it, I hold that the interpretation

On the other hand, canonization simultaneously integrates the early Christian writings into the history of the emerging Christian church. Thus, alongside the category of the past stand the categories of the *present* and *future*. The communities who let certain early Christian writings be read out in their gatherings made clear in this way that they regarded these writings not only as reliable documents of their foundational phase but also as decisive for their own time and for the future.

In summary, from a historical perspective the *Bible* in its canonical form is a product of Christian late antiquity with a syncretistic religious dimension[40] and a long prehistory.[41] It is composed in the Greek language, which was very soon translated into other major languages of the *imperium Romanum* and its neighboring cultures. The *Vulgata* of Jerome[42] marks out something like a formal endpoint for the formative phase of the Christian biblical canon, for here, there emerged, for the first time, a unified Christian "Bible book" from a single mold.[43] The canonical *New Testament* is a document of the early church. The collection expresses the absolute high estimation and conviction of enduring normativity that the early church assigned to a certain portion of their initial writings. This also applies – this has been given less attention – to the two-part Christian *Bible*.

The *Bible* has come down to us in this historical double form. New Testament scholarship consciously and programmatically decanonizes this historical and ecclesiastical inheritance when it isolates the second part of the *Bible* – the *New Testament* – from the first part and when it reads[44] and interprets the writings of the *New Testament* not as canonical Scriptures but as texts of their time, i.e., in their pre-canonical or, more precisely, non-canonical situation. It also does so when it assigns the New Testament canon to the *reception history* of the individual early Christian writings and thus to the history of the early church,[45] while New Testament scholarship itself is devoted to the *history of emergence* of the individual writings and their interdependencies. From this perspective, the canon is a thoroughly historical and processual phenomenon, which brings together after the fact certain texts of the heterogenous early Christian literature and thereby changes the individual writings fundamentally. The enormous dy-

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of each several passage is in some way hidden and more wonderful. For even though I do not understand it, yet I suspect that some deeper meaning underlie the words" (trans. J. E. L. Oulton, LCL 265, 197). Dionysius clearly uses the program of the Jewish hermeneutic here (cf. note 33).

[40] In the language of cultural studies one can speak of a "hybrid."

[41] The first applies also to the Quran, as A. Neuwirth shows. See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*; A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx, eds., *The Qur'an in Context*.

[42] Cf. F. Brunhölzl et al., "Bibelübersetzungen" in *LexMA* 2 (1983): 88–106; for the Vulgate, see pp. 91–92.

[43] This statement is not meant normatively but refers equally to the material aspect and to the linguistic and cultural aspect. With the Latin Vulgate there emerged one "Christian Bible" in one place from one hand at one time. By contrast, the Septuagint and the New Testament as well as the Greek Bible were, as indicated, linguistically and culturally heterogenous collections.

[44] The term "readings" transports a "flat" hermeneutic and is suitable for designating the hermeneutical potencies of New Testament scholarship, which are present but seldom brought into exegetical consciousness and worked out clearly. Cf. note 31.

[45] This is presented and justified in O. Wischmeyer, "Texte, Text und Rezeption. Das Paradigma der Text-Rezeptions-Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments," in *Die Bibel als Text. Beiträge zu einer textbezogenen Bibelhermeneutik*, ed. O. Wischmeyer and S. Scholz, NET 24 (Tübingen: Francke, 2008), 155–92.

namism and the great scholarly success of New Testament scholarship since J. S. Semler and F. C. Baur lies, by contrast, in the decanonization and historicization of the New Testament writings, which were now read for the first time in the reception history as "themselves" and in their simultaneous fundamental separation from the Old Testament canon, which in the course of recent scholarship has again become what it originally was – the scriptural collection of ancient Israel.[46]

Both processes of separation had far-reaching hermeneutical consequences. The separation of the early Christian writings from their reception history calls into question not only their normative significance but also their significance as such. What makes the letter of James *materially* – and this means in our context *theologically* – "significant" and distinguishes it from so-called apocryphal texts if it is *not* read *canonically* from the outset? The other separation may have had even more far-reaching consequences for canon hermeneutics. The separation from the *Old Testament* implies both an interruption of the intertext of Jewish *Scriptures* and *New Testament* – which was a given for the New Testament authors themselves and for the early church writers[47] – and the renunciation of both the hermeneutical concept of salvation history[48] – which connects the two canons – and the methods of typology and allegoresis.[49] In this way, historical interpretation distanced itself from the self-understanding of the New Testament writings – in favor of the self-understanding of the *Scriptures* of Israel – and in the long run subjected the position and significance of the *Old Testament* in the Christian religion to renewed debate.

2.2 History of Emergence: The Individual Writings and their Pre-History as a Starting Point

The choice to start with the early Christian writings themselves is self-evident for New Testament scholarship. In the context of the discussion of canon and hermeneutics, the question of the status and authority of these writings therefore initially arises from their self-understanding, i.e., *before* their canonization. The early Christians were not "Scriptureless," let alone an illiterate group, nor did they need to create canonical literature for the first time. They had the *Scripture*, which they used richly and employed as an interpretive – and newly interpreted – foundation for their own religion. They joined their own literature to this *Scripture* from the beginning. To be sure, Jesus himself did not leave behind anything written, Paul placed his preaching far above his letters, and the Christ-believing communities esteemed the orality of the tradition of the sayings of the Lord and the gospel proclamation more highly than what was committed to writ-

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[46] The further deconstruction of the "Scriptures" of Israel through Old Testament scholarship, which ran parallel to the work of New Testament scholarship, cannot be presented here.

[47] On this, cf., as an exemplary starting point, the classic study of P. Wendland, "Zur ältesten Geschichte der Bibel in der Kirche," *ZNW* 1 (1900): 267–90.

[48] On this, cf. the essays in J. Frey, S. Krauter, and H. Lichtenberger, eds., *Heil und Geschichte*, WUNT 248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

[49] On this, see note 146.

ing. Nevertheless, Paul did already compose his own writings. The first early Christian writings emerged as situational (letters of Paul) and commemorative (Gospels) literature with kerygmatic and paraenetic functions without an open canonical claim. This scenario is reminiscent of the Qumran community, which likewise did not understand its own literature as canonical.[50] The differentiating interpretation of the early Christian texts as independent individual writings does justice to this self-understanding.

Since F. C. Baur efforts have been made to present the historical and thematic profile of the individual writings of the New Testament along with their partly oral and partly written prehistory and to reconstruct their processes of emergence as well as their effects and mutual relationships. This differentiating analysis has made the *New Testament* a rich source for the history of the first three generations of emerging Christianity and has shed light on the different profiles, tendencies, and powers of this formative epoch. It is not necessary for me to present this process. It largely coincides with the discipline of New Testament scholarship. I will refer only very briefly to the fundamental thematic spheres that structure the discipline. New Testament *literary history* placed the New Testament genres – Gospels, letters, *diegesis* (acts), and apocalypse – in the Jewish and Greek literature, described the different functions of the *genre*, and worked out the profile of the author. The individual writings can be presented in their mutual dependence and situated historically. The great themes of New Testament *theology* – Christology, ethics, eschatology, Israel, law, gospel, faith – can analogously be analyzed as a historically developing discourse,[51] in which the first generations of the Christ-believing Jews and gentiles participated. In the *history of primitive Christianity*, the central historical figures at the beginning of Christianity – Jesus, Paul, Peter – are historically reconstructed and respectively constructed anew. The *religion of the first Christians*[52] can be described as a deviant Judaism in the Hellenistic-Roman cultural context, which quickly developed its own religious, social, and ethical identity[53] and, as already described, built its own new library. From the perspective of New Testament scholarship, the *New Testament* presents itself as a library of the incipient Christian religion and its institutions, whose individual books each require individual analysis. This individual analysis is the heart of New Testament scholarship. The discipline continues to understand its scholarly work as predominantly analytical and critical – textual analysis and tradition-historical analysis are the leading methodological terms.

From this perspective, the canonical *New Testament* can appear to be a collection that is violently and secondarily imposed upon the individual writings after the fact, which partly even destroys the intentions of the individual writings. The example of the letter of James, which takes a position against a central element of the Pauline letters can serve as an illustration. The persistent exegetical efforts to reach a reconciliation

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[50] On the Qumran literature, see note 5.

[51] In part, this discourse is conducted polemically. On this, cf. O. Wischmeyer and L. Scornaienchi, eds., *Polemik in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Texte, Themen, Kontexte*, BZNW 170 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

[52] Cf. the title of G. Theißen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen. Eine Theorie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 2000); ET = G. Theißen, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World*, trans. J. Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

[53] The question of how one can describe this process temporally is controversial in scholarship.

between the position of Paul and that of James have no basis in substance but can be
traced back to the fact that the Pauline letters and the letter of James are included in
the canon and therefore appear to require a certain harmonization. The phenomenon
is well known and discussed time and again under the key phrase *unity and diversity of
the canon*.[54]

*2.3 Processes of Authorization: Pre-Canonical Characteristics of the Individual Writings
of the New Testament*

The perspective of the situational and commemorative individual writings remains de-
cisive for New Testament scholarship. But precisely the exegetical analyses of the indi-
vidual writings have identified clear tendencies to close relationships of the writings to
one another and to latent canonizing claims: (1) in the figure of "apostolic" origin, (2)
in the latent canonical claim of the letters of Paul ("self-authorization") and of the orig-
inally anonymous Gospels ("self-canonization"), (3) in the emergence of earlier proto-
canonical collections, and (4) in the reading out of these writings in the communities
("reading fellowships"). These tendencies surface in the texts in different connections
and mixtures. I therefore inquire first into motifs that are connected to the *authority
of the origin from the Kyrios and from the apostles* (1 and 2) and then into motifs that
point to the *recognition of the authority of the texts by groups* (3 and 4). The fifth motif –
namely, the inner-biblical intertextuality (5) – likewise gives information about the text-
internal hermeneutic of the writings and about its relationship to the phenomenon of
the canon.

(1) The earliest of the impulses that led to the preservation and collection of the
Christian texts and thus marked the beginning of the early Christian writings that later
obtained canonical status can be studied especially well in Papias, whose activity stands
more at the end of the early efforts at collection and canonization – namely, the unques-
tionable high esteem for the Jesus tradition as the "sayings of the Kyrios." According
to Eusebius' report in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, bishop Papias from Hierapolis in Phry-
gia in Asia Minor collected oral Jesus tradition at a time in which the Gospels of Mark
and Matthew were already available, which Papias also knew himself.[55] His motive for
collection lay in the authority of the *Kyrios* and of the maximally secure and authen-
tic handing down of the sayings of the Lord through a chain of tradition that led back
to the apostles and through them to Jesus himself: "But if ever anyone came who had
followed the πρεσβύτεροι, I inquired into the words of the πρεσβύτεροι, what Andrew
or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other τῶν τοῦ κυ-
ρίου μαθητῶν had said, and what Aristion and ὁ πρεσβύτερος John, τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί,
were saying." For οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων τοσοῦτόν με ὠφελεῖν ὑπελάμβανον, ὅσον τὰ

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[54] See E. Käsemann, "Einheit und Wahrheit. Über die Faith-and-Order-Conference in Montreal 1963,"
MPTh 53 (1964): 65–75.

[55] Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39. For Papias, see now also S. C. Carlson, *Papias of Hieropolis, Exposition of
Dominical Oracles: The Fragments, Testimonia, and Reception of a Second Century Commentator* (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2021).

παρὰ ζώστης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσῆς.[56] It is notable that Papias exclusively collected Jesus tradition. M. Günther notes that "the letters of Paul, which were in circulation in Asia Minor at the time of Papias, evidently did not attract his interest"[57] – an indifference to the letters of Paul that Papias shared with the *auctor ad Theophilum*, who likewise collected Jesus traditions and reworked them in the Gospel of Luke, while remaining silent about the letters of Paul, although he was the person who collected additional apostle traditions and Paul traditions from the mission of the first generation and in his "Acts of the Apostles" became *nolens volens* the first and most important biographer of Paul. Evidently, neither for the *auctor ad Theophilum* nor for Papias did the letters of Paul have the authority that they assigned to the apostolic Jesus traditions and that Paul claimed for himself. As already mentioned, Papias is also the first person about whom Eusebius hands down that he commented also on the origin of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. When Papias, as is well known, consistently speaks of the sayings of the Lord (λόγια κυριακά), which Mark – on the basis of the teachings of Peter – and Matthew are said to have committed to writing, and places "the living and enduring voice" of the apostles and apostle students *over* these accounts (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39) and when Eusebius himself makes a case for the priority of the oral over the written tradition (*Hist. eccl.* 3.24),[58] then we are still very far from the authority of a written *book* canon. Despite his knowledge of the Gospels, Papias has the impression that the genuine Jesus tradition reaches far beyond what has been committed to writing up to that point. He is likewise rather skeptical in relation to the authority of the Gospels that were already available. By contrast, the authority of the Jesus tradition guaranteed through the apostles and their students has normative character for him. Ironically, Papias himself contributed to the commitment of the Jesus tradition to writing through his five book *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*, which did not, however, gain entrance into the Gospel canon and received little respect from Eusebius.[59] Nevertheless, one thing is very clear in Papias. All interest is focused on the *Kyrios*. The apostolic tradition of Jesus' teachings is thus a decisive root of the idea of the New Testament canon. Every canon hermeneutic that is based on a book theory must critically call to mind the fact that the canonization of early Christian writings was understood as the last step of the safeguarding of the oral teaching of Jesus and the gospel proclamation of the apostles. The tragedy of Papias lies in the fact that he came too late for the further collection of oral Jesus tradition. His endeavor was similarly anachronistic as Marcion's and Tatian's efforts to obtain a single gospel. The commitment of the Jesus tradition to writing was already so far advanced that its canonization – namely, in the four Gospels – had already begun

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[56] Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39 (trans. K. Lake, LCL 153, 293, with Greek words inserted by O. W.). Unless otherwise noted, subsequent translations of Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica* are also taken from the LCL.

