Brevard Childs' canonical approach:
an evaluation of its main elements

A thesis submitted by

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Abbreviations

Following the precedent established by others who have published in this field, I refer to Childs' major monographs with acronyms:

M&R	Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 27 (2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 1962).
M&T	Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 37 (London: SCM Press, 1962).
BTC	Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970).
IOTS	Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 1979).
NTC	Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1984).
OTTCC	Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985).
BTONT	Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

Abstracts

Short Abstract

This thesis aims to provide an evaluation of Brevard Childs' canonical approach, which is an approach to Theological Interpretation that aims to utilise the Bible as a vehicle to know the Christian God. This thesis is located in the academic discipline of Biblical Studies and has a substantial lean towards Old Testament (hereafter 'OT')/Hebrew Bible (hereafter 'HB') Studies as this was Childs' specialism and is also mine today. This thesis was not initially devoted to a study of Childs' approach, but his approach is so extensive that it warrants a thesis in itself. My argument is twofold: (i) Childs' approach consists of three main elements that were variously developed and implemented over time, and (ii) these elements, though rich and informed, ultimately fail to complete the aim that Childs set out to achieve. Regarding originality, this thesis introduces the idea that Childs' canonical approach is composed of these three main elements and provides what I hope is the most detailed evaluation of Childs' approach in light of Biblical Studies. A conclusion was established by firstly identifying that the canonical approach consists of three main elements. I then undertook detailed analyses of each of these elements and evaluated them in accordance with their reasonableness and in light of the evidence from Biblical Studies. This thesis is structured in two parts. Part A aims to provide the reader with a helpful foundation before one engages in a detailed study of Childs' canonical approach. Part B is then the main body of the thesis which analyses and evaluates each of the approach's main elements.

Long Abstract

i. Overview

The aim of this thesis is to provide an evaluation of Brevard Childs' (1923-2007) canonical approach, which is an approach to Theological Interpretation that aims to utilise the Bible as a vehicle to know the Christian God.

ii. Location in Academia

This thesis is located in the academic discipline of Biblical Studies, a multifaceted discipline that draws upon multiple others. It has a substantial lean towards Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (OT/HB) Studies as this was Childs' specialism and is also mine today. This thesis is located in Biblical Studies because this was the academic context in which Childs operated, both in terms of publications and employment. More specifically, it is located in two sub-disciplines of Biblical Studies: Theological Interpretation and Biblical Theology. Both of these disciplines concern how the Bible is used as a theological resource; Theological Interpretation focuses on individual discourse units, whereas Biblical Theology attempts to engage with the entire Bible. Though both sub-disciplines are interested in theological matters, they primarily approach these from the perspective of Biblical Studies. The same is true of this thesis. Indeed, this thesis is not an interdisciplinary study integrating Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology; rather, it is a Biblical Studies thesis interested in approaching theological questions from the perspective of this one discipline.

iii. Interest

My thesis was not initially devoted to a study of Childs' approach, but the topic is so extensive and has had such an impact that it warrants a thesis in itself. I am not an advocate for Childs' approach but I think it still has value and am extremely grateful to Childs for his contribution to Biblical Studies. His works have sparked many debates on important topics, encompassing both confessional and secular scholarship. Even if his approach does not stand the test of time, it has helped scholars to refine an approach that will. I do not doubt that Childs' legacy will live on for years to come, which is not a problem so long as it is properly understood. I hope my

thesis will, at the very least, shape a proper understanding of Childs for future generations, much in the same way that Childs' canonical shapers shaped the traditions they received for the benefit of future generations.

iv. Argument

The argument of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, Childs' approach consists of three main elements that were variously developed and implemented over time: the theory of canonical shaping, the prioritisation of the canonical texts, and the search for the Bible's subject matter. Secondly, from the examples this thesis considered, these elements, though rich and informed, ultimately fail to complete the aim that Childs set out to achieve.

Regarding Childs' theory of canonical shaping, Childs claims that the Bible has been intentionally shaped to function as Scripture, by which he means that it has been shaped to convey normative traditions for future generations. After reviewing the evidence for this claim in the form of 'signs' of canonical shaping, this thesis finds that the Bible has, at each of its literary levels, been intentionally shaped at many points; thus, there is some validity to Childs' theory. However, it is not clear that the Bible has *always* been shaped in this way. Childs takes a well-evidenced claim (that the biblical texts have been intentionally shaped at various stages of their composition and transmission) and extends it beyond that which is justifiable (arguing that all shaping was part of a canonical design). Also, though canonical shaping is a partially observable phenomenon, Childs has not presented convincing reasons for why it should be normative for the Church today. Indeed, it is one thing to claim that the Bible has been shaped to be read in a particular way, but it is an entirely different thing to claim that this way is *authoritative*, which is the step that Childs takes (though in a nuanced way).

Regarding Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts: Childs prioritises what he calls the 'canonical texts' as the base texts for interpretation in accordance with his theory of canonical shaping. The canonical texts are the literary strata where the Bible's normative

traditions have, so Childs claims, reached their literary climax. Childs identifies the canonical text of the OT as a form of the Masoretic text-type, and that of the New Testament (hereafter 'NT') as a set of authoritative readings which he thinks form the 'best received text'. There is convincing evidence that the canonical text of the OT did exist, yet there is not for the canonical text of the NT. Furthermore, Childs does not provide convincing reasons to grant the canonical texts priority during interpretation. Indeed, it is far from clear that the canonical texts are those forms of the biblical books which contain the pinnacle of normative tradition. Furthermore, no denomination of Christianity has ever sanctioned what Childs identifies as the canonical texts as authoritative, which undermines his argument.

Regarding his search for the Bible's subject matter: Childs believes that the ultimate task for any interpreter is to move from the witness of Scripture to the subject matter (i.e. God) to which it points. This is done through a kind of *Sachkritik* (a critical study of how the Bible's content relates to its subject matter in reality) that is guided by the Holy Spirit. Childs' methodology for moving from witness to subject matter affirms the classic Christian conviction that God uses the Bible to reveal himself. However, Childs does not present a clear and repeatable methodology for *how* one can transition from witness to subject matter, thus his approach never moves beyond description in practice.

v. Significance and Originality

For the last half-century, Childs' canonical approach has provided Christians with a paradigm for how to read the Bible in a manner which is both theologically oriented and informed by biblical scholarship. As an approach, it is well known within the field of Biblical Studies and continues to have a lasting impact. This thesis, then, is significant because it challenges the effectiveness of this well-known approach.

I believe this thesis makes an original contribution to the academic discussion on its topic in the following major ways. Firstly, it introduces the idea that Childs' canonical approach

is composed of three main elements that were variously developed and implemented over time: the theory of canonical shaping, the prioritisation of the canonical texts, and the search for the Bible's subject matter. Secondly, it provides what I hope is the most detailed evaluation of Childs' approach in light of the historical theories and material documents of Biblical Studies. Indeed, I have sought to consider in detail how Childs' ideas relate to the material world of ancient manuscripts and the processes of textual composition.

vi. Establishing a Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis was established in the following ways. I began by identifying that the canonical approach is motivated by Childs' belief that the Bible is a vehicle to God and that it consists of three main elements (the theory of canonical shaping, the prioritisation of the canonical texts, and the search for the Bible's subject matter). I then undertook detailed analyses of each of these elements and evaluated them in accordance with their reasonableness and in light of the historical theories and material documents of Biblical Studies. This led me to conclude that the main elements of Childs' canonical approach, though rich and informed, are ultimately unjustifiable in an approach to Theological Interpretation.

vii. Structure

This thesis is structured in two parts. Part A, 'Introduction', provides an overview of the thesis (§1), an introduction to Childs (§2) (including a biography and primary literature review), and a study of where Childs is situated in scholarship (§3) (including a secondary literature review). Part A aims to provide the reader with a helpful foundation before one engages in a detailed study of Childs' canonical approach.

Part B, 'The Main Elements of the Canonical Approach', is then the main body of the thesis which analyses and evaluates each of the three main elements of Childs' canonical approach. It begins with Childs' theory of canonical shaping (§4), then progresses to consider Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5). Technically, this prioritisation is a component

of Childs' theory of canonical shaping, but it is such an extensive area of research that it is helpful to separate it as a main element of Childs' approach. Finally, Childs' ideas for how the witness of the Bible can be used as a vehicle to access the subject matter to whom the Bible points are considered (§6). This is the final element studied as it is the methodological climax of the canonical approach in which one seeks to know that which is true about God through a process guided by the Holy Spirit. In the final chapter (§7), then, the thesis closes by presenting a final conclusion.

Part A. Introduction

1 Prolegomena

Before progressing into the analytical parts of this thesis, it is helpful to begin by orienting the reader to the nature of this thesis so that s/he will be able to better navigate and understand its contents. This section starts with a reflection on the question, 'what is the canonical approach?', so that the reader might grasp at the outset the context in which Childs' approach is to be understood (§1.1). Next, it considers the nature of this thesis (§1.2), including its aim, objectives, methodology, structure, and location in Academia.

1.1 What is the Canonical Approach?

Childs' approach is extremely complex, incorporating multiple sub-disciplines of Biblical Studies and, indeed, drawing together these disciplines with Systematic Theology. Despite this, his 'canonical approach' can primarily be categorised as an approach to Theological Interpretation that aims to utilise the Bible as a vehicle to know the Christian God.[1] Childs' approach is 'interpretation' in the sense that it is concerned to understand the traditions contained in the Bible. It is 'theological' in the sense that it wishes to use those traditions as a means for knowing the Christian God in the present day. It is an 'approach' (and not a methodology) in the sense that it consists of loosely connected elements that can be drawn upon in various ways to fulfil the ultimate aim of using the Bible to know God. In terms of existing academic fields/debates, Childs' canonical approach is located primarily in, as above, Theological Interpretation. Yet, as its interests are holistic, involving the Christian Bible as a whole, it is also justifiable to categorise it within the field of Biblical Theology as well (§3.1.1).

The scale and complexity of the canonical approach means that it defies often-used categories: it is both descriptive (describing what the Bible says) and normative (having a

[1] Both Moberly and Seitz locate Childs' approach within Theological Interpretation (R. W. L. Moberly, 'What is Theological Interpretation of Scripture', *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 3/2 (2009), 161-78 (173); Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: 2011), 27-8).

concern for reality/truth); both diachronic (studying how the Bible developed over time) and synchronic (focusing on one particular form of the Bible – 'the canonical text'). It is confessional (in the sense that one only practices it if one already believes that the Christian God exists), yet it also contains features which require no such conviction (e.g. Childs' theory of canonical shaping). Furthermore, its fluidity over time makes it difficult to grasp. It is thus a complex approach which resists simple labels and requires a considered approach (§1.2.4.3).

1.2 This Thesis

1.2.1 Aim, Objectives, and Methodology

An aim specifies the overall purpose of a work; it is the direction towards which an entire project should be pointed. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to evaluate the main elements of Brevard Childs' canonical approach from the perspective of Biblical Studies. Importantly, this thesis does not seek to reconstruct Childs' canonical approach, nor offer its own alternative approach to how the Bible should be used as a resource in Christianity; rather it is focused solely on the description and then evaluation of Childs' approach.

In order to complete the above aim, there were two objectives for my research: (i) to identify the nature of Childs' canonical approach, and (ii) to evaluate whether this approach is justifiable from the perspective of Biblical Studies. The former objective led me to conclude that Childs' approach consists of three main elements which were variously developed and implemented over time. The latter objective led me to conclude that Childs' approach, though rich and informed, ultimately fails to complete the aim that Childs set out to achieve.

With regard to methodology, I determined that the canonical approach consists of three main elements through the exegesis of Childs' works in consultation with the extensive corpus of secondary literature. I then considered whether these elements were justifiable in two ways. Firstly, I assessed how they related to what I consider to be the most accurate scholarship of

Biblical Studies. Secondly, I considered whether these elements were logical, reasonable, and coherent. Both of these evaluative steps were taken in consultation with the secondary literature.

1.2.2 Structure

This thesis is structured in two parts. Part A, 'Introduction', provides prolegomena for the thesis (§1), an introduction to the person and work of Childs (§2) (including a biography and primary literature review), and a study of where Childs is situated in scholarship (§3) (including a secondary literature review). Part A aims to provide the reader with a helpful foundation before one engages in a detailed study of Childs' canonical approach.