[57] M. Günther, "Papias," in *RGG*[4] 6 (2003), 862; ET = M. Günther, "Papias," in *RPP* 9 (2011), 514.

[58] The apostles Matthew and John "took to writing perforce"; John had "used all the time a message which was not written down"; Matthew had "preached to Hebrews." The basis for the commitment to writing was his mission outside of Israel: "When he was on the point of going to others he transmitted in writing in his native language the Gospel according to himself, and thus supplied by writing the lack of his own presence to those from whom he was sent." The apostle students Mark (interpreter of Peter) and Luke (companion of Paul) likewise "had already published the Gospels according to them."

[59] *Hist. eccl.* 3.39: σφόδρα σμικρὸς ὢν τὸν νοῦν.

and the Gospels were no longer "open terrain." Thus, Papias is an especially important witness for the early beginning of the canonization of the Gospels on the basis of their close connection to the apostolic tradition.

What reasons can we discern for the preservation, collection, and ultimate canonization of the *Pauline letters* – those texts that appeared in written form from the beginning and were meant to maintain the oral and personal communication of Paul with his communities in his absence?[60] A reference to the proclamation and teaching of Jesus is not present. At the end of her book *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics*,[61] Margaret M. Mitchell raises the question of why the letters of Paul, which are so difficult to interpret and therefore already interpreted controversially at a very early date,[62] were preserved, collected, and – as I add – made the foundation of the later *New Testament*. Her answer is that

> We should … note here that the fact that Paul's letters were not plain, were not easily digested on the first reading, was not only cause for interpretive debate, but also a major *condition for their preservation*: after all, missives that have released their information and done their work can be discarded or the writing surface reused. The threshing Gregory described so well requires the safeguarding of the text for continual rereading.

Thus, Margaret Mitchell finds in the complexity of the Pauline letters – which were not exhausted in current information or situational communication and therefore required a higher degree of attention and thus could become a source for interpretation and hermeneutics – a presupposition for the preservation of these community letters, which, though initially functioning as current and situational functional texts, did not come to an end in this function and thus already carried within them the foundation for their later canonization.[63] Eve-Marie Becker speaks in this context of the "metacommunicative excess" of the Pauline letters.[64]

Some Pauline communities – to be more precise, the communities in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Philippi as well as the Christian house communities in Rome[65] – must have understood the theological quality (cf. 2 Cor 10.10)[66] and material authority of

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[60] On the Pauline epistolography, cf. E.-M. Becker, "Form und Gattung der paulinischen Briefe," in *Paulus Handbuch*, ed. F. W. Horn. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 141–49.

[61] M. M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 106. Mitchell alludes to Gregory of Nyssa.

[62] Cf. esp. 2 Peter.

[63] There are, of course, also other reasons for the preservation and archiving of pieces of writing. On the theme of the complexity of texts, cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, 158–71.

[64] E.-M. Becker, *Schreiben und Verstehen. Paulinische Briefhermeneutik im Zweiten Korintherbrief*, NET 4 (Tübingen: Francke, 2002), 134: linguistic forms "that have independent propositional content and that Paul formulated in the context of meta-communicative reflections."

[65] The fact that Philemon is also preserved is interesting. A strong Christian house church presumably also stands behind Philemon.

[66] A distinction is important here. The orthonymous Pauline letters were preserved in certain communities because of the authority of their author *and* because of their high degree of complexity and universal claim

the Pauline letters, which, on the one hand, reached beyond the *oral* gospel proclamation[67] and teaching that stood at the center of the Pauline activity, beyond the communication and situational instruction and admonition of their founding missionary, who called himself – not without contestation – *apostle*, and, on the other hand, contained his gospel proclamation. They evidently also did not take to heart Paul's theological-missional interpretation that *they* are his "letter" to all people (2 Cor 3.1–3) but preserved the letters of Paul, so that the first collections of Pauline letters soon emerged, which can be regarded as a nucleus of the later New Testament canon alongside – or even before – the four Gospels. These letters – in this respect they are most comparable to the Gospel of Mark – developed a formative literary power that very soon led to imitations. The Deutero- and Trito-Pauline letters bear witness to a Pauline school[68] – however this is to be specified – or at least to Pauline tradition,[69] whose members were themselves literarily, pedagogically, and organizationally active in the vein of and on the basis of the Pauline letters and who borrowed for this the authority of the apostle, which had already become more established in the time since his death.[70]

(2) Alongside the handing down of logia on the basis of the absolute authority of the *Kyrios* and the preservation of Pauline letters[71] on the basis of the personal authority of the *apostolos* (2 Cor 10.10) and because of their textual complexity, we can recognize *another reason* that contributed to the commitment of the Jesus traditions to writing, their literary composition in Gospels, as well as to the collection of the New Testament letters and thus created the basis of the later New Testament canon – the comprehensive *theological claim* of early Christian texts vis-à-vis the religion of Israel and the Greco-Roman religious worlds.

The authors of the Gospels – notwithstanding their specific traditions and different early Christian community contexts, their individual cultural profiles and intentions, and their personal literary and theological strategies – surely all understood their books in the first instance as media for the secure preservation of Jesus traditions. We have already seen that Eusebius still handed down this understanding – namely, that the Gospels are only the written "sayings of the Lord." But this self-understanding, which

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to interpretation – thus, at least Galatians and Romans. The circumstances that led to the preservation and later canonization of the Deutero- and Trito-Pauline letters as well as the Catholic epistles was probably different. Here, we must start from local and theologically-oriented traditions and "schools." In the name of early Christian leadership figures – above all Paul, Peter, and James have weight here – the authors of the non-orthonymous epistolary literature wrote themselves into the formative Christian tradition literature.

[67] Cf. only Rom 10.14–21 and Rom 15.14–24.

[68] T. Schmeller, *Schulen im Neuen Testament? Zur Stellung des Urchristentums in der Bildungswelt seiner Zeit* (Freiburg: Herder, 2001); T. Vegge, *Paulus und das antike Schulwesen*, BZNW 134 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).

[69] On this, cf. the essays in J. Frey, J. Herzer, M. Janßen, C. K. Rothchild, and P. Engelmann, eds., *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen – Pseudepigraphy and Author Fiction in Early Christian Letters* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

[70] The most interesting case of a borrowing of the authority of Paul is, however, not the pseudepigraphical Pauline letters but what we encounter in 2 Peter, whose pseudonymous author is committed to the Petrine authority and yet cannot avoid appealing to Paul, as difficult as this is for him.

[71] The ἀπόστολος is Paul. Peter is perceived less as an author. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3. Mark writes "for him."

is reflected in the understanding of the ecclesiastical writers, does not exhaust the significance of the Gospels. From the perspective of New Testament scholarship, this task of collection and handing down does not yet describe the actual *achievement* of the authors. Out of these Jesus traditions – which *Papias* also sought and collected, though without joining and reworking them literarily – the evangelists respectively configure their own magisterial Jesus stories, which represent for them the foundation of their interpretation of the world and of human beings. The Gospel of Mark stages itself literarily as εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, as announcement of the eschatological time.[72] Taking up the biblical creation narrative, the Gospel of John interprets Jesus as the eternal Logos who has definitively disclosed the truth and the life to human beings and seeks to awaken faith in its hearers and readers (John 20.31). The Gospel of Luke understands itself as a precise account (διήγησις) that provides assurance about the λόγος or λόγοι of the Jesus story for the patron Theophilus (Luke 1.4). The Gospel of Matthew places the whole Jesus story under the rubric of the διδαχή of Jesus, which claims validity for the whole world. These different concepts have *one* thing in common – they all understand and interpret the Jesus story within the framework of a comprehensive world interpretation on the basis of the Jewish religion, which is developed between the universal theologoumena of God's creation of the world and human beings, his covenantal law, and the general last judgment.[73] All the Gospels sketch Jesus into this theology. Their claim to definitive world interpretation,[74] which is especially explicit in the Gospel of John, is derived from their interpretation of Jesus as the last and definitive revelation of the God of Israel, who is the God of the world.[75] The authors of the Gospels are also by no means "mouthpieces" or "minute-takers" of Jesus.[76] They do not understand themselves as Jesus' voice, and they also do not act only as *collectors* and *tradents* of Jesus traditions, as Papias did. Instead, they write as *interpreters* of the εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ

[72] On this, cf. O. Wischmeyer, "Forming Identity through Literature: The Impact of Mark for the Building of Christ Believing Communities in the Second Half of the First Century C.E.," in *Mark and Matthew. Comparative Readings I: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First Century Settings*, ed. E.-M. Becker and A. Runesson, WUNT 271 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 355–78.

[73] In Matthew and Luke this is documented through the genealogies, which sketch Jesus into the history of Israel and into the history of humanity.

[74] On this, cf. G. Theißen, "Wie wurden neutestamentliche Texte zu heiligen Schriften? Die Kanonizität des Neuen Testaments als literaturgeschichtliches Problem," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 423–47; G. Theißen, "Die Kanonizität der Schrift. Wie wurden urchristliche Texte zu Heiligen Schriften? Ein literaturgeschichtliches Problem," in *Texttranszendenz, Beiträge zu einer polyphonen Bibelhermeneutik*, BVB 36 (Münster: LIT, 2019), 275–300.

[75] This distinguishes them from Papias. It also distinguishes them from Q, which in this perspective, is by no means to be understood even only as a "half Gospel."

[76] This is Papias' view of the apostles. The ecclesiastical writers vacillate between the idea that the Gospels according to Mark and Luke are later transcriptions of the oral teachings of Peter and Paul and their own observations on the independent profiles of the authors. Cf., e.g., the sketch of the distinctive Lukan profile in Irenaeus' dispute with the Marcionites and Valentinians (*Haer.* 3.14.3). In all four Gospels, however, the recourse back to the apostolic tradition, i.e., to Jesus, is primary for the ecclesiastical writers.

Χριστοῦ, of God's definitive saving action in Jesus Christ.[77]

It is evident that the letters of Paul have materially the same claim. They are not only – as Margarett Mitchell specifies – complex texts but are also texts that work out from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus a definitive world interpretation[78] in the framework of the Jewish religion.[79] The semantic cipher for this world interpretation is the εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ[80] as information about the end-time action of God toward human beings. There is no place in this εὐαγγέλιον for interpretation, discussion, and alternatives.[81] This fundamental theological claim of the Gospels and of the letters of Paul represents something like a material implicit canonical claim.[82] Gerd Theißen speaks very generally of the "reference to transcendence" of these writings.[83]

(3) It is not necessary to present the history of the early collection of early Christian texts here.[84] I will merely call to mind a few aspects that make clear that there was an early and lasting recognition of early Christian texts in the communities that led to their preservation, collection, and compilation. The letters of Paul were meant to be passed on between the communities. Paul himself already makes clear thereby that his letters were meant to be read not only in a situational way and in relation to the problems of individual communities. In 2 Peter, a collection of Pauline letters is not only presupposed (3.15–16), but an effort is also made to appeal to Paul as a witness for the eschatological teaching of (pseudo-)Peter. Thus, there are also pointers to a (pre-canonical) harmonization between Pauline letters and Catholic epistles. The mutual influence of the four Gospels and the tendency to group them is evident at the latest since the secondary ending of Mark, John 21, and, later, Tatian's *Diatessaron*.[85] For the process of canonization three tendencies follow from this – first, the high esteem for the

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[77] The distinct theological profile of the evangelists was recognized also by Eusebius, though with great caution and only very small results (*Hist. eccl.* 3.24). In the last century, the method of redaction criticism led New Testament scholarship to significant insights here.

[78] I prefer the term world interpretation (*Weltdeutung*) to the term "meaning creation" (*Sinnstiftung*), which is used by Udo Schnelle and others. The term "meaning creation" contains an active-independent constructive element, which the biblical authors, who understood themselves primarily as witnesses of the εὐαγγέλιον and as interpreters of the Old Testament, would not have embraced.

[79] The differences to the Gospels play no role in this connection.

[80] εὐαγγέλιον occurs in this sense in Paul and in the Gospel of Mark.

[81] Discussion, alternatives, polemic, and apologetic do not occur in the Gospel of Mark on the level of the εὐαγγέλιον itself but rather are embedded as text sections in the narrative announcement of the macrotext εὐαγγέλιον – in the controversy dialogues of Jesus with Jewish authorities. On this, cf. L. Scornaienchi, "Jesus als Polemiker oder: Wie polemisch darf Jesus sein?" in *Polemik in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Texte, Themen, Kontexte*, ed. O. Wischmeyer and L. Scornaienchi (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 381–414.

[82] On this, cf. F. W. Horn, "Wollte Paulus 'kanonisch' wirken?" in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 400–22.

[83] On this, cf. Theißen, "Wie wurden neutestamentliche Texte zu heiligen Schriften?"; Theißen, "Die Kanonizität der Schrift."

[84] On this, cf. H. von Lips, "Kanondebatten in 20. Jahrhundert," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 109–26.

[85] On these texts, cf. the analyses in T. K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium*, WUNT 120 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

writings that were regarded as original; second, the clear limitation of these writings in demarcation from other texts; third, the retention of the variety of the original writings in opposition to standardizing and reductionistic tendencies, as we observe them in Marcion and Tatian. Canon formation is not simply reduction but documentation of the original variety within limits.

(4) According to the shared testimony of Origen,[86] Augustine,[87] and the Easter letters,[88] the most important criterion for the belonging of one of these new Christian writings to the *canon* was their use and their public reading in the community worship services,[89] i.e., a second orality. The Old Testament, adapted in a Christian way, was also persistently understood by Origen and others as "word of God," i.e., from the perspective of its oral power.[90] The *book* thesis – which from a history-of-religions perspective is often made the basis for explaining the biblical canon and supported by the

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[86] Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.25. Origen attests the "22 books of the Old Testament," while his "New Testament" includes only one generally recognized letter of Peter and John, respectively. With respect to Hebrews, the position of Origen is open. He recognizes Revelation.

[87] Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 2.12.13.