Part B, 'The Main Elements of the Canonical Approach', is then the main body of my thesis which analyses and evaluates each of the three main methodological elements of Childs' canonical approach. This part begins with Childs' theory of canonical shaping (§4) and then progresses to consider Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5). Technically, this prioritisation is a component of Childs' theory of canonical shaping, but it is such an extensive area of research that it is helpful to separate it as a main element of Childs' approach. A precedent for doing so can be found by comparing Childs' canonical approach with Sanders' canonical criticism; Sanders largely affirms Childs' theory of canonical shaping but rejects Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts (§3.2.2.1), showing how they can be distinct ideas. Finally, this thesis considers Childs' ideas for how the witness of the Bible can be used as a vehicle to know the subject matter to whom the Bible points (i.e. God) (§6). This is the final element that is studied as it is the methodological climax of the canonical approach in which one seeks to know that which is true about God through a process guided by the Holy Spirit. In the final chapter (§7), then, the thesis closes by providing a final conclusion.

1.2.3 Contributions

Firstly, this thesis presents an understanding of Childs' canonical approach which has not been expressed before; namely that it is composed of a taxonomy of three main elements that were

variously developed and implemented over time. This taxonomy brings clarity to an understanding of Childs because it allows one to properly explain the inconsistent implementation of these elements across his academic career. Secondly, it provides what I hope is the most detailed evaluation to date of Childs' approach alone[2] in light of the historical theories and material documents of Biblical Studies. Rather than only wrestling with the reasonableness of Childs' ideas, this thesis also sought to consider in detail how they relate to the material world of ancient manuscripts and the processes of textual composition. In doing so, this thesis has, therefore, tried to evaluate Childs in accordance with the standards he set himself as a biblical scholar. Importantly, this thesis evaluates Childs from its own historical position which assumes both a particular understanding of Biblical Studies as well as the correctness of the threefold taxonomy proposed to understand his main elements. This historical position also constitutes one of the thesis' unique contributions.

1.2.4 Approach

This section briefly reflects on the approach that this thesis takes to evaluating the main elements of Childs' canonical approach. It considers my interest in the topic (§1.2.4.1), the location of both Childs and this thesis in Academia (§1.2.4.2), and why this thesis focuses solely on the 'main elements' of Childs' approach (§1.2.4.3).

1.2.4.1 Interest

Concerning religion, I stand on the periphery of Protestant Christianity, having once been an active participant within evangelical and Baptist church communities in the United Kingdom. I am also actively invested in academic Biblical Studies (as this thesis demonstrates). Thus, Childs' approach interests me as a means for holding religious belief and academic study in tension.

[2] For example: Noble devotes 37 pages to discussing Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics (Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs*, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 254-81); Driver devotes 70 pages to a secondary literature review (Daniel R. Driver, *Brevard Childs Biblical Theologian: For the Church's One Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 35-105).

However, I am not a supporter of Childs *per se*. Why, then, have I written a thesis on him? During the initial phases of my doctoral research it became necessary to narrow my topic significantly. As I had already undertaken some research on Childs' ideas and been awed by their scale and complexity, and because his canonical approach is so well-known within Biblical Studies, it seemed sensible to dedicate a thesis to his approach. Despite not being a supporter of Childs' canonical approach in general, I have deliberately tried to provide a charitable reading of his ideas, trying to bring clarity at the same time as evaluation to a commonly-misunderstood approach.

1.2.4.2 Location in Academia

The purpose of this section is to reflect on the location of both Childs and this thesis in Academia. Childs' canonical approach engages with complex and important questions that extend beyond the boundaries of any one academic discipline, which in part explains why it is difficult to categorise (§1.1). Despite this, Childs is still best categorised as a biblical scholar, in the sense that his starting point and scholarly expertise is in Biblical Studies. For a variety of reasons, modern universities tend to make a distinction between Biblical Studies and Theology in its various forms (systematic, philosophical, historical, etc).[3] Whilst there is value in this distinction, it implies that biblical scholars are not engaged in normative theology, by which I mean that they are not engaged in making normative theological claims (e.g. who God is, what God may have done in the past, or how the Bible may be a vehicle for the Holy Spirit, etc.). Some biblical scholars may indeed see themselves more as historians than theologians, but there are also many other biblical scholars, both historically and today, who *are* deeply engaged in normative theology from the starting point of Biblical Studies. Childs is perhaps the paradigm

[3] For a helpful study see Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

example, but one also thinks of other major figures - focusing only on OT/HB Studies - as Barr, Barton, Brueggemann, Goldingay, Moberly, and Seitz.

With this in mind, this thesis is also located fundamentally in Biblical Studies; indeed it approaches the evaluation of Childs' three main elements from the foundation of biblical scholarship. Yet, as there is a well-established tradition of biblical scholars engaging in normative theology (that includes Childs), it also engages in normative theology to the extent that this is necessary to effectively evaluate Childs' ideas. Importantly, this thesis engages in normative theology not in the sense that it is trying to reconstruct Childs' approach (§1.2.1), but rather in the sense that it is engaged in evaluating the methodology of the normative theological interpretation of the Bible that Childs provides. It is also important to state that this thesis is not an interdisciplinary study integrating Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology (though this would be most welcome); rather, it is a Biblical Studies thesis engaged in normative theology when the need arises.

In addition, this thesis does not engage with Childs from the perspective of a single sub-discipline of Biblical Studies (e.g. Literary Criticism), but rather from the perspectives of all those sub-disciplines which are relevant to the task. This has made the thesis particularly wide-ranging, but it had to be so because Childs' approach itself is so extensive. There are three academic conversations which intersect with Biblical Studies that this thesis is particularly engaged with: Theological Interpretation (how to read the Bible as normative Scripture),[4]

[4] E.g. A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); D. A. Carson, 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, but...', in R. Michael Allen (ed.)*, Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 187-207; Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Stephen E. Fowl, *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997); Joel B. Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation: Engaging Biblical Texts for Faith and Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005). Also of note is the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* and its supplement monograph series.