[88] On the Easter letters, cf., by way of introduction, K. Fitschen, "Osterfestbrief," in *LACL* (2002): 538–39 (with literature). On the Thirty-ninth Easter Letter, see, e.g., D. A. Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon," *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 47–66, here 56: "This last point restates part of my earlier argument about the significance of the thirty-ninth Festal Letter: Although most scholars remain focused on the lists of books, the greater importance of the letter is that it reveals the role of canon formation in supporting one form of Christian piety and authority and undermining others. Different scriptural practices accompany different modes of authority and spirituality, and we should not take the bounded canon of episcopal orthodoxy as either the inevitable *telos* of early Christian history or the only way that Christians construed and used sacred writings. The new fragment, however, makes clear that in establishing a defined canon Athanasius sought to undermine not only a general spirituality of free intellectual inquiry and its academic mode of authority, but also the specific false doctrines to which he believed such a spirituality gave rise." The significance of the Letter of Athanasius for the history of the canon is above all terminological in character: "Only since the middle of the fourth century were the ecclesiastically normative collection of the Scriptures of the OT and NT designated as canonical .... This is first attested in the Thirty-ninth Festal Letter of Athanasius from 367 CE" (Ohme, "Kanon," 18).

[89] Theißen ("Wie wurden neutestamentliche Texte zu heiligen Schriften?"; "Die Kanonizität der Schrift,") speaks of the cultic use. On this, cf., on the one hand, the reports of the reading out of writings in the community gatherings (but when did this begin to apply to the early Christian writings and for which writings did it apply?) and, on the other hand, specifically the thesis of the construction of the Gospel of Mark in pericope form, which implies a purpose relating to the worship service; on this, cf. L. Hartmann, "Das Markusevangelium, für die lectio solemnis im Gottesdienst abgefasst?" in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel*, vol. 1, ed. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger, and P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 147–71. On the very difficult reconstructions of the readings in the early Christian worship service, cf. P. C. Bloth, "Schriftlesung I," in *TRE* 30 (1999): 520–58. On this, cf. the critical evaluation of C. Buchanan, "Questions Liturgists Would Like to Ask Justin Martyr," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, ed. S. Parvis and P. Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 152–59. In light of the lack of sources, both theses (on the reading out and on the pericopes) remain very hypothetical. Cf. C. Markschies, "Epochen der Erforschung des neutestamentlichen Kanons in Deutschland. Einige vorläufige Bemerkungen," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 578–604.

[90] Cf. also the orality of the Torah, which is strongly emphasized by current Jewish studies scholarship (cf. note 33). Texts such as those of Origen must be taken into account by Jewish studies scholars who reject closed "Bible concepts," so that an inappropriate opposition between Jewish and Christian "Bible" concepts can be avoided.

hypothesis of the Christian origin of the codex, which is said to have provided the material foundation for the *one*, closed Christian canonical Bible *book*[91] – is not historically useful for the phase of the emergence of the New Testament canon.

(5) As already mentioned, the intertextuality that exists between *Septuaginta* and *New Testament* as well as within the New Testament writings or partial collections proves to be a decisive factor for the pre-canonical valence of the early Christian writings. The early Christian authors refer, in the first place, primarily and extensively to the *Septuaginta*. At the same time, an initial self-canonization in the sense of the surpassing of the *Septuaginta* arose already in the Pauline letters and then even more clearly in the Gospels. In the process of canonization, the coordinates for a *hermeneutic* of these writings, which takes their canonical status into account, is also developed. In doing so, the ecclesiastical writers who were especially involved in this process, such as Irenaeus, Origen, Tyconius, Augustine, and John Cassian,[92] could make recourse to hermeneutical course settings in the New Testament writings themselves, i.e., to different forms of literary and theological intertextuality[93] and to the already mentioned hermeneutical tools of typology and allegoresis – in short, to the various ways in which early Christian authors interacted with the *Septuaginta*, which represents the prehistory, the contemporary basis, and the religio-cultural foundation of the early Christian writings that were to become the *New Testament*. This applies not only to the religious statements, conceptual worlds, and linguistic forms, but also to the *hermeneutic* of the Jewish *Scriptures*. As I have already mentioned, the early Jewish texts did not, for example, emerge in a religious-cultural and hermeneutical vacuum or in a pre-cultural no man's land, as might be suggested by the conception of early Christian *Urliteratur*, which, in this view, arose from orality and was a phenomenon of the lower class or of groups on the margins.[94] Instead, they explicitly support themselves with reference to the existing library of Greek speaking Judaism,[95] the *Septuaginta*.[96] Thus, from the beginning, they stand, on the one hand, in a canonical environment and, on the other hand, also in direct material connection to the *hermeneutic* of the Greek Jewish *Scriptures* that was developed in Alexandria[97] and to their general cultural environment. Beyond this, they must specify their own relation to the *Scriptures* – this too begins in the early Chris-

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[91]Schuller, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Canon and Canonization," appears to argue in this way. On this, cf. the critique of this perspective in H. R. Seeliger, "Buchrolle, Codex, Kanon. Sachhistorische und ikonographische Aspekte und Zusammenhänge," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 547–76.

[92]See O. Wischmeyer, ed., *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016).

[93]On the hermeneutical valence of intertextuality, cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, 185–93.

[94]On this, cf. the approach of Theißen, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments als literaturgeschichtliches Problem*.

[95]See Mark 1 and Rom 1 as well as the beginnings of the three large Gospels. The writers make this connection programmatically clear from the very beginning.

[96]However, through Jesus himself and his disciples who came from Galilee, the Hebrew Bible also remains visible in the background as pretext of the Gospels.

[97]Cf., by way of introduction, Kugel, "Early Jewish Interpretation." Kugel mentions "four fundamental postulates" of ancient Jewish (Hebrew as well as Greek) biblical hermeneutics: (1) "scriptural texts were ba-

tian texts with Paul and the Gospel of Mark and leads to a complex and many-voiced process that presents one of the great, enduring hermeneutical tasks of the ecclesiastical writers since the debate with Marcion. The biblical hermeneutics of the last two generations has taken the specification of this relationship into view again.[98] The enduring close connection of the early Christian texts to the canonical *Septuaginta* and its hermeneutic placed the early Christian texts themselves – in a similar way to some Qumran writings – in a pre-canonical sphere. These texts were not commentaries but claimed for themselves an authority that built on that of the Scriptures, respected it, and at the same time surpassed it. This disposed them for a canonical status and ultimately made them pre-canonical texts.

2.4 Processes of Diversification: Aemulatio and Imitatio

The analysis of the aforementioned motifs should neither be overestimated nor absolutized and made into the exclusive foundation of a one-dimensional canon hermeneutic. With respect to their latent canonical dimension, the theological claim of the Gospels and the Pauline letters is only limited. After all, we have not *one* Gospel, as Marcion wanted, but several – according to the *auctor ad Theophilum* even many – and we have not only the Gospels but also the Pauline letters. And, conversely, we have not only the Pauline letters, in which the εὐαγγέλιον gets by almost entirely without the Jesus story, but also the interpretation of the εὐαγγέλιον precisely as Jesus story in the Gospels. Beyond this, the engagement of the large Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John with the Gospel of Mark makes clear that the authors of the post-Markan Gospels did not acknowledge the theological-formative role of the oldest Gospel but understood the Gospel of Mark – if at all[99] – only as one source alongside others.[100] This also applies to the Sayings Source, to which the two large Synoptics evidently did not pay the same respect as Papias did to the "sayings of the Lord." We hear nothing at all about a written sayings source in Papias. The prologue of the Gospel of Luke proceeds in this way even with the "many" already existing Gospels. Something analogous applies to the Pauline letters. While the authentic Pauline letters were indeed preserved,[101] even hypotheses that assume a very early corpus of Pauline letters that made a claim to pre-canonical

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sically cryptic," (2) "the basic purpose of Scripture was to *guide* people nowadays," (3) the different biblical texts ultimately contained "a single, unitary message," (4) "all of Scripture was of divine origin" (132).

[98] Cf., by way of introduction, Dohmen and Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments*.

[99] This qualification applies to the Gospel of John.

[100] The outline of the Jesus story of the Gospel of Mark was probably the most important thing for the two large Synoptics. On the question of whether the Gospel of Matthew wanted to replace the Gospel of Mark, cf. the essays in E.-M. Becker, and A. Runesson, eds., *Mark and Matthew. Comparative Readings I: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First Century Settings*, WUNT 271 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[101] The question of the extent to which they were reworked in the communities (Corinthian correspondence) and the question of how many letters of Paul were lost cannot be raised here.

status[102] must consider the fact that the pseudonymous authors of the Deutero- and Trito-Pauline letters did not respect these collections as such but expanded them beyond recognition – and the latter may have been redactionally active. Even if one were to affirm David Trobisch's proposed reconstruction of an early collection of Pauline letters,[103] it would nevertheless remain decisive that the possible editors did *not* demarcate the authentic epistolary corpus of Paul but rather wrote themselves into such a potential corpus. This means that the possible editors did not start from a closed "canon" of Pauline letters but rather from an open one. And it is not evident from the Pastoral epistles that they sought to close this part of the canon.

Viewed historically, what stood at the beginning was the variety of competing early Christian writings[104] that did not necessarily show consideration for one another, were written with a latent canonical claim, and had claims that were based on different and competing motives.[105] The prologue of the Gospel of Luke in particular makes clear that the early Christian authors also did not regard this as a problem at all but rather were active in the sense of the literary *aemulatio*, whereas the authors of the Deutero- and Trito-Pauline letters wrote in the sense of the *imitatio*. At least for the Gospel of Luke it is clear that his author was not interested in protecting and preserving the Gospel of Mark.[106] This diverse and – measured by the small number and the social status of the early Christians – extremely productive literary scene, which did not come to an end with the latest "New Testament" writings but rather came into bloom, led already in the second century to that process of safeguarding and selection that we know as the beginning of the canon history of the later "New Testament" writings of early Christianity. The canonization of the writings of the apostles and the Gospels that began in the second century – known under the term "the *Kyrios*" and the "*Apostolos*" – already presupposes their theological significance, their community reception,

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[102] On this, cf. Theißen, "Wie wurden neutestamentliche Texte zu heiligen Schriften?"; Theißen, "Die Kanonizität der Schrift."

[103] D. Trobisch, *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung. Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik*, NTOA 10 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989); on this, cf. the critical evaluation in Horn, "Wollte Paulus 'kanonisch' wirken?"

[104] Thus the classic positions of W. Bauer and E. Käsemann. On the evidence of the texts that have been handed down, cf. the helpful presentation in L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), especially 20–24 on the early Christian texts. What is conspicuous here is the eleven manuscripts of the Shepherd of Hermas, on the one hand, and the relatively small number of New Testament apocryphal writings, on the other hand. Thus, the picture of the preserved early Christian texts – which is to a high degree contingent – results in an astonishingly "conservative" and not very surprising sketch of the early Christian literary scene. The high regard for the Gospels (apart from Mark), which far exceeds the presence of Pauline letters, is likewise evident.

[105] This applies, in the first place, to the four canonical Gospels, on the one hand, and to the Pauline letters, on the other hand, which have no competition. Writings of the "opponent" missionaries have not been handed down. By contrast, the Deutero- and Trito-Pauline letters as well as the Petrine and Johannine letters and the letter of James point to conflicts between early Christian streams that were carried out with the help of apostolic authorities.

[106] The *aemulatio* also applies to the Deutero-Pauline letters, especially to the high theological claim of Ephesians. On the relationship of the Gospels among one another, cf. also the reflections on suppression mechanisms in historiographical literature in Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan, and Christian Societies*, which illuminate the relationship between the Gospel of Mark and the large Synoptics.

and their "implicit" canonicity, i.e., their claim to authority. Canonization in the sense of the exclusion of certain valued writings resulted fundamentally from the increasing mass of Jesus traditions and theologically interpretive writings of different genres and provenances, which could appear to lead to an inability to grasp the whole and to arbitrariness. This was opposed by the process of canonization. Alongside the category of apostolicity, which was especially placed in the foreground by men such as Papias, the criteria of the reading of a work[107] in the communities, which was already mentioned earlier, and the agreement with the so-called *regula fidei* were developed further.[108] The numerous later Gospels, letters, acts, and apocalypses – designated today as "New Testament apocrypha" – used the New Testament genres and wanted, according to their self-understanding, to be apostolic.[109] By contrast, the ecclesiastical writers designated them as "inauthentic," since they doubted their connection back to the apostles. In retrospect, the so-called New Testament apocrypha become early Christian post-New Testament edifying literature,[110] which have their own place alongside the clearly non-canonical commentaries, theological apologetic and polemical writings, and poetic and historical writings of the ecclesiastical writers,[111] and serve as witnesses for the rapid inculturation of the Christians in the literature of incipient late antiquity. The canonization is then in its end stage a product of the needs of the community and of the leadership bodies of the church in light of the growth of "Christian literature," which did not make clear its distance from the apostolic writings, and it has liturgical, ecclesial-legal, and dogmatic status[112] that continues to exercise influence into the present.

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[107] On this, cf. especially Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*.

[108] On this, cf. Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter."

[109] Cf. the scandal around the presbyter who "forged" the Acts of Paul (cf. note 126).

[110] On the New Testament apocrypha, see H.-J. Klauck, *Apokryphe Evangelien. Eine Einführung*. 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2008); ET = H.-J. Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. B. McNeil (London: T&T Clark International, 2003); S. Luther and J. Röder, "Der neutestamentliche Kanon und die neutestamentliche apokryphe Literatur. Überlegungen zu einer Verhältnisbestimmung," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 469–502. Cf. now also M. Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017); J. Schröter, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Jesus Traditions Outside the Bible*, trans. W. Coppins (Eugene: Cascade, 2021).

[111] On this, cf. the reflections in Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 37: "As we have noticed, these other (ultimately extracanonical) Gospel writings were read, and apparently in the very Christian circles that seem to have also read and revered the familiar canonical Gospels. But the manuscript data suggest that, though these Christians regarded texts such as the "Egerton Gospel" and the sayings collection we know as the Gospel of Thomas as suitable for Christian reading, they did not consider these texts as appropriate for inclusion in the early Gospel collections that reflect steps toward a New Testament canon."