Biblical Theology (how to read the Bible as a whole) (§3.1.1), and a 'small cottage industry'[5] devoted to Childs' canonical approach. These conversations are largely the domain of biblical scholars, though other subject specialists do participate,[6] and there are of course those whose work is interdisciplinary.

1.2.4.3 Why 'Main Elements'?

Childs' canonical approach grew over time; he developed its elements across several publications and many academic contexts (such as the writing of a commentary, an OT 'Introduction', and a book on Biblical Theology). The canonical approach's diachronic development is demonstrated in §2.2. Thus, it is incorrect to portray Childs' canonical approach as a static entity with a single nature and methodology. Unfortunately, this makes Childs' approach difficult to engage with, which is further complicated by the fact that Childs only ever once provided a precise methodology for one particularly minor form of his approach,[7] which was soon superseded by later works. This means that Childs' readers are not given clear guidance on how his canonical approach is supposed to work, though it must be said that one is given many examples of the approach in practice and many scholars have still found his approach to be of great value. For a long time this complexity hindered me as I sought to engage with Childs. However, I realised that Childs can be engaged with successfully if one reconceives the nature of the debate. Thus, rather than trying to force Childs' ideas into a rigid method, this thesis construes Childs' canonical approach as a constellation of main elements which were variously developed and implemented over time.

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[5] Christopher R. Seitz, 'The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation', in Craig Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, et al. (eds.), *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 58-110 (61); Seitz, *Character*, 32.

[6] E.g. theologians have attempted to contribute to the Theological Interpretation debate in Angus Paddison (ed.), *Theologians on Scripture* (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

[7] See Brevard S. Childs, 'Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary', *Interpretation*, 18 (1964), 432-9.

1.2.5 Style

This thesis uses acronyms for several of Childs' major monographs (e.g. *IOTS*) – see Abbreviations. Also, all biblical passages are abbreviated according to *New Hart's Rules*.[8] However, non-canonical texts are not abbreviated to clarify the identities of these lesser-known books. Following convention, all Hebrew quoted is from *BHS*[9] and all Greek from *NA28*.[10] Verse numbers are from English translations, unless otherwise stated. Translations of Hebrew, Greek, and German are the author's own, unless otherwise stated.

1.2.6 Limitations

Firstly, though I have tried my hardest to ground this thesis in the thought of Brevard Childs, there are undoubtedly things that I have missed within his vast corpus.[11] Engaging with a figure so prolific is an extensive task and I do not claim to have the competency needed to match Childs' achievements in so many areas.[12] However, I think that I have been able to grasp Childs' approach well enough to perceive both its strengths and weaknesses and so further the discussion on the topic. Thus, I do not claim that my thesis is the final definitive study of Childs' canonical approach.

Secondly, Childs' canonical approach has had a significant impact upon Biblical Studies (and, arguably, upon the interpretation of the Bible in Christianity generally). However, this thesis is not focused on the *impact* of Childs (e.g. the reception of Childs in the Catholic Church, or Brett (§3.2.1.1) and Noble's (§3.2.1.2) attempts to reconstruct his approach), but rather solely on Childs' canonical approach *itself*. I.e., this thesis is primarily a work of exegesis (of Childs),

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[8] Oxford University Press, *New Oxford Style Manual* (2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 147-8.

[9] A. Alt, O. Eißfelt, P. Kahle, et al. (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (5th edn, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997) [*BHS*].

[10] Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland, et al. (eds.), *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th edn, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012) [*NA28*].

[11] His major monographs alone total to 2,447 pages (excluding indices).

[12] Note the comment of Seitz: 'History, literary analysis, text criticism, Old and New Testaments, the earlier history of interpretation – all these facets were brought back onto a single field of play by a figure whose competence was only slightly, if at all, outmatched by the ambition needed for such an undertaking' (Seitz, *Character*, 31).

not Reception History. Though this thesis does consider Childs' impact in §3, it does so only briefly. This thesis is primarily a dedicated study of Childs for the simple reason that this is needed to bring clarity to his approach. Importantly, my exegesis of Childs has been greatly improved by reading the secondary literature and, indeed, this thesis builds upon the foundation already established by so many other scholars.

1.3 Terminology

The following terminological clarifications on certain key terms that Childs uses are offered to bring clarity to the discussions within this thesis.

1.3.1 Canon

> […] I am using the term canon in a broader sense than is traditionally the practice in order to encompass the entire process by which the formation of the church's sacred writings took place. I am including under the term not only the final stages of setting limits on the scope of the sacred writings – canonisation proper – but also that process by which authoritative tradition was collected, ordered, and transmitted in such a way as to enable it to function as sacred scripture for a community of faith and practice.[13]

To Childs, the term 'canon' is not restricted to a corpus or a list of books, but includes the 'entire process' of the Bible's formation which concluded in what he calls 'canonisation proper'.[14] 'Canon' therefore serves 'as a cipher to encompass the various and diverse factors involved in the formation of the literature'.[15] Childs uses this definition because he wants to assert that the process which culminated in the canon 'proper' began long before decisions were made to finalise the Jewish and Christian Bibles.[16] Whilst Childs' definition is coherent with his

[13] Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 25, see also 238 [*NTC*]. See also Brevard S. Childs, 'The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament', in J. A. Emerton, William L. Holladay, A. Lemaire, et al. (eds.)*, Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 66-80 (67); Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 1979), 58 [*IOTS*].

[14] See also Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 16-7 [*OTTCC*].

[15] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 70 [*BTONT*].

[16] Stephen B. Chapman, 'Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible', in Craig Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, et al. (eds.)*, Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics, vol. 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 167-206 (169).

theory of canonical shaping (§4.1), it is confusing since it conflicts with generally accepted definitions of 'canon' as either a fixed corpus or list of books.[17] Barr, as an expert in linguistics, found this particularly frustrating: 'canonical criticism depends upon systematic confusion in the use of its favourite word'.[18] Fortunately, though Childs is unclear when he discusses the terminology of canon, he is clear when he uses the term in practice.

1.3.2 Subject Matter

As will be elucidated later (§6), the concept of 'subject matter' is highly important to Childs' canonical approach. In Childs' view, the purpose of reading the Bible is to use it as a vehicle to know the subject matter to which it points (§2.3.1), thus Childs' canonical approach includes a search for the subject matter as its final interpretative stage (§6). However, what does he mean by the term? Childs' term 'subject matter' (which he also refers to as 'reality'[19] and 'substance'[20]) is a translation of the German *Sache* and the Latin *res*, both of which are important terms in the history of Christian Theology. Though 'subject matter' is used generally to refer to the topic dealt with by a work, in Childs' context it refers to the God who is witnessed to by the Bible.[21] Indeed, for Childs the subject matter of the Bible is not a 'what' but a 'who', hence why he (as a Christian) identifies Jesus as the 'main subject matter' (*Hauptsache*) of the Bible.[22]

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[17] On which see Eugene Ulrich, 'The Notion and Definition of Canon', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 21-36. For further consideration of what Childs means by 'canon', see Driver, *Childs*, 144-53.

[18] James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 79. See also Chen Xun, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context: Brevard Springs Childs' Methodology of Biblical Theology*, Studies in Biblical Literature, vol. 137 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 64.

[19] E.g. Brevard S. Childs, 'Jonah: A Study in Old Testament Hermeneutics', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 11/1 (1958), 53-61 (58-9); Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 112 [*BTC*]; Childs, *BTONT*, 85.

[20] E.g. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), xvi; Childs, *BTONT*, 380; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4.

[21] See also Seitz who writes that, 'the subject of the Scriptures is God himself' (Seitz, *Character*, 24).

[22] Brevard S. Childs, 'Die theologische Bedeutung der Endform eines Textes', *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 167 (1987), 242-51 (248). See also the section, 'Jesus Christ is the *res* of the Bible' in Xun, *Canonical*, 200-2.

1.3.3 Divine Inspiration

The meaning of the term 'divine inspiration' is a complex topic with a rich history of development. Thus, in this section I shall only offer a brief reflection sufficient for the purpose of this thesis.[23]

As I have written elsewhere,[24] according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun 'inspiration' has the meanings today of 'the action of blowing on or into' and 'the action, or an act, of breathing in or inhaling'.[25] In both definitions the word refers to breathing in or out, which corresponds with the Latin verb *inspirare* to which the English is related. The term also carries a metaphorical sense in which a person 'breaths in' or is 'breathed upon' in such a way that one is stimulated to do or feel something. Though the precise meaning of the term is debated, it is this metaphorical sense of inspiration which is often utilised by Jews and Christians to explain the way in which their Scriptures were composed. In its simplest formulation, the idea is that God 'breathed upon' the biblical authors in such a way that they were stimulated to write the texts which he wanted; hence why the canonical Paul refers to the Scriptures of his time as θεόπνευστος which the ESV rightly translates as 'breathed out by God'.[26] Importantly, there is no unanimous agreement amongst Jews or Christians on *how* the process of divine inspiration occurred. For example, some affirm a 'divine dictation' model in which the biblical authors lost their autonomy and were just instruments under God's control,[27] whereas others have argued for the paradoxical theory of 'dual authorship' which mirrors orthodox

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23 For fuller studies see William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 476-9; John Goldingay, 'Inspiration', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Coulden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 314-6.

24 Robert G. Brown, 'Which Books and Wordings? Two Problems with Divine Inspiration in British Evangelicalism', *The Expository Times*, 130/10 (2019), 429-38 (430-1).

25 'Inspiration', *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/96980?redirectedFrom=inspiration#eid, accessed 26 Sep. 2018.

26 2 Tim. 3:16.

27 E.g., see the stories of the Lutheran theologian J. A. Quenstedt and the KJV/AV translators cited in Barton, *History*, 477-8.

Christianity:[28] the Bible is described in terms of the incarnation - it is both fully (from) God and fully (from) man.

[28] E.g. Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible,* trans. Charles H. Henkey, Quaestiones Disputatae, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961), 13-4.

2 The Career and Publications of Brevard Childs

The aim of this second chapter is to introduce the reader to the career and publications of Brevard Childs. It begins by providing the most comprehensive biography of Childs developed to date (§2.1). This is important because it allows one to see Childs as a person, rather than just a set of ideas. It then provides a primary literature review of Childs' works (§2.2), which has been shaped to show that Childs' approach is best understood as a constellation of main elements that developed over time. Finally, it examines two of Childs' theological beliefs – about the Bible (§2.3) and about God (§2.4). It is important to give these beliefs dedicated consideration because they provide the intellectual rationale for much of Childs' canonical approach.

2.1 Biography

> I can think of no person who made a greater contribution to the work of unifying the Bible, theology and church life […].[29]

Professor Brevard Springs Childs[30] (2nd September 1923 – 23rd June 2007), or 'Bard' to his family and friends,[31] was born in Columbia in the American state of South Carolina and moved to Queens, New York, in 1929.[32] His family attended a Presbyterian church.[33] Childs started his higher education at Queens College, near his home, but enrolled in the U.S. Army on the 17th October 1942[34] (aged nineteen) to serve during the Second World War, where he achieved the

[29] Christopher Seitz, as quoted in 'In Memoriam: Brevard S. Childs', *Yale Bulletin & Calendar*, http://archives.news.yale.edu/v36.n1/story25.html, accessed 23 Aug. 2019.

[30] Childs is referred to as 'The Reverend Dr. Brevard S. Childs' in Brevard S. Childs, 'Jesus Christ the Lord and the Scriptures of the Church', in Ephraim Radner and George Sumner (eds.), *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1998), 1-12. However, I have found no other reference to Childs as ordained.

[31] Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

[32] Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

[33] Driver, *Childs*, 12.