[112] Cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, 63–80 (with literature). See also L. M. Mc-Donald and J. A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), which is an extensive, historically and exegetically oriented handbook on the canons of the Old/First Testament and of the New Testament that includes helpful appendices on pp. 580–97, as well as E. Thomassen, *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010). Cf. also the criteriology in Theißen, "Wie wurden neutestamentliche Texte zu heiligen Schriften?"; Theißen, "Die Kanonizität der Schrift."

2.5 Processes of Canonization: Orality and Literality

The term "canon," when related to the *Bible*, is, in general usage, semantically shaped chiefly by its end form and refers less to a collection of writings in the sense of a catalogue of especially valuable and authoritative books – this would be a possible definition of a literary canon[113] – than to a closed collection of texts that have to a certain extent lost or surrendered their own life to the canon and now exist together as a textual collection in the form of a book and are in this regard more comparable to a collection of laws.[114] Thus, the term describes not a process but rather the state of a closed process in which both the historical development and the independent existence of the individual texts are "sublated." In contrast to this, the historical perspective asks about the process of canonization. What exists before this end state and what hermeneutical relevance does this prehistory possess? On the basis of what has been said thus far, I would like to emphasize again more clearly three relations of tension that are important for the question of the relation between canon and hermeneutics: (1) collection of writings and book, (2) closedness and openness of the canon, (3) orality and authenticity of the gospel.

(1) The fact that the writings that form the canon of the Christian Bible do not enter into history as "a book"[115] is central. They become "a book" only much later. The fact that they become a book – which has already been touched on above – is an important result of canonization. It stands at the *end*[116] of the canonization process and not at the beginning. The new early Christian writings become part of two collections – one that already existed (though it was not closed) and one that first had to be created – which are, in turn, composed of heterogenous individual writings and have rather blurred "margins." Here, a clear distinction must be made between the Christian *Old Testament*, whose wording and scope as Hebrew and Greek *Scripture* of ancient Ju-

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[113] Cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, 75–80; J. A. Loader, H. von Lips, W. Wischmeyer, C. Danz, J. Maier, N. Sinai, and S. Winko, "Kanon," in *LBH* (2009): 310–16 (with literature on the literary canon). On this, see, in detail, N. Irrgang, "Vom literarischen Kanon zum 'heiligen Buch.' Einführende Bemerkungen zu den autoritativen Textsammlung der griechisch-römischen Welt," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 130–36.

[114] Cf. note 4.

[115] The idea of the *one book*, supported by the Latin loan word *biblia*/βιβλίον, which has been taken up into the European languages, especially characterizes the Muslim view of late antique Judaism and Christianity. Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 81. Neuwirth's plea (170) to understand the Quran itself, by contrast, not as a "holy book" but as an oral text (following K. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* [Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001]) finds an analogy in the clear tendency of Jewish studies to speak not so much of the Hebrew Bible but rather of *Scripture* or the *Scriptures*. Cf. Schuller, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Canon and Canonization" (literature and critical reflections); cf. also J. J. Collins, "Canon, Canonization," in *EDEJ* (2010): 460–63 (with literature). Other aspects can be found in E.-M. Becker, "Antike Textsammlungen in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 1–32; E.-M. Becker, "Literarisierung und Kanonisierung im frühen Christentum. Einführende Überlegungen zur Entstehung und Bedeutung des neutestamentlichen Kanons," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 389–99.

[116] This is meant materially rather than historically, i.e., since there is no historical closing of the biblical canon.

daism was already established to a large extent when the earliest Christian writers – Paul and Mark – referred to *Scripture*,[117] and the emerging *New Testament*, whose texts first had to be led from orality, particularity, and regional appreciation to a general and canonical concept. The ecclesiastical writers also distinguished between the Scriptures of the *Old* and *New Testaments* in their canon lists.[118]

(2) Something analogous applies to the idea of the *closedness* of the canon. The starting point of the canonization process of the early Christian writings was not the idea of a closed group of writings but the safeguarding of the "sayings of the Lord." Neither the canon of the Hebrew and Greek Jewish Bible nor the Christian canon of the "New Testament" can be understood on the basis of the initial idea of an exclusive closedness, even though this was already insinuated by Jewish writers such as the author of the Letter of Aristeas, Philo, and Josephus in the context of their cultural situation, which was characterized by books, lists and collections of books, libraries, writing, and the production of commentaries.[119] The ever recurring debates and explanations concerning the universally recognized, debated, and inauthentic writings of the New Testament – which Eusebius provides in a meticulous presentation of the positions of early Christians known to him in historical sequence[120] – make very clear that we can by no means speak of a fixed canon in the sense of a closed list of books. An especially telling exam-

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[117] Cf. the careful presentation of Collins, "Canon, Canonization." Collins draws on Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.37–41 and 4 Ezra 14.45–47 as first witnesses to a more or less closed Hebrew canon of 22 or 24 writings and states concerning the meeting at Jamnia: "Josephus and 4 Ezra were contemporary with the sages of Jamnia, but the delimitation of the books was not the result of a conciliar decree" (463).

[118] Cf. note 120 on Eusebius' lists.

[119] The intention of the Letter of Aristeas is to place the "laws of Moses" on the same level as the rest of the books of the Alexandrian library in order to then highlight its categorical superiority. The author inserts the "law of the Jews" into the cultural concept of the Ptolemaic state, since only in this way can its qualitative superiority come to light. This must take place via its reception as a book and into the library. See the commentary by B. G. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas. "Aristeas to Philocrates" or "On the Translation of the Law of the Jews"* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015). The significance of the category of literature for Philo as a commentator and for Josephus as a court author who wrote for the Flavian library need not be discussed here. Eusebius' note that not only Josephus (*Hist. eccl.* 3.9) but also Philo found such recognition in Rome that his writings were considered worthy of inclusion in the library (*Hist. eccl.* 2.18) is interesting. The lists of books that play such a great role among all the early Christian and early church writers come from this cultural context. On this, see E. A. Schmidt, "Historische Typologie der Orientierungsfunktionen von Kanon in der griechischen und römischen Literatur," in *Kanon und Zensur*, ed. A. Assmann and J. Assmann, Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 2 (Munich: Fink, 1987), 246–58. On library and book collections in Jerusalem, cf. also 2 Macc 2.14–15. On this whole topic, cf. N. Irrgang, "Eine Bibliothek als Kanon. Der Aristeasbrief und der hellenistische Literaturbetrieb Alexandriens," in *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion. Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch*, ed. E.-M. Becker and S. Scholz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 257–92. Cf., by contrast, on the openness and diversity of early Jewish canons, by way of introduction, E. Ulrich, "The Jewish Scriptures."

[120] On the program of Eusebius, cf. *Hist. eccl.* 3.3: "As the narrative proceeds I will take pains to indicate successively which of the orthodox writers in each period used any of the doubtful books, and what they said about the canonical and accepted Scriptures and what about those books which are not such" (trans. K. Lake, LCL 153, 193). *Hist. eccl.* 2.5 on the Gospel of Mark, ratified by Peter; *Hist. eccl.* 3.3 on the letters of the apostles: only one letter of Peter; 2 Peter is "instructive" but does not belong to the Bible; other writings attributed to Peter are rejected; fourteen letters of Paul (nevertheless, Hebrews is not undisputed!); *Hist. eccl.* 3.24 on the Gospels; *Hist. eccl.* 3.25 with a listing of the writings that were regarded as recognized, disputed, and inauthentic at the time of Eusebius; *Hist. eccl.* 5.8 with a report on Irenaeus' lists of New Testament writings

ple for the enduring fuzziness of the concept of canon and for the imbalance between closed and open concepts of canon also *after* Athanasius is provided by Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.12, when he writes:

> The most expert investigator of the divine scriptures will be the person who, first, has read them all and has a good knowledge – a reading knowledge, at least, if not yet a complete understanding – of *those pronounced canonical*. He will read *the others* more confidently when equipped with a belief in the truth; they will then be unable to take possession of his unprotected mind and prejudice him in any way against sound interpretation or delude him by their dangerous falsehoods and fantasies. In the matter of canonical scriptures he should follow the authority of the great majority of catholic churches, including of course those that were found worthy to have apostolic seats and receive apostolic letters.[121]

After further statements on different community traditions, in 2.13 Augustine surprisingly continues with a precise listing out of the biblical books of the Old and New Testaments without returning to the differentiated statements of 2.12.[122]

(3) The *oral* proclamation of the gospel or the "sayings of the Lord" is still superordinated over what is written in Eusebius, and all four Gospels are explicitly understood only as written substitutes vis-à-vis the proclamation of Jesus and the apostles. The protocanonical claim of the Gospels is based on the authority of the *Kyrios*. For Papias orality is a criterion of "authenticity," and the collection of sayings of the Lord is still open. At the same time, the consciousness of genuine, i.e., apostolic and thus limited tradition, on the one side, and inauthentic tradition, on the other hand, is developed early also and precisely in Papias, so that a process of interpretation according to "genuineness," which combines historical and authoritative aspects under the perspective of "apostolic tradition," begins early. As I have already indicated, the Gospels and the Pauline letters testify to a clear implicit canonical claim. At the same time, as I have likewise shown, in juxtaposition to this stands the plurality of the Gospels, the plurality and variety of the New Testament genres (Gospels, letters), and the reworking of older and more original texts in the sphere of the Gospels and in the pseudepigraphical letters within the Pauline sphere, so that canonizing and diversifying tendencies appear alongside one another.[123] Despite the aforementioned debates and the fact that the canon was still not closed at the time of Augustine, from the second century onward we already encounter the excluding construction of the tetraevangelium[124] and of a rel-

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and attachment of the Septuagint legend from Haer. 3.21.2; *Hist. eccl.* 6.14 on Clement of Alexandria; *Hist. eccl.* 6.25 on Origen; *Hist. eccl.* 7.25 on Dionysius of Alexandria on the Revelation of John.

[121] Trans. R. P. H. Green, ed., *Saint Augustine: On Christian Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 35; O. W.'s emphasis.

[122] Elsewhere, he uses different lists.

[123] The Catholic Epistles do not play a major role in the process of canonization.

[124] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.8 (τετράμορφον εὐαγγέλιον; on this, cf. the interpretation in Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium*); cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8 and Papyrus 45. Cf. also

atively closed collection of Pauline letters.[125] In the later second century a conscious-
ness of apostolic "genuineness" (τὰς τε κατὰ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν παράδοσιν ἀληθεῖς καὶ
ἀπλάστους καὶ ἀνωμολογημένας γραφάς) vis-à-vis secondary "forgeries"[126] is also already
documented, which was itself meant to lead to the collection of authentic – and, more
specifically, only authentic – Jesus tradition. From the middle of the second century
at the latest, the four-Gospel canon is no longer expandable. The incorporation of an-
other, *fifth* Gospel – there would have been sufficient possibilities – was not discussed.
On the other hand, Marcion evidently backed *one* Gospel, and Tatian[127] and his com-
munities preferred a unification of the four Gospels in a four-book, the harmony of the
Gospels. Here we find early tendencies to obtain *one* book or at least a strong concen-
tration of the different writings. This, however, met with opposition from the diversity
that had already been tested and accepted in the communities. In light of the already
existing plurality of the subsequently canonized Gospels, Marcion's and Tatian's pref-
erence for one Gospel or one Gospel book – which was comparable in purpose though
very different in result – was already anachronistic.

2.6 Historical Results and Hermeneutical Implications

The *Scriptures* of Hellenistic Judaism – in whatever form – constitute the foundation
of the canonical Scriptures of the Christians, both as the first part of the new Christian
Bible and as the singular religious and cultural reference text of the New Testament
writers and of the early Christian communities. Alongside this, very early on, between
50 and ca. 120 CE, the two core collections – the four Gospels and the Pauline letters
– of a developing new, second part of the canon, of the later *New Testament*, emerged.
At the end of the second century at the latest, the ecclesiastical writers, and especially
Irenaeus, already start from a firm core of New Testament writings. However, the "mar-
gins" of this emerging second part of the canon always remained unsharp, as shown by

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Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 36–37. Hurtado states, "This makes it worth noting which Gospel
texts were linked and copied together. To my knowledge, the only Gospels so treated in the extant evidence are
those that became part of the New Testament canon. None of the other (apocryphal) Gospel texts is linked
with any other Gospel" (37). In Augustine we encounter the consciousness of the unity of the four Gospels
in the formulation "The authoritative New Testament consists of the gospel in four books (Matthew, Mark,
Luke, John)" (*Doctr. chr.* 2.13; trans. Green, *Saint Augustine: On Christian Teaching*, 37). The debate over
the worthiness of being included in the canon concerned the letters and the Revelation of John and not the
Gospels. On the Gospel of the Hebrews, cf. Klauck, *Apokryphe Evangelien*, 55–61 (ET = Klauck, *Apocryphal
Gospels*, 36–42).

[125] Papyrus 46. Theißen, *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments als literaturgeschichtliches Problem*, 283,
states with regard to Irenaeus: "He grounds the number four so emphatically that it is probably still not
taken for granted. But for him it stands firm. Beyond this there were no canonical Gospels. The Pauline
letter collection is functionally closed for him. But he lacks a statement about its being closed."

[126] Thus the judgment regarding the Acts of Paul in Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17: The priest in Asia had
written the Acts "out of love for Paul." In Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25 "inauthentic" (ἀντιλεγόμενα) in opposition
to the ὁμολογούμενα, but not "heretical."

[127] On Tatian, cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.29. Cf. also P. Bruns, "Diatessaron," in *LACL* (2002): 193–94; J. W.
Barker, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Composition, Redaction, Recension, and Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2021).

the many different lists of New Testament writings; the textual witnesses, which differ in order and scope; and the different engagement with the *dubia*.[128] Thus, early Christianity very soon had a conception of canonical writings that referred to the Gospels and Pauline letters. With respect to Hebrews,[129] the Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation of John, as well as a few other early Christian writings, such as 1 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Didache, an ongoing uncertainty or openness prevailed.[130]

The tendency toward demarcation from writings that could no longer make plausible their apostolic origin is clear.[131] The canonical status of the New Testament writings – which, on the one hand, places these writings on par with the Old Testament and, on the other hand, prioritizes them from a Christian perspective – depends on their authentic relationship to the ἀρχή in the form of apostolic tradition. At the same time, the ἀρχή has a historical and authoritative character. The canon is always related to the *Kyrios* and to the one εὐαγγέλιον and does not come to have a value in and of itself. On the whole, the canon of the Christian Bible is determined by the idea of the authority of the apostolic tradition that refers to Jesus Christ as the *Kyrios*. This conception makes possible the incorporation of the *Old Testament* as a prophecy of the *Kyrios* and excludes at the same time those early Christian writings that could no longer make plausible their direct relationship to the apostolic tradition and to uncontested use in the communities.[132] Thus, the motif of apostolic tradition and authority stands at the beginning of the construction of the New Testament canon and not the principle of the exclusion of heretical books. As already mentioned, the canonical figure of thought of the formation of a book that excludes other writings[133] could have taken its start from Jerome's translation, which presented a uniform text, and would thus be a late or derived product of the process of canonization of the first centuries.

If one reconstructs the emergence of the New Testament canon from a hermeneutical perspective, then several fundamental consequences for a hermeneutic of the canonical writings emerge from the outset. The constant relationship to the *Kyrios* and to the original oral gospel proclamation of the apostles lends to the Gospels and letters some-

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[128] Here, the stance of Dionysius of Alexandria on the Revelation of John is instructive (cf. note 39). Dionysius makes very clear that, on the one hand, the New Testament canon exists for him as idea and reality, but, on the other hand, that it does not ruin his respect for disputed writings but rather provokes his creative effort of interpretation, here conceptualized as allegorical exposition.

[129] On this, see Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 31 (on Papyrus 46).

[130] On this, cf. H. von Lips, "Kanondebatten in 20. Jahrhundert."

[131] Cf. the harsh treatment of the letter of James that can still be found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23, who has great respect for James, but does not transfer this respect to the letter that bears James' name: "Such is the story of James, whose is said to be the first of the Epistles called Catholic. It is to be observed that its authenticity is denied, since few of the ancients quote it, as is also the case with the Epistle called Jude's, which is itself one of the seven called Catholic; nevertheless, we know that these letters have been used publicly with the rest in most churches."

[132] 1 Clement presents a good example here. This letter claims no apostolic authority for itself, but it is considered important in many communities and therefore read out.

[133] The numerous book lists since Origen, which are meant to establish the scope of the canonical writings of the *Bible*, are more comparable to lists of books held in a library or to the lists of works recorded in Eusebius (there beginning with Philo) than to canonical judgments. Here, the meaning "book lists, catalogue" is predominant.

thing provisional and at the same time transparent. They remain transparent for the oral teaching of Jesus and the preaching of the apostles. The New Testament writings have the character of witness and present no ultimate value in themselves, neither theologically nor literarily.[134] They are understood neither as literature in the sense of the ancient aesthetic canon nor as a "holy book" that claimed veneration for itself in material and normative respects.[135] From the perspective of the early Christians this applies to the *Old Testament* to an even higher degree. It has canonical status in the Christian communities not as – highly esteemed – *law of Moses* but as prophecy of the coming of Jesus.[136] At the same time it is also the case that precisely this transparency for the *Kyrios* lends the Old Testament and New Testament writings their authority. The fundamental tools of the biblical hermeneutic – allegoresis and typology – have their *Sitz im Leben* here. The transparency and the relative closedness of the Christian canon are interrelated, since only the "apostolic" writings have the necessary transparency and reference character. This reference character enables and necessitates the incorporation of the *Old Testament* into the Christian double canon, since for the early Christian and early church hermeneutic the *Septuaginta* is transparent for the coming of Jesus Christ. For this hermeneutic, there arises an inversion of the temporal relation between the two canons of the Christian *Bible*. Viewed *historically*, the *Septuaginta* stands – as already noted – at the beginning of the Christian biblical canon, namely, both as model and as material and formal norm. Both Paul and the author of the Gospel of Mark embed their εὐαγγέλιον in *Scripture* (Rom 1.1–7 and Mark 1.1–4). Viewed *theologically*, for the ecclesiastical writers the relationship can then also be presented the other way around: [First] "the sojourning of Jesus led those who might have suspected the Law and the Prophets not to be divine to the clear conviction that they were composed by heavenly grace," writes Origen.[137]

The picture sketched out here also sheds light on the question of the anonymity of the Gospels. The *transparent character* of the Gospels is preserved in the anonymity of the Gospels. They want to point to the "sayings of the Lord," even though they actually set forth their own christological concepts, as we have seen. This also applies to the titles that were added after the fact, i.e., "Gospel *according to* Mark," etc. Augustine

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[134] On the second aspect, cf. only Eusebius' comments on the Gospels and their makeshift commitment to writing (*Hist. eccl.* 3.24: "Those inspired and venerable ancients, I mean Christ's Apostles, had completely purified their life and adorned their souls with every virtue, yet were but simple men in speech (τὴν δὲ γλῶσσαν ἰδιωτεύοντες). … Thus they announced the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven to all the world and cared but little for attention to their style (τὸ λογογραφεῖν)" (trans. K. Lake, LCL 153, 249–50).

[135] On the material veneration, cf. the Letter of Aristeas as well as N. Irrgang, "Eine Bibliothek als Kanon. Der Aristeasbrief und der hellenistische Literaturbetrieb Alexandriens." This aspect increasingly came into the foreground in the course of the history of the early church. Cf. only the Bible illustrations from late antiquity: K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 2, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); K. Weitzmann, *Spätantike und frühchristliche Buchmalerei* (Munich: Prestel, 1977); U. Zimmermann, *Die Wiener Genesis im Rahmen der antiken Buchmalerei*, Spatantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz 13 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003).

[136] Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 4.1.6 = 302.

[137] Origen, *Princ.* 4.1.6 (trans. J. Behr, ed., *Origen, On First Principles*, vol. 2 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 475). Origen argues in such a way that the law of Moses and the prophetic writings are already given by God, but that they first receive convincing power for gentiles through Christ.

speaks of the *one* gospel of the four[138] evangelists.

Things are different in Paul. He announces the εὐαγγέλιον that the Lord revealed to him. He vouches for this with his name, person, and biography. He himself, in his proclamation, is transparent for the *Kyrios*. He understands his office (2 Cor 4–5) as service to the gospel; he is *apostolos* and ambassador of God. Ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν· δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ (2 Cor 5.20). Very different is the approach of the second New Testament author to write by name, the author of the Revelation of John. He writes what the Lord and the Spirit show him about the end of the world. The prophet John also understands himself as the one who reproduces the μαρτύρια Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (2 Cor 1.2), and his apocalyptic series of visions is likewise transparent for the *Kyrios*. But he discloses the *future* action of the *Kyrios*. The temporally-eschatologically conceptualized gospel concept appears to be overextended thereby and has become a cipher for transcendent eternity (εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον; 2 Cor 14.6). The original historical connection back to the *Kyrios* and the *apostolos* is abandoned. This places the Revelation of John at the margin of the canon in terms of substance.

3. Hermeneutic Paradigms

Canonization affects not only canons but also their hermeneutic, as the sentence, from which I started, shows: "*Canonical writings need and develop their own doctrine of understanding.*" In what follows I will show that and how the sentence "*What the writings of the New Testament need is not their own doctrine of understanding but rather a reflection on their reception history*" represents the legitimate reading of the first sentence in the times of deconstruction, i.e., in our cultural and scholarly world. To this end, I will sketch out three paradigms of canon hermeneutics

3.1 Canonicity and Hermeneutics: The Greek Paradigm

The canonical writings – or, better, the canonized writings that stand at the beginning of the European cultural sphere – have given rise to their own doctrines of understanding and interpretive practices. As we have seen, this began not with the biblical hermeneutic but with the Greek Homer philology and hermeneutic and with the philosophical hermeneutic.[139] The canon hermeneutic is not a theological conception but a cultural conception of Greece, whose foundations and methods were applied to the Greek-language *Pentateuch*[140] and later also to the *Bible*. The Greek-speaking Jewish

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[138] *Doctr. chr.* 2.13: "These forty-four books form the authoritative Old Testament; the authoritative New Testament consists of the gospel in four books" (trans. Green, *Saint Augustine: On Christian Teaching*, 37).

[139] On Plato hermeneutics, cf. H. Dörrie, ed., *Der hellenistische Rahmen des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus*, Platonismus in der Antike 2 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991).

[140] On the hermeneutic of Philo, cf. I. Christiansen, *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philon von Alexandrien*, BGBH 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969); D. R. Runia, "The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises," in *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Aldershot: Vari-

scriptural exegetes of Alexandria took over basic characteristics and techniques of this hermeneutic. Greek as well as Jewish-Alexandrian hermeneutics obey the same basic conviction: canonical texts, such as the epics of Homer, the *Tanak*, and the *Septuaginta* contain transtemporal potentials of meaning that can be newly disclosed for each present with the help of hermeneutical guidelines.

What this hermeneutical program specifically looks like for a *Septuaginta* text – which is to be read and understood in the context of early Judaism – can be seen with reference to an example from Philo's tractate *De confusione linguarum* on Gen 11.7 (190):

> but those who merely follow the outward and obvious think that we have at this point a reference to the origin of the Greek and barbarian languages. I would not censure such persons, for perhaps the truth is with them also. Still, I would exhort them not to halt there, but to press on to allegorical interpretations (μετελθεῖν δὲ ἐπὶ τὰς τροπικὰς ἀποδόσεις) and to recognize that the letter is to the oracle but as the shadow to the substance and that the higher values therein revealed are what really and truly exist.[141]

Philo is not satisfied with the so-called literal sense, i.e., in this case with an aetiology of the diversity of languages but rather seeks and finds an ethical meaning. He derives this from his special interpretation of the word σύγχυσις, which from his perspective points to a destructive scattering of the vices, so that by the scattering of the people in the diversity of languages what is really meant is the expulsion of the vices of the godless tower builders, through which a new possibility of influence is opened for the virtues. Thus, God's destructive action is constructively reinterpreted in the sense of virtue ethics. Philo himself would say: thus, the constructive meaning of the narrative comes to light. To find this is the task of the hermeneutic. The pan-ethicizing of the Pentateuchal texts by Philo may ultimately appear unsatisfactory to the historically trained eye of the present-day exegete of the Hebrew Bible, since Philo flattens out and shows contempt for precisely the explanatory achievement of cultural-aetiological narratives, such as the story of the tower of Babel. From the perspective of historical exegesis, the literary and aetiological achievement of Gen 11 is not merely obscured in Philo but actually destroyed. However, the more recent history of the hermeneutics of the Bible makes us receptive to the insight that Philo had to assert himself in the philosophical and philological culture of his time, and, in his commentaries, he needed and wanted to demonstrate his conviction that the Torah was ethical speech. This kind of hermeneutic is not only structurally related to varieties of the *canonical approach* or "canon hermeneutics"[142] but also closer to present-day liberation-theological, post-

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orum, 1990), 202–56; P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete of His Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); M. R. Niehoff, *Jewish Bible Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[141] Trans. F. H. Colson, LCL 261, 113–14. Cf. also M. R. Niehoff, "Philons Beitrag zur Kanonisierung der griechischen Bibel." For the hermeneutic of *De confusione linguarum*, see N. Treu, *Das Sprachverständnis des Paulus im Rahmen des antiken Sprachdiskurses*, NET 26 (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2018).

[142] Cf., by way of introduction, A. Schart, "Canonical Approach," in *LBH* (2009): 115.

colonial, and gender-related *readings* than one might believe at first glance. It is classic canon hermeneutics in the sense that it makes its canonical texts meaningful for the leading paradigms of its respective present. In the early imperial period, ethics was the general paradigm to which important texts were meant to contribute. What this classic hermeneutic lacks from the perspective of the present – namely, first, a deeper engagement with the so-called *literal sense*, which Philo recognizes but does not acknowledge, since it does not fit in the ethical horizon of expectation, and, second, the *critical* engagement with the text that is characteristic of present-day contextual hermeneutics – does not count in the canonical hermeneutical paradigm. Rather, what matters here is the bridging of the temporal distance through transtemporal ethics. The central role of the hermeneutic – and its representatives – in this paradigm is clear. For in this perspective the hermeneutic as doctrine of understanding comes to its actual and most demanding task in the interaction with the canonical writings – the establishment of guidelines for the interpretation of texts of special quality and normativity.[143] Since the canonical writings respectively come from the past and are the result of a process of collection and selection,[144] the task of interpretation presents itself as a combination of historical and systematic efforts. What is historical must first be made comprehensible and then made contemporary. Historical clarification, explanation of language and realia of every kind,[145] and the respective applications – which differ greatly in character – occur in the respective present and for every present, i.e., on the level of time and of historical change. At the same time, a certain transtemporality and general validity of the canonical writings must be claimed and demonstrated. In this type of doctrine of understanding, the most important means for doing so was allegoresis or "tropological" interpretation.[146] Ever since the Alexandrian Homer interpretation and above all ever since Philo's ethically oriented allegorical interpretation of the *Pentateuch*, the concern had been with the uncovering and mediation of enduring norms in history and reaching into the respective present.

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[143] Cf. Tyconius, *Liber regularum* and, on this, K. Pollmann, "Tyconius," in *LACL* (2002): 702–3. See also Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*; cf. K. Pollmann, ed., *Augustinus, Die christliche Bildung (De doctrina Christiana)*, trans. K. Pollmann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013).

[144] M. Finkelberg, "The Canonicity of Homer," demonstrates how fundamental this is not only for the different biblical canons but also for the Homeric epics.

[145] On the spheres in which clarification and explanation are necessary, cf. Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 2.16–63. Augustine recognizes the contribution of historical scholarship in *Doctr. chr.* 2.42ff. Augustine is concerned especially with questions of dating.