[34] According to U.S. Army enlistment records: 'Partial Records', *The National Archives*, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/display-partial-records.jsp?f=3475&mtch=1&q=brevard+childs&cat=all&dt=929&tf=F, accessed 23 Aug. 2019. Childs' Army Serial Number was 12154782. See also Driver, *Childs*, 12 n.47.

rank of sergeant.[35] As he waited to be demobilised following the end of the War, Childs completed several correspondence courses via the Army Education Programme and he earned enough qualifications to graduate with an A.B. and an M.A. in 1947, both in history,[36] awarded by the University of Michigan.[37] He then went on directly to Princeton Theological Seminary where he concentrated on Biblical Studies and improving the German and French which he had learned during his time in Europe with the American Army.[38] Among the academic awards he received at Princeton were the Samuel Robinson Prize and the OT Fellowship, demonstrating his academic competence.[39] Childs graduated from Princeton with a B.D. in 1950.[40] Continuing his theological studies at the doctoral level, Childs went to the University of Basel in Switzerland from 1950 to 1954, where he studied under such notable scholars as Walter Baumgartner, Walther Eichrodt, and Karl Barth (§3.1.8). While in Basel he also took advantage of a one-semester Near Eastern scholarship at the University of Heidelberg in 1951 where he was taught by von Rad, amongst others.[41] He graduated from Basel with a Th.D. (Doctor of Theology) – it is not clear who Childs' *Doktorvater* was.[42] He also met his wife-to-be, Ann, in

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35 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

36 Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (eds.), *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Brevard S. Childs* (Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 1988), xi.

37 Driver, *Childs*, 13; Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Childs, Brevard', in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 575-84 (575); Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xi.

38 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xii.

39 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xii.

40 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xi; Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

41 Childs, *BTONT*, xv; Driver, *Childs*, 5; Sheppard, 'Childs', 575. Childs refers to von Rad as 'my esteemed teacher' (Childs, *BTONT*, 102).

42 Collett could be read as suggesting that it was Walter Baumgartner (Don Collett, 'Review of Daniel Driver, Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian for the Church's One Bible', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 16/4 (2014), 470-3 (470)), but he may just be referring to Childs' claim that he went to Basel to study Hebrew with Baumgartner (Brevard S. Childs, 'Karl Barth as Interpreter as Scripture', in D. L. Dickerman (ed.), *Karl Barth and the Future of Theology: A Memorial Colloquium Held at Yale Divinity School January 28, 1969* (New Haven, CT: Yale Divinity School Association, 1969), 30-9 (30)).

The title of Childs' first submitted thesis was Brevard S. Childs, 'Der Mythos als theologische Problem im Alten Testament', Th.D thesis, University of Basel, 1953. It was resubmitted as Brevard S. Childs, 'A Study of Myth in Genesis I-XI', Th.D thesis, University of Basel, 1955. Sheppard explains the story of Childs' thesis: 'At the University of Basel Childs completed his dissertation on the problem of myth in the opening chapters of Genesis just at the time when Walter Baumgartner replaced Eichrodt as the senior Old Testament scholar. Creating consternation at the time, Baumgartner informally refused to accept the methodology of Child's [*sic*] dissertation, so Childs had to change his plans and undertake a full revision, now informed by a new grasp of form-critical

Basel during a seminar delivered by Karl Barth.[43] The pair would go on to have two children: Kathy and John.[44]

Childs' first teaching appointment was at the now defunct Mission House Seminary in Franklin, Wisconsin back in the USA, where he was Professor of Exegesis and OT (1954-1958).[45] Childs was then appointed at Yale University, Connecticut, in 1958, where he would stay for the remainder of his academic career – forty one years in total, retiring in 1999.[46] Childs held multiple roles across the University. Of particular note was his appointment within Yale Divinity School as Holmes Professor of OT Criticism and Interpretation in 1981.[47] Also of note is that Childs had a second home in Cambridge[48] in the United Kingdom, where he and Ann would regularly spend their springs.[49]

Childs was an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature, serving for five years as the Book Review Editor for its *Journal of Biblical Literature*; he was also an honorary member of the Society for Old Testament Study in the UK.[50] In addition, he was for many years on the editorial board of the journal, *Interpretation*.[51] His academic prowess was well recognised by his peers. Among the distinguished lectures he was invited to deliver included: the Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary (1972),[52] the Gray Lectures at Duke University, the Jackson

analysis' (Sheppard, 'Childs', 576. See also Driver, *Childs*, 40-1 n.24). There is minor disagreement on whether his thesis was published. Driver claims that it was revised and published as Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 27 (London: SCM, 1960) [*M&R*] (Driver, *Childs*, 319). However, Sheppard claims that it was not published and that Childs distributed parts of it to his English-speaking academic contacts under the title *A Study of Myth in Genesis 1-11* (Sheppard, 'Childs', 576). Yet, Sheppard acknowledges that *M&R* 'reflects further hermeneutical refinements of his dissertation' (Sheppard, 'Childs', 576).

43 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

44 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

45 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xi.

46 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam'.

47 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xi.

48 Childs' home was on Albert Street (R. W. L. Moberly, *Letter to Childs*, 5th September 2003, 1).

49 Christopher R. Seitz, 'Tribute to Brevard S. Childs, at the International SBL Meeting in Vienna, Austria', in Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richards (eds.)*, The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 1-8 (1).

50 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xii-xiii.

51 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam', xiii.

52 Childs, *IOTS*, 15.

Lectures at Southern Methodist University, and the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary (1981).[53] In addition, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship,[54] an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship, and a Fulbright Fellowship.[55] He was awarded a D.D. by the University of Aberdeen in 1981, and in 1992, Yale University named him 'Sterling Professor', which was the highest academic honour given by the University to one of its professors.[56]

Childs and his canonical approach have been the subject of several dedicated collections of essays. He received two *Festschriften* whilst he was alive. The first, *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*,[57] was given on the occasion of his 65th birthday. The second, *Theological Exegesis*, for his 75th birthday.[58] A collection of larger essays on the topic of Childs' canonical approach, *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, was published by the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar.[59] Finally, a collection of essays was published in dedication to Childs posthumously by the Society of Biblical Literature: *The Bible as Christian Scripture*.[60] All of these demonstrate Childs' substantial impact upon the Academy from which he has received both praise and criticism.[61]

Though Childs was an OT scholar, he by no means stayed within the boundaries of this one discipline. Childs also made forays into NT Studies and Systematic Theology to try to

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53 Available online, 'Theological Commons', *Princeton Theological Seminary*, http://commons.ptsem.edu/?qtext=series-id:childs_bible&series-title=%22The+Bible+as+the+Scriptures+of+the+Church%22, accessed 5 Nov. 2019.

54 In 1963 to study at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem (Childs, *M&R*, inside cover).

55 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*, xiii.