[146] Cf. D. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); F. Siegert, "Early Jewish Interpretation in a Hellenistic Style," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I/1, ed. M. Saebo (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 130–98; R. L. Wilken, "In Defense of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 197–212; E. Birnbaum, "Allegorical Interpretation and Jewish Identity among Alexandrian Jewish Writers," in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of P. Borgen*, ed. D. E. Aune, T. Seland, and J. H. Ulrichsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 307–29; I. Ramelli, "Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and Its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism XX*, ed. G. Sterling and D. T. Runia (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 55–99; J. A. Loader, K. Erlemann, J. Ulrich, P. Stoellger, F. Siegert, N. Sinai, S. Döpp, and S. Waldow, "Allegorie/Allegorese," in *LBH* (2009): 8–10; J. N. Rhodes, "Allegory," in *EDEJ* (2010): 323–24.

The early Christian authors whose writings later became the *New Testament* share the hermeneutical-methodological fundamental conviction of the early Jewish canon hermeneutic. In hermeneutical perspective, the early Christian writings are neither original nor normative but rather part of the cultural and religious canon hermeneutic of their tradition and their time. Their authors know and use above all the hermeneutical methods of allegoresis quite unselfconsciously, such as when Paul says *en passant* about Deut 25.4 ("You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing"): μὴ τῶν βοῶν μέλει τῷ θεῷ ἢ δι' ἡμᾶς πάντως λέγει· (1 Cor 9.9–10). At the same time, the early Christian writers enrich and alter this hermeneutic through a typology that is shaped in a specifically christological (messianic) way.[147] They read the *Septuaginta* in a consistently typological way and use this interpretation in their own argumentation, without commenting on it like Philo or rewriting it as the numerous early Jewish examples of *rewritten Bible*.[148] In this respect, the early Christian writings are themselves part of the extensive early Jewish works on canon hermeneutics.[149] At the same time, they use allegoresis in the interpretation of their own tradition – the Jesus tradition.[150] Here, it is no longer *Septuaginta* hermeneutics that is practiced but hermeneutics of the *Kyrios*. The later New Testament writings go beyond this when, for example, Hebrews develops an independent Christology with the help of allegoresis.[151]

Building on the New Testament authors themselves, Christian biblical hermeneutics from the time of the early ecclesiastical writers has always retained and further developed the paradigm of the binding of the hermeneutic to canonicity. This also applies to the twentieth century and to contemporary biblical hermeneutical conceptions. The existentialist interpretation of Rudolf Bultmann[152] starts from the possibility of a direct, not historically mediated existential dimension of the New Testament texts, as does feminist exegesis and many other engaged approaches or *readings*. The basic idea of these engaged hermeneutics continues to be *canonical*: the biblical text must and can magisterially answer the questions of the present because they, as canonical writings, cannot be exhausted in what is historically contingent and past. In the classic model of canon hermeneutics that I have sketched out, the historical relatedness and limitation of biblical texts was allegorically overwritten. The tower of Babel spoke not of the astonishing phenomenon of the diversity and incommensurability of the lan-

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[147] Cf., by way of introduction, M. Weigl, H. K. Nielsen, H. E. Lona, P. Stoellger, and M. Margoni-Kogler, "Typos/Typologie," in *LBH* (2009): 613–16.

[148] Cf. S. W. Crawford, *Rewriting Scriptures in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Tigchelaar, "Wie haben die Qumrantexte unsere Sicht des kanonischen Prozesses verändert?" 169, speaks of "Interpretive Rewriting." On this topic, cf. now also Jonathan M. Potter, *Rewritten Gospel: The Composition of Luke and Rewritten Scripture*, BZNW 267 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2024).

[149] Cf. the typological interpretation of the prophets in the Qumran scrolls.

[150] The first example is in Mark 4. Here, the evangelist has Jesus himself allegorically interpret for his disciples his parabolic speech, which is directed to all hearers. In this way, there emerges the constellation of outer (encoded) speech and inner (open) speech. The parable becomes a secret speech, the allegoresis the means of disclosure (μυστήριον vs. ἀποκάλυψις). The Gospel of Matthew expands the parable form on a grand scale and portrays Jesus as end-time teacher whose parables are latent allegories.

[151] Christ as the high priest.

[152] Cf. U. H. J. Körtner, "Existentiale Interpretation," in *LBH* (2009), 174–75.

guages but rather of vices and virtues, as Philo presents it. Since Bultmann at the latest, the hermeneutical figure of *allegoresis* has been replaced by the hermeneutical figure of *criticism*. The biblical texts and conceptions that are resistant to an existentialist interpretation are subjected to the so-called *Sachkritik*.[153] This hermeneutical figure has been taken over by the various engaged hermeneutics and radicalized through the figure of *suspicion*.[154] The canonical paradigm, however, is not abandoned by any of these hermeneutical figures.

3.2 Decanonization and Taking Leave of Hermeneutics: The Historical Paradigm

New Testament scholarship is indebted to a doctrine of understanding that is explicitly opposed to the canonical model that has been sketched above. The paradigm of historical understanding in which New Testament scholarship works is much more critical toward canons and hermeneutics than the "*Sachkritik*" of Bultmann and the "hermeneutics of liberation." It owes its questions, methods, and scholarly task to the phase of the emancipation of the "biblical disciplines" or of "biblical theology" from theological dogmatics and to the development of historical scholarship as a leading scholarship in the nineteenth century. The history of the emergence of New Testament scholarship[155] was understood as a history of liberation by its own representatives. It became an important part of the large changes to the humanities and to theology during the nineteenth century. The "life of Jesus research" is a shining example of this work.

For New Testament scholarship the *Bible* ceased to be interpreted as canonical "Holy Scripture" and as basis and subject of theological doctrine. It instead became a source writing that disclosed the "history of Israel" and the "history of primitive Christianity" and thus led Christianity back to its beginnings. The *canon* was not destroyed – that could be brought about only by the Christian churches since the canon of the *Bible* is the result of ecclesiastical (and not theological) agreements and determinations – but rather opened for historical questions of every kind and for comparisons with the literary, historical, philosophical, and religious environment. Thus, it became part of its cultural environment, which was likewise shaped since the eighteenth century by phases of historicization and decanonization and by the establishment of new literary canons that decidedly served their own goals beyond the biblical canon. With the thoroughgoing work on contextualization New Testament scholarship brought about

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[153] Cf. L. Bormann and M. Petzoldt, "Sache/Sachkritik," in *LBH* (2009): 512–13. Cf. also R. Morgan, "Thiselton on Bultmann's Sachkritik," in *Horizons in Biblical Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony Thiselton*, ed. S. E. Porter and M. R. Malcolm (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 39, "What … Bultmann meant by the word [*Sachkritik*] was criticism of a *text* (what is *said*) in the light of the *Sache* that the New Testament author intended to speak of (what was *meant*), ultimately the truth of the gospel." Common proposals for translating *Sachkritik* into English include "theological criticism," "content criticism," and "material criticism." In my (Wayne Coppins') judgment, it is best to retain the German technical term *Sachkritik* – or, if it must be translated, to render it with "theological criticism."

[154] Cf. D. Hiller and T. Wesche, "Verdacht/Misstrauen," in *LBH* (2009): 631–32.

[155] A more in-depth presentation of the history of New Testament scholarship in the sense of an enduring self-enlightenment is a desideratum.

a de facto *decanonization*. At the same time, the historicization of the canon and its individual writings brought with it a fundamental transformation of the *hermeneutic*. In this paradigm, understanding took place via historical and literary explanation. The historical dimension became the central category of understanding, and in its historical-critical function New Testament scholarship itself thus took over hermeneutical tasks. In this paradigm the canon-determined hermeneutic does not lose its object, i.e., the canonical collection of writings – which in historical perspective is, in fact, the enduring scholarly object of the discipline – but it does lose its hermeneutical foundational argument, according to which the biblical canon requires its own hermeneutic. For hermeneutics as a historical doctrine of understanding has no preferential attachment to canonical or classic writings. Instead, historical explanation operates in an egalitarian way. All texts are read as sources and investigated with historical methods. From this perspective, the theme "canonicity and hermeneutic" represents only an echo of the general ancient canon hermeneutic that has come to an end through the historical line of questioning. However, the theme "canonicity and hermeneutics" continues to be pursued in systematic and practical theology as well as in the so-called canonical approach and in biblical theology, i.e., in different disciplines of Christian theology,[156] which understands itself as the reflexive organ of the Christian church. I will return to his point below. I have already touched on the parallels in contemporary Judaism and Islam.

The detachment from the special interpretation of canonical texts thus creates a new situation not only for the canonical texts but also for the hermeneutic as canonical doctrine of understanding. As we have seen, it was the great classic and canonical texts of Greco-Roman, Israelite-Jewish, and Christian antiquity that led to the hermeneutical and methodological reflections in Plato, Aristotle, the Alexandrian philologists, Philo, the rabbis, and the ecclesiastical writers from Origen to Augustine and that brought forth the great interpretive achievements of the Greek, Jewish, and Christian commentaries. When canons lose their dominant and normative aesthetic, ethical, and religious status in the framework of their institutions, not only does the normative power of the canons fade but also the necessity of a special hermeneutical grappling with their texts. Decanonization is joined by the gradual "taking leave of hermeneutics."[157] The undertaking of hermeneutics is reduced to the philological securing of

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[156] Cf. the objectives of the *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*. Cf. also the essays in volume 25 (2011): *Wie biblisch ist die Theologie?* As already mentioned, concepts of contemporary canon hermeneutics and Jewish hermeneutic models stand alongside this.

[157] On this, cf. the different critical approaches, especially in contemporary debates in literary studies, linguistics, and philosophy, in A. N. Terrin, C. Dohmen, G. Schunack, G. Figal, W. G. Jeanrond, J. Fischer, H. Schroer, and M. Vincent, "Hermeneutik," in *RGG*⁴ 3 (2000): 1648–63; ET = A. N. Terrin, C. Dohmen, G. Schunack, G. Figal, W. G. Jeanrond, J. Fischer, H. Schroer, and M. Vincent, "Hermeneutics," in *RPP* 6 (2009): 87–96. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, is already critical (against the interpretive analysis of the *meaning* of art); See also O. Marquard, "Frage nach der Frage, auf die die Hermeneutik die Antwort ist," in *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 117–46; J. Hörisch, *Die Wut des Verstehens. Zur Kritik der Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988); H. U. Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik. Über die Produktion von Präsenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004) (in continuation of S. Sontag against methodological constructivism and "interpretation").

the text and the interpretation of sources for the purpose of historical reconstruction. In this paradigm, hermeneutics is coextensive with *method-led explanation*[158] according to the guidelines of philology and historical scholarship. The reduction of hermeneutics to explanation presents itself as a simultaneous deconstruction of canon *and* hermeneutics. This tendency continues in a stream of the more recent history of hermeneutics. In the wake of different approaches to *canon criticism*, a philosophical and ideological *hermeneutics criticism* has developed that suspects forms of the establishment and interpretation of dominating power in the special effort to understand canonical texts and seeks to deconstruct these.[159]

Let us look back again at the nineteenth century, which made binding the historical approach to *all* kinds of texts that came from the past. Alongside historicism,[160] Schleiermacher's hermeneutic has exercised an enormous influence,[161] since it pursued a distinct hermeneutical goal, though it comes close to the historical doctrine of understanding in its result. Schleiermacher wanted to transfer the *hermeneutica sacra* into a general doctrine of understanding and thus made a distinct hermeneutic for canonical writings superfluous. We could say that this hermeneutic wanted to bestow the status of canonical texts on *all* demanding texts – whether literary, philosophical, or religious – in the sense that they merit an empathetic or sympathetic and elaborate interpretation. Here too, the bond between canon and hermeneutics is undone. The concern is no longer with a deconstruction of canon and hermeneutics but with a conceptual new understanding of the idea of canon and hermeneutics. The classic idea of canon is expanded to such an extent that at least a distinct hermeneutic for canonical writings becomes superfluous.[162]

Both the historical doctrine of understanding and Schleiermacher's hermeneutic distance themselves from the foundational argument of the canon hermeneutic thematized at the outset: "*Canons need their own doctrine of understanding.*" Instead, the following principle has applied since the nineteenth century: "*There is (only) one uni-*

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[158] Cf. D. Erbele-Küster, O. Wischmeyer, M. Leiner, D. Oschmann, M. Habermann, and M. Weber, "Erklärung/Erklären," in *LBH* (2009): 147–52.

[159] For a concise introduction, see Körtner, *Einführung in die theologische Hermeneutik*, 40; D. Erbele-Küster, A. Standhartinger, and M. Köhlmoos, "Feministische Bibelhermeneutik," in *LBH* (2009): 176–78.

[160] On historicism, cf., by way of introduction, G. Scholtz, "Geschichte, Historie IV," in *HWBh* 3 (1974): 361–71; H. W. Blanke, "Aufklärungshistorie und Historismus: Bruch und Kontinuität," in *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. O. G. Oexle and J. Rüsen (Colgne: Böhlau, 1996), 69–97; S. Jordan, "Zwischen Aufklärung und Historismus. Deutschsprachige Geschichtstheorie in der ersten Halfte des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Sb. Leibniz-Sozietät* 48 (2001): 5–20; J. Nordalm, ed., *Historismus* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006).

[161] F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, ed. H. Kimmerle (Heidelberg: Winter, 1959); F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik. Mit einem Anhang sprachphilosophischer Texte Schleiermachers*, ed. M. Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). Cf. A. N. Terrin, C. Dohmen, G. Schunack, G. Figal, W. G. Jeanrond, J. Fischer, H. Schroer, and M. Vincent, "Hermeneutik," in *RGG*[4] 3 (2000), 1656: "Through F. Schleiermacher … hermeneutical thinking as a whole obtained a new philosophical starting point. All authorities that stood outside the text were rejected in the interpretation and with them every claim to a special (e.g., theological or legal) hermeneutic. Rather, every text was to be interpreted with a view to both its individual meaning (psychological understanding) and the linguistic means through which meaning is enabled (grammatical understanding)."

[162] Cf. the tendency in Dilthey to transfer this hermeneutic to poetry ("die Dichtung").

versal methodological understanding of texts." E. Preuschen expressed this perspective in a nutshell in the first volume of *ZNW* in 1900: "In the future it will probably no longer be said that one regards a 'biblical' hermeneutic, a 'biblical' philology, etc., as possible, as still happened in the first half of the century."[163] Preuschen interprets the history of New Testament scholarship as the history of the liberation of the writings of the New Testament from the canon and from the theological special hermeneutic: "Through this term [the canon] a group of writings was detached from the context of the living literature and understood in its isolation as a doctrinal norm and no longer as an expression and product of personal life. But insofar as this took place … one unconsciously ensured that the writings became fossils."[164]

The hermeneutical achievement of this approach can be summarized concisely as follows: the *historical approach*, which forms the backbone of New Testament scholarship and an extremely large portion of scholarly work in the discipline "New Testament"[165] starts with the *authors* of the texts – whether they can be grasped historically or must be inferred – and their *intention*. According to this understanding, the texts are not open for interpretation but rather bearers of distinct statements and messages of their known or unknown authors.[166] But what does this mean for a hermeneutic of the canonical texts? Since the nineteenth century the so-called "introductory questions" have been regarded as the key to understanding the biblical writings. The great success story of the historical exegesis of Old and New Testaments is nourished by the thoroughgoing historical line of questioning, whose program, under the label of historical contextualization, also dominates contemporary exegesis, at least in the German-language sphere. In the process, the emphases can change. Thus, at present scholars are asking less about historical authors and more about historical community profiles, in whose political, social, and cultural context the New Testament writings are to be placed. The historical line of questioning, however, remains the same. This historical research is based on an implicit hermeneutical conviction that is not made explicit: "The uncovering of the beginnings creates understanding." This is why the (hi)stories of the beginnings are investigated so intensively,[167] even when – or precisely when – it is known that the first beginnings always remain obscure.[168] The unusual energy

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[163] E. Preuschen, "Idee oder Methode?" *ZNW* 1 (1900): 1–15.

[164] Preuschen, "Idee oder Methode?" With a view to the history of scholarship it is interesting that Preuschen presupposes and reinforces the historical paradigm, on the one hand, and yet points, on the other hand, to its weaknesses (collection of materials instead of interpretation) and invokes anew Baur's "idea" vis-à-vis a mere material reconstruction. In this way Preuschen makes clear that the historical paradigm alone is not sufficient (any longer) for the interpretation of the New Testament texts. In Preuschen, however, it is unclear how he will compensate for the interpretive deficits of historicism.

[165] On this, see O. Wischmeyer, ed., *Herkunft und Zukunft der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft*, NET 6 (Tübingen: Francke, 2003); O. Wischmeyer, "Die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft am Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts. Überlegungen zu ihrem Selbstverstandnis, ihren Beziehungsfeldern und ihren Aufgaben," in eadem, *Von Ben Sira zu Paulus. Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Texten. Theologie und Hermeneutik des Frühjudentums und des Neuen Testaments*, ed. E.-M. Becker, WUNT 173 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 245–71.

[166] Here, I can pass over other important motifs, such as the historical classification of the texts.

[167] A current example is research on the beginnings of the *Quran*.

[168] E. Angehrn, *Anfang und Ursprung. Die Frage nach dem Ersten in Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaft* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

that has been invested for many generations in the comprehensive investigation of the beginnings of Christianity – currently still conducted prominently as a discussion of *the parting of the ways* of Judaism and Christianity – can be explained only as a latent hermeneutical movement to find in the historical beginnings a truth[169] that cannot be found in the doctrine of faith or dogmatics.

The hermeneutical paradigm is by no means so foreign to the writings of the New Testament as one might suspect according to their own belonging to the ancient canon hermeneutic. They stand, however, despite this belonging, with an astonishing taken-for-grantedness, in the history of their time[170] and understand their writings in different ways as witnesses to "the beginning of the gospel" *in this time* (Mark 1.1). The rather rare historical-political specifications in the Gospels[171] are not part of a literary staging that places a narrative in a historical context[172] but rather must be read as what they are – as temporal specifications. The significance of the witnesses of the beginning is not only underlined by the *auctor ad Theophilum* (Luke 1.2) but, with very different theological language, *also* by the author of 1 John (1.1–2). Nevertheless, as we have seen, there is not only *one* account of the "beginnings" but *four*, though these do not differ in the broad features of the so-called "Jesus story." What predominates is not historical exactness in the sense of the clarity of historical research[173] but authorial style of narration in the sense of ancient historiography. Paul, too, combines biographical retrospections with historical inexactness. On the other hand, he very explicitly and authorially introduces himself as an author in every one of his letters and consistently binds his teaching and parenesis to his person. When Acts has him be active as a historical person, it captures his self-understanding. We have already discussed the connection between historical trustworthiness and "apostolicity." Accordingly, the category of historical trustworthiness and thus of history in the sense of historical scholarship can by no means be distanced from the hermeneutic of the New Testament.[174] On the contrary, the New Testament writings are not transtemporal but situated in time. They are concerned with a person from the history of the first century CE – with *Jesus of Nazareth*.[175] The historical hermeneutic discloses this basic aspect of the New Testament writings and cannot

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[169] On this, cf. especially the historical-hermeneutical program of Martin Hengel; M. Hengel, "Eine junge theologische Disziplin in der Krise," in *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: Autobiographische Essays aus der Evangelischen Theologie*, ed. E.-M. Becker (Tübingen: Francke, 2003), 18–29; ET = M. Hengel, "A Young Discipline in Crisis" (trans. W. Coppins), in *Earliest Christian History. History, Literature, and Theology. Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel*, ed. M. F. Bird and J. Maston, WUNT 2/320 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 459–71. Cf., more generally, W. Paravicini, *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), who argues for the rehabilitation of "truth" as a guideline or benchmark for the work of the historian (24–28). He refers to the saying of Wilhelm von Humboldt: "The truth of what has happened appears easy but is the highest that can be thought. For if it would be gained entirely, it would lie revealed in it what determines all reality as a necessary chain" (W. von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte*, 3rd ed. [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980], 585-606, here 587).

[170] This applies not only to the *auctor ad Theophilum* but already to the author of the Gospel of Mark.

[171] Cf. especially the synchronisms in the Gospel of Luke.

[172] Thus, e.g., the literary framework of the Letter of Aristeas.

[173] This applies also to the Gospel of Luke and the often very imprecise presentation technique of Acts.

[174] Different rules of historical referentiality apply to the collection of the books of the *Tanak*.

[175] This applies also to the Gospel of John.

make do without the program of the search for "historical truth,"[176] also and precisely in the times of deconstruction and the new concept of historical construction.

3.3 A New Connection between Canon and Hermeneutics: The Paradigm of Reception Aesthetics

As a general hermeneutical yield of the scholarship of the nineteenth century, such as E. Preuschen summarized it in 1900 for New Testament scholarship, one can formulate the following statement: "*There is (only) one universal methodological understanding of texts*." But the nineteenth century established two different tracks of the interpretation of this sentence – first, the strictly historical study of sources, which regarded its task as the reconstruction of past happenings, and, second, the empathetic interpretation of great texts in the sense of Schleiermacher. Even though Schleiermacher's hermeneutic rejected a *hermeneutica sacra*, and that means a special canon hermeneutic, the interpretation of great texts is nevertheless not reduced to historical explanation. Schleiermacher keeps open the task of an appropriate interpretation. E. Preuschen also did not want to stop with historical reconstruction. He made recourse to Baur's idea and thus to Hegel and thereby reconnected historical work and historico-philosophical interpretation. The way then led to new syntheses of historical-critical exegesis and theological-philosophical canon hermeneutics in dialectical theology, existentialist interpretation, and the new hermeneutic. All these approaches agreed that historical reconstruction alone could not bring about an adequate understanding of canonical texts or, put differently, that the quest for the origin or beginning did not establish adequate understanding. In these major attempts to set forth a hermeneutic of the New Testament *after* historicism, i.e., to retain and develop the historical method and at the same time to take seriously the transtemporal claim of the New Testament, the historical approach always continued to play the leading role in exegetical work.[177] At the same time, in the last few decades, it has been attacked from various sides, on the one hand, and developed further, on the other hand.

 As is well known, these processes stand in connection to the new cultural studies paradigm, which need not be presented here.[178] For our hermeneutical question two points are important from the shifts in self-understanding within the humanities: (1) as already mentioned, in the second half of the last century, historical studies has discovered the dimension of the *construction* of the past and has thus moved beyond the goal of the reconstruction of the past, at least in the theoretical sphere;[179] (2) literary stud-

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[176] A. von Harnack, "Nachwort zu meinem offenen Brief an Herrn Professor Karl Barth," in *Theologische Bücherei 17/1. Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie. Teil 1: Karl Barth. Heinrich Barth. Emil Brunner*, ed. J. Moltmann, 6th ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1995), 346–47: "As there is only *one* scholarly method, there is also only one scholarly *task* – the pure knowledge of its object."

[177] Cf. only the journal *Early Christianity* 1 (2010). Cf. note 22.

[178] On this, cf. O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, 195–211. The cultural studies paradigm is supported especially with reference to literary studies and literary-theoretical considerations.

[179] This applies despite the brilliant objection of Paravicini, *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* (cf. note 169). His criticism of an exaggerated historical constructivism/deconstructivism does not distinguish clearly enough

ies has developed the hermeneutical paradigm of *reception aesthetics* and discovered the reader instead of the author as the hermeneutically relevant entity for the construction of meaning.[180] These changes are important for the hermeneutics of the *Bible* because while they do not supplant the one-dimensionality of the historical model of understanding, which believed it could find the understanding of the texts exclusively in the beginnings and read the biblical texts *in toto* only with reference to their source value, they do supplement and correct it.

What does the approach of reception aesthetics achieve?[181] The author is replaced by the reader. The *reader-oriented* approach perceives the *texts in their textuality*, since in this hermeneutical model they are understood as open for later meaning potentials, which are independent of the original authorial intention, and places the *readers* of the texts at the center, who in the act of reading must constantly connect anew the texts of the past to the life-worldly and theoretical contemporary contexts.[182] In New Testament scholarship, the reception aesthetical perspective initially plays less of a role in exegetical work itself than in hermeneutical theory. In a similar way to the historical paradigm, which in the historical methods makes direct interpretive work on the texts possible, reception aesthetics also develops its own lines of questioning and modes of investigation. In doing so, the reception-aesthetical approach is in a certain way closer to the text than the historical approach, i.e., since here the texts are liberated from their one-sided attachment to their own time – i.e., to the past – and taken seriously in their future dimension or future relevance. After all, they themselves do want to have both.[183] Canonical texts as texts with a high interpretive potential and interpretive claim can be interpreted and understood by the historical methods always only in their "historical context." Their further-reaching claim is taken from them. In this way they are consciously disempowered. This liberating influence of the historical interpretation is not revoked by the reception-aesthetical methods, but it is corrected in such a way that it frees up the way for an interpretation that reaches into the respective present. With this approach, which *does not replace* the historical methods – which retain their disclosing function for texts of every kind – *but rather supplements*

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between "history" and "the writing of history" and ultimately underestimates the constructive achievement of that historiography. On this topic, cf. now also Jens Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament*, ed. W. Coppins and S. Gathercole, trans. W. Coppins, BMSEC 1 (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 9–70.

[180] Cf. J. A. Loader, O. Wischmeyer, U. H. J. Körtner, S. Döpp, and C. Lubkoll, "Autor," in *LBH* (2009): 60–63 and H. Utzschneider, S. Döpp, C. Sporhase, and J. Meibaum, "Autorenintention," in *LBH* (2009): 63–66. Here too, however, it applies that the insights into the role of the reader does not in itself bring with it the "death of the author"; cf. F. Jannidis, G. Lauer, M. Martínez, and S. Winko, eds., *Rückkehr des Autors: Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999); F. Jannidis, G. Lauer, M. Martínez, and S. Winko, eds., *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000).

[181] Cf. M. Grohmann, B. H. McLean, T. Schmitz, and M. Sauter, "Reader-Response Criticism," in *LBH* (2009): 478–81.

[182] Systematic theology has connected the reader-oriented approach under the keyword of the *inspired reader* with a theory of interpretation that has been adapted in a reception-theoretical way. Within the framework of New Testament scholarship, this systematic theological approach cannot be pursued further. In any case, with reception aesthetics we are dealing with a strictly "innerworldly" theory of meaning construction in relation to texts. Theological points of contact must be incorporated into this theory from the outside.

[183] Cf. just the Gospel of Mark as announcement of the eschatological time or Rom 13.

them precisely for canonical texts, a new stage in the history of canon hermeneutics is reached. At the same time, the reception-aesthetical theory protects us from an uncritical interaction with the authoritative and normative potential of the biblical canon since its reception-historical component always consciously remains aware of the precanonical history of emergence of the canonized text. This connects it with the critical function of the historical paradigm. Understanding always takes place as a new critical engagement with possible sense and meaning potentials[184] for the respective present from the standpoint of the present. While allegoresis "unconceals" or uncovers the respectively dominant cultural paradigm – in Philo virtue ethics – in their texts and thus functions in a precritical and repetitive way from a historical-critical perspective, in reception theory the critical reader establishes meaning in each case. The reception-aesthetical hermeneutical model is thus not post-canonical, but it is post-normative. It makes possible the critical discussion of the Sache or subject matter, and the recognition of this as an instrument of hermeneutics is an enduring achievement of Rudolf Bultmann. The reception-aesthetical approach makes possible a deconstructive hermeneutical approach to canonical texts, which can be expressed as follows: *"It depends not on the application of a distinct canonical hermeneutic but on the judgment of the reader whether and in what way she or he wishes to confer a special – i.e., normative – status upon the canonical texts. A pre-given canon hermeneutic cannot bring about this decision."*[185]

4. The Canon-Oriented Hermeneutical Achievement of New Testament Scholarship

4.1 New Testament Scholarship in the Field of Tension between Theological and Historical Readings

Let us return for the last time to the starting conditions for a hermeneutic of the biblical writings. The relations between Jewish-Christian and Greco-Roman religious and literary canons and hermeneutics have been equally close and diverse since Alexandrian philology. Jewish and later Christian exegetes and hermeneuticists have taken over the main features of the ways of dealing with the texts of Homer. This canonical hermeneutics paradigm has long come to an end for the canonical exemplary writings of Homer and Vergil. Since the rise of historical thinking – we are dealing with a process of the historicizing of these texts, which includes the classical and new humanistic renaissances up to the second half of the twentieth century – Homer and Vergil have lost their culture-canonical significance and their own hermeneutic, and the national

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[184] C. Hardmeier, O. Wischmeyer, D. Korsch, M. Becker, U. Kundert, I. H. Warnke, and H. Ineichen, "Bedeutung," in *LBH* (2009): 67–73; C. Hardmeier, O. Wischmeyer, D. Korsch, M. Becker, U. Kundert, K. Ehlich, and E. Angehm, "Sinn," in *LBH* (2009): 548–55.