56 Yale Bulletin & Calendar, 'Memoriam', xii-iii.

57 Tucker, Petersen, and Wilson, *Canon*.

58 Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (eds.), *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

59 Craig G. Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin A. Parry, et al.(eds.), *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics, vol. 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

60 Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

61 Other dedicated works include: a significant portion of *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2/1 (1980); *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 5/16 (1980); *Theologische Quartalschrift* 167/4 (1987); Ingo Baldermann and Ernst Dassman (eds.), *Zum Problem des biblischen Kanons,* Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie, vol. 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988); *The Princeton Theological Review*, 14/38 (2008).

understand the canonical witness of the entire Bible and the role it should play as a theological resource in Christianity today. Childs achieved (to some degree) the feat of crossing the divides between both OT and NT Studies, as well as between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology. He also managed to research and comment upon *all* sixty-six books in the Protestant canon, which included the publication of two major commentaries on Exodus and Isaiah.[62] One can therefore see that Childs' breadth of knowledge and academic ability were astounding, regardless of whether or not one agrees with his contributions.[63] Consider the following testimonials.

> At the outset, I admit my inability to give anything like a thorough analysis of the work of my old friend and schoolmate, Brevard Springs Childs. But I take comfort in the fact that I am not alone in that. For one thing, the majority of Bible interpreters in this country are not able to match Childs in the extent of territory traversed. He has simply read more than we have! For another, Childs' interest in the questions of systematic or dogmatic theology, engined by his conviction respecting the biblical interpreter's task, is not shared by the members of his guild. For still another, we will have to reach into an era long gone to discover another with sufficient lung power to plunge into the waters of both Testaments.[64]

> Whatever one's assessment of the debate, the importance of Childs's contribution can hardly be denied. First, Childs is a professional biblical scholar, who is well aware of the issues peculiar to the field of biblical study. Secondly, his theoretical proposals concerning the nature of biblical interpretation have always been accompanied by close exegetical study of the text, thus constantly relating theory and practice. Thirdly, Childs's work covers both Old and New Testaments alike. Such a thoroughgoing approach to biblical interpretation is otherwise unparalleled in contemporary scholarship, and means that his proposals deserve the closest attention.[65]

2.2 The Developing Canonical Approach (Primary Literature Review)

Childs published a large number of academic works[66] throughout his extensive career and almost all of them contributed to the development of his canonical approach. The following

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[62] Childs, *Exodus*; Childs, *Isaiah*.

[63] Gossai writes, 'regardless whether one is critic or supporter of Childs's perspective, one cannot overlook the immeasurable influence' (Hemchand Gossai, 'Editor's Preface', in Chen Xun, *Theological Exegesis in a Canonical Context: Brevard Springs Childs's Methodology of Biblical Theology*, Studies in Biblical Literature, vol. 137 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), ix).

[64] Roy A. Harrisville, 'What I Believe My Old Schoolmate is Up To', in Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (eds.), *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 7-25 (7)).

[65] R. W. L. Moberly, 'The Church's use of the Bible: The Work of Brevard Childs', *The Expository Times*, 99/4 (1988), 104-9 (104).

[66] For a full bibliography see Seitz and Richards, *Bible*, xiii-xx.

primary literature review comments upon a selection of those works which are particularly useful for tracing the development of his approach.

A helpful starting point is Childs' second published article from 1958[67] (his first in a reputable academic journal), in which he comments on the theological value of the Book of Jonah in light of scholarly challenges to its historicity. Childs observes how the Book communicates a profound theological message of God's care for all people despite it not being historically accurate (i.e. what really happened); showing early on that he believes theological value is not always dependent on historicity. He also discusses the role of critical scholarship in general and goes into considerable theological detail when describing the way in which the Bible should function in Christianity. Childs describes how, as a human work, the Bible should be read 'like any other book',[68] which includes utilising historical-critical scholarship.[69] However, Childs also wishes to read the Bible as a vehicle to know God. He notes the complexity of uniting these two interests.

> The problem with which we are faced is how to relate the reality witnessed to in the Bible, which is understood through the means of reason on the basis of the empirical sciences, with the reality made known in Jesus Christ which transforms our human reason.[70]

Here one sees an idea which is important within Childs' thought and which he refers to with various terms: there is a distinction between the *human witness* of the Bible ('the reality witnessed to in the Bible') and the *divine reality* (i.e. God) which is believed by faith ('the reality made known in Jesus Christ'). Childs' theological concern, then, is how to connect these two 'noetic spheres'[71]

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[67] Childs, 'Jonah'.

[68] This now classic phrase derives from Benjamin Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', in Anonymous , *Essays and Reviews*, vol. 7 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 330-432. On which see James Barr, 'Jowett and the "Original Meaning" of Scripture', *Religious Studies*, 18/4 (1982), 433-7; James Barr, 'Jowett and the Reading of the Bible "Like any Other Book"', *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 4/1 (1982), 1-44; R. W. L. Moberly, '"Interpret the Bible Like any Other Book"? Requiem for an Axiom', *Journal for Theological Interpretation*, 4/1 (2010), 91-110; Paul R. Noble, 'The "Sensus Literalis": Jowett, Childs, and Barr', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 44/1 (1993), 1-23.

[69] Childs, 'Jonah', 56.

[70] Childs, 'Jonah', 57.

[71] Childs, 'Jonah', 59.

which can theoretically be studied separately.[72] Childs immediately rules out the possibility of ignoring the human witness altogether using a popular maxim from the quest for the historical Jesus.

> The Christ of faith can never be known apart from the Jesus of history. The divine reality remains one with its human manifestation because of the incarnation. To understand the divine, one can never by-pass the world of *empeiria*, the world which is subject to the laws of probability.[73]

Childs' solution to the question of how to relate the human witness of the Bible to the divine reality to which it points is to claim that the former is a vehicle which one can use to access the latter (and, importantly, by which God can *vice versa* access the reader). To Childs, proper theological reading requires having eyes of faith which allow one not just to study the Bible as a human witness, but to experience it as a vehicle through which one can know God.