[185] For the recent debate on reception history see R. Burnet, *Exegesis and History of Reception: Reading the New Testament Today with the Readers of the Past*, WUNT 455 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021); C. Hoegen-Rohls, "Rezeptionskritik und Rezeptionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments: Eine methodologische Skizze," *NTS* 69 (2023), 258–270; eadem, "Überlegungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments im Gespräch mit Régis Burnet," *NTS* 69 (2023), 291–98.

literary canons are also noticeably fading. By contrast, despite the decanonizing tendencies[186] of the last two centuries and the loss of its cultural environment of literary canonical writings, the *Bible* has thus far retained its canonical status both in the religious and in the scholarly framework.[187] From this constellation the following question arises once again: Does the New Testament under present-day conditions of understanding need its own hermeneutic?

The hermeneutic of the ecclesiastical writers was already not without tensions. Thus, Origen insists that the writings not only of the New Testament but also already of the Old Testament are not human words:

> The reason, in all the cases mentioned, for the false beliefs and impious or ignorant assertations about God appears to be nothing else than Scripture not being understood according to its spiritual sense (πνευματικά), but taken as regarding the bare letter (πρὸς τὸν ψιλὸν γράμμα). Therefore, for those who are persuaded that the sacred books are not compositions of human beings, but that they were *composed* and have come down to us from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) by the will of the Father of all *through Jesus Christ*, one must indicate the apparent ways [of understanding Scripture followed] by those who keep the rule of the heavenly Church of Jesus Christ through succession from the apostles.[188]

Augustine argues, by contrast, that in the Bible human words are read by humans and therefore human aids to understanding are not only legitimate but necessary:

> All this [the instruction and baptism of Paul and of Cornelius] could certainly have been done through an angel, but the human condition would be wretched indeed *if God appeared unwilling to minister his word to human beings through human agency*. It has been said, "For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" [1 Cor. 3:17]: how could that be true if God did not make divine utterances from his human temple but broadcast direct from heaven or through angels the learning that he wished to be passed on to mankind? Moreover, there would be no way for love, which ties people together in the bonds of unity, to make souls overflow and as it were intermingle with each other, if human beings learned nothing from other humans.[189]

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[186] Cf. Becker, "Antike Textsammlungen in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion."

[187] The Jewish faith community and the Christian churches and the corresponding academic training courses are meant here.

[188] *Princ.* 4.2.2 (trans. Behr, *Origen, On First Principles*, 489, 491; O. W.'s emphasis and insertion of Greek words). Interesting here is not only the notion that Jesus Christ composed "the Holy Scriptures" but also the trinitarian formulation.

[189] *Doctr. Chr.*, prologue (trans. Green, *Saint Augustine: On Christian Teaching*, 5–6; O. W.'s emphasis and insertion of [the instruction and baptism of Paul and of Cornelius]). On this, cf. W. Wischmeyer, "Von Men-

Thus, Augustine begins his hermeneutic *De doctrina Christiana* with a clear criticism of those who think they do not need any hermeneutic as a human doctrine of understanding since the texts disclose themselves to them in their meaning. Between Origen and Augustine and within the exegetical work of the two ecclesiastical writers,[190] biblical hermeneutics developed itself in its different varieties of literal meaning and allegoresis, of human authorship and inspiration. The later history of biblical hermeneutics built upon Origen and Augustine. Both poles, literal sense and allegoresis, are, however, part of the tension-filled framework of a cultural paradigm of their time, of the canon hermeneutic. Restating this point in a nutshell, the ecclesiastical writers did not advocate a special hermeneutic but interpreted the *Bible* on the basis of the general models of understanding of their culture. Only the insistence of Christian theology – and analogously also of Jewish and Islamic scriptural hermeneutics – on this canon hermeneutic under entirely changed cultural conditions led to the notion that the Bible requires *per se* its own hermeneutic.

Since its emergence, New Testament scholarship, by contrast, has worked on the basis of the conditions of understanding of its time. The disciplines of Old and New Testament scholarship have not taken the path of a special hermeneutic for their texts that is separated from the general cultural development. Instead, in the sense of the indivisibility of the hermeneutic, they have carried out the decanonization of the classic literary canon for their canon.[191] In this way, both scholarly disciplines carried forward the constellation of the general Greek (exemplary) canon hermeneutic under the conditions of their time. Vis-à-vis a threatening petrification (Preuschen) of the Bible as Holy Scripture, cult book, or the like, New Testament scholarship places the early Christian writings, on the one hand, in their own time (historical contextualization) and, on the other hand, in the present (reception aesthetics), and thereby makes them accessible to an understanding that is appropriate to the time – the very understanding that was always the concern of the hermeneuticists. New Testament scholarship[192] does not thereby regress behind its *raison d'etre*, i.e., the historical-critical perspective, to which

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schen für Menschen. Augustins Schrift de Doctrina Christiana – Die hermeneutischen Positionierungen des Prologs," in *Heiliger Text. Die identitätsbildende Funktion klassischer Texte innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft*, ed. H. de Roest and W. Wischmeyer (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2007), 109–17.

[190] We also find, of course, acknowledgments of the literal meaning in Origen and allegoresis in Augustine. On this, cf., by way of introduction, U. Heil, R. Leonhardt, H. Liss, and H. Kugler, "Schriftsinn, vielfacher," in *LBH* (2009): 531–35. I have selected the quotations with a view to the subject matter and not as quotations that are characteristic of the persons.

[191] Representatives of both Old and New Testament scholarship made a decisive contribution themselves to the general process of decanonization in the humanities.

[192] In this field of tension, representatives of New Testament scholarship perceive, however, very different options. (1) They develop their own hermeneutics of the New Testament in their own discipline and on the basis of their textual understanding. (2) They limit themselves to the exegetical explanation of the Bible, while leaving hermeneutics to systematic theology. (3) They work exclusively in the historical-critical context as a small subdiscipline of the ancient history of religion and Jewish studies and consciously refrain from every hermeneutical reflection. (4) A fourth tendency, which is especially widespread in Anglo-American exegesis leads in its direction to patristics, either with a broader history-of-religions focus on Gnosticism or on the patristic history of exegesis and thus in the direction of a new canonical approach on the basis of reception history.

it owes its existence. This perspective means freedom in relation to canonical norm and institutional tradition. It makes possible the historical *deconstruction* of the canon; the *construction* of the history of emerging Christianity, of its writings and structures of authority; and the *discourse-analytical*[193] approach to the messages and instructions of the New Testament writings. Theology and ethics of the New Testament writings are presented and historically contextualized in their relationships. The combination of historical and reception-aesthetical lines of questioning in contemporary New Testament scholarship is the form in which canonical hermeneutics can be set forth in a post-canonical epoch in the framework of text-interpretive scholarship, i.e., in which the understanding of the New Testament texts under the current conditions of understanding can take place. *Decanonization* and the historical and reception-aesthetical interpretation fulfill the same purpose that the ancient allegorical canon interpretation pursued – namely, making possible the understanding of the texts under general conditions of knowledge. These conditions – and not the texts – are subject to constant change. *Decanonization* is the current presupposition for understanding, as the status of canon was the presupposition for understanding in precritical hermeneutics. The concern here is not with a simple model of progress in which "precritical" is evaluated as more distant from the text in comparison with the "historical-critical" approach – or, vice versa, with a view in which "precritical" is regarded as that which is appropriate to the texts of the Bible in contrast to criticism and suspicion – but rather with presenting the belonging of the three hermeneutical paradigms to their respective cultural and theoretical contexts. The historical and reception-aesthetical paradigms are not better than the precritical-canonical one but the hermeneutical response that is respectively appropriate to the time, to the question that must always be posed and answered anew, namely, "*How do I read canonical texts?*" in their respective cultural and theoretical environments. This applies also to the conflict – which is only apparent – between the historical and the reception-aesthetical hermeneutic. Only when the hunger for historical knowledge and its liberating and deconstructive effect was slaked to some extent could spheres other than the historical ἀρχή become hermeneutically relevant and could the reader's own role be reflected upon anew.

4.2 New Testament Scholarship and Reception Aesthetics

I have presented the process of canon formation and of the specific canon hermeneutic from the perspective of New Testament scholarship. New Testament scholarship was and is the scholarly instrument of decanonization. In the place of a canon hermeneutic it sets the historical and reception-aesthetical perspective with their analytical and constructive work steps. My remarks have made clear that the historical and reception-aesthetical paradigm is not oriented *against* a hermeneutic of the New Testament but rather itself represents the *hermeneutical program* for understanding the New Testament in the context of present-day textual scholarships. New Testament scholarship is

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[193]Cf. U. Sals, S. Scholz, J. F. Lehmann, and I. H. Warnke, "Diskursanalyse," in *LBH* (2009): 135–38.

devoted to the understanding (hermeneutics) and interpretation (methods) of the texts that in the course of their early reception history became the *New Testament*, the second part of the *Bible*. I will summarize the achievement of New Testament scholarship in three points.

(1) While New Testament scholarship does not work in the canonical hermeneutic paradigm, it does work in a *canon-oriented* way.[194] The writings of the New Testament canon constitute its primary object of investigation. To this extent, its approach is that of reception history, for canonization is – as mentioned at the outset – an integral and enduring component of the reception history both of the individual writings and later also of the canonical collection of writings. At the same time, the analysis of the latent internal self-canonization of the Gospels and Pauline letters makes clear that at least these early Christian writings have a tendency toward canonization. A historical interpretation will not be able to ignore this tendency. The concept of canon is not superfluous for New Testament scholarship and its hermeneutic but remains its base concept. To this extent, New Testament scholarship will continue to distinguish between the texts of the New Testament and the so-called New Testament apocrypha – not for normative reasons but for reception-historical ones.

(2) New Testament scholarship works, second, in a *text-oriented* way. It investigates the texts of the New Testament text-critically, text-historically, exegetically, and thematically. To this extent, its approach is the general text-scholarly one. Through the fact that it interprets the texts with philological, historical, literary-historical, and history-of-religions methods and lines of questioning, it mediates the New Testament texts in their distinct profile and in their contexts to all the scholarly disciplines that deal with texts. It continues to be the first advocate for the texts and the effort to understand them.[195]

(3) New Testament scholarship works, third, in a *hermeneutic-oriented* way. It connects the investigation of the Greek, Jewish, and early church canon hermeneutics[196] with the hermeneutical implications of the history of interpretation, on the one hand, and contemporary hermeneutical research, on the other hand. In this way, it presents a hermeneutical platform for the bringing together of different historical and contemporary approaches of canonical hermeneutics.[197] However, New Testament scholarship itself does not develop a *separate* "canon hermeneutic" that isolates the writings of the New Testament and their interpretation from their contexts on the basis of a closed, exclusive, and normative conception of canon. At the same time, it also does not withdraw exclusively to the older historical paradigm, which leaves undiscussed the different conceptions of "world interpretation" that the texts work out. It is obligated to the contemporary reception-aesthetical hermeneutic concept, which applies to emi-

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[194] This is not to be confused with a canonical approach. On the canonical approach, cf. note 142.

[195] Since Origen, establishing the text, exegesis in commentary form, and hermeneutics have been interdependent. On the enduring value of philology for hermeneutics, cf. K. Pollmann, "Five Contributions to Latin Philology AD," *Millennium* 7 (2010): 1–8.

[196] On this, see now Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics*.

[197] Cf. the rationale of the *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik* (ed. O. Wischmeyer).

nent texts[198] and works with an open, historically dynamic conception of canon and the hermeneutical concept of expectation[199] and criticism[200] in relation to the world interpretation of the texts. In this way, it keeps the texts in the tension between claim and opposition, in which they have stood since Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Contemporary New Testament scholarship works with the hermeneutical principle "*What the writings of the New Testament need in the hermeneutical discourse of the present is not their own doctrine of understanding or canon hermeneutic but rather a hermeneutical reflection on their reception history, that is, canon research. It depends on the reader whether and in what way she or he will confer a special status on the canonical texts. A pre-given canon hermeneutic cannot bring about this decision.*"

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[198] Thus the formulation of H. G. Gadamer, who clearly refers back to Dilthey's conception.

[199] The category of expectation refers to all texts that have a complex structure and contain statements that do not exhaust themselves in mere information.

[200] The category of criticism refers to the texts mentioned in the previous note. The world interpretation conceptions of eminent texts must be subjected to different critical processes, which apply, on the one hand, to the statement and argumentation worlds of the texts themselves and, on the other hand, critically interrogate the statements of the texts in the respectively current discourse. This applies in a special way to texts that are furnished with a canonical claim by the institutions that are carried by them and by their interpretive communities. Concepts such as the Bultmanian "*Sachkritik*" and "engaged readings" or "contextual hermeneutics," which go beyond the understanding of the texts and inquire about the theoretical and practical possibilities of their implementation, carry the canonical claim of the New Testament texts into the religious and philosophical discourse of the present.

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