> It is the task of Old Testament exegesis to deal seriously with both areas into which the full reality has penetrated. It must come to grips with the fact that the human witness is the only channel to the full reality. Biblical criticism is the attempt to understand the temporal form of the witness with the only tools available for this area of life. The great challenge of the exegete comes, as in prayerful expectation, God's Spirit opens his eyes to the full reality known only in faith. The temporal form becomes then a transparency through which the divine light shines giving the picture its true perspective.[74]

For the Bible to function in this way, the reader must have faith and be assisted by the Holy Spirit (§6.2.2). Childs makes clear that his approach, at this stage, is explicitly for those who hold confessional Christian beliefs.

Childs' proposal that the Bible is a human witness which serves as a vehicle to a divine reality is taken up again in the 1964 article, 'Interpretation in Faith',[75] where he critiques approaches to the interpretation of the OT (primarily in commentaries). Childs argues that it is vital for interpreters to begin their exegesis of the biblical texts from the correct starting point. This starting point, in his opinion, is the 'framework of faith',[76] by which he means firstly that

[72] Hence why Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology are now distinct subject areas within universities.

[73] Childs, 'Jonah', 58-9.

[74] Childs, 'Jonah', 59.

[75] Childs, 'Interpretation', 432-9.

[76] Childs, 'Interpretation', 438.

one reads from a confessional standpoint (as above),[77] and secondly that one reads the Bible as a vehicle for knowing God. To support his claim, Childs argues that his approach recovers several ideas of the Reformers.

> The Reformers read the Old Testament in order to hear the Word of God. They began with the presupposition of the Christian faith that both the Old and the New Testaments witness to the one purpose of God with his people. Moreover, they were convinced that the Bible was a vehicle through which God continued to speak to his people. Therefore, they were concerned not only with "the letter of the law" but also with the reality to which the witness pointed.[78]

Childs' recovery of precritical interpreters will be explored in more detail later (§3.1.5). In 'Interpretation', Childs maintains the same belief about the Bible's nature presented in 'Jonah', but promotes it in a new context, i.e. the writing of an OT commentary. However, unlike in 'Jonah', Childs attempts to define a methodology for how the Bible might be studied as a vehicle for knowing God. He argues for three 'dialectics' within a 'hermeneutical circle':[79] 'The first dialectic of the hermeneutical circle is the movement from the single text to the whole witness',[80] by which he means that one studies a single biblical book in light of the Testament within which it is contained; 'The second dialectic of the hermeneutical circle is the movement from the Old Testament to the New',[81] by which he means that one must consider how the two Testaments relate to each other on a particular topic; 'The third dialectic of the hermeneutical circle is the movement from the level of the witness to the reality itself',[82] by which he means using the Bible's witness as a vehicle for the reader to know God. Here one sees that Childs has begun

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[77] 'The exegete who seeks to hear the witness does not stand, uncommitted, at a neutral point. Within the framework of faith or, rather, sharing himself in the reality of God's redemptive activity, he seeks to understand the Old Testament witness to the selfsame reality. Theological exegesis is the task of the church to whom God has made himself known in Jesus Christ' (Childs, 'Interpretation', 443).

[78] Childs, 'Interpretation', 437. See also Childs, *BTC*, 139-47; Brevard S. Childs, 'Old Testament as Scripture of the Church', *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 43/11 (1972), 709-22 (722); Xun, *Canonical*, 87. Also notable is the comment of Sheppard: 'While we have superior knowledge of philology and history in a modern critical sense, we are humbled by how much we share with the pre-modern history of interpretation: the same search for religious reality' (Gerald Sheppard, 'Canonization: "Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions"', *Interpretation*, 36/1 (1982), 21-33 (33)).

[79] Childs, 'Interpretation', 440 (see also Childs, *BTONT*, 85-6, 381). Following these dialectics, Childs argues for the comparison of one's exegetical results with Jewish interpretations of the same text/s (Childs, 'Interpretation', 444).

[80] Childs, 'Interpretation', 440.

[81] Childs, 'Interpretation', 442.

[82] Childs, 'Interpretation', 444.

to develop a theory for how to read the Bible *holistically*, not on the basis of canonical shaping (for this would come later), but on the basis of the confession (in faith) that the Bible is united by its witness to the same God who is witnessed to by the OT and NT (§4.3.3.3.1).[83]

Childs' holistic interests were developed further in *BTC*, published in 1970.[84] In *BTC*, Childs surveys the failing American Biblical Theology Movement and finds its approach to Biblical Theology lacking (§3.1.1.1),[85] then he presents several arguments for a new approach. In *BTC*, Childs repeatedly affirms his belief that the Bible is a vehicle for knowing God, phrased in different ways.[86] Childs also describes how important it is 'to establish the proper context for interpreting the Bible theologically'.[87] What Childs means by 'context', however, is far from clear. Consider the following passage.

> By "context" more is meant than simply "perspective" which focuses on the angle of vision of the interpreter. Rather, context refers to the environment of that which is being interpreted. As a literary term, context denotes the parts of a composition that constitute the texture of the narrative. To interpret a sentence "out of context" is to disregard its place in the larger literary design. In a broader sense the term "context" includes both the formal and the material elements of design that belong to a historical period.[88]

In contrast to the many other contexts within which the Bible can be used, Childs argues that, 'As a fresh alternative, we would like to defend the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology'.[89] However, understanding what Childs means by this is far from simple, despite his explicit attempt to address the matter in this passage, though it is notable that this is the first time in his works that 'canon' is attested

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[83] Childs, 'Interpretation', 442.

[84] Childs, *BTC*.

[85] Sheppard calls *BTC* 'an epitaph for the modern biblical theology movement' (Sheppard, 'Childs', 577).

[86] 'The Scriptures of the Church are not archives of the past but a channel of life for the continuing church, through which God instructs and admonishes his people' (Childs, *BTC*, 99); 'the appeal to the canon understands Scripture as a vehicle of a divine reality, which indeed encountered an ancient people in the historical past, but which continues to confront the church through the pages of Scripture' (Childs, *BTC*, 100); 'The ancient medium becomes a living vehicle into the presence of God' (Childs, *BTC*, 219). See further quotations from across Childs' other publications in §2.3.1.

[87] Childs, *BTC*, 97. Childs argues that, 'A great confusion persisted throughout the period of the Biblical Theology Movement in regard to the proper context for the doing of Biblical Theology' (Childs, *BTC*, 98).

[88] Childs, *BTC*, 97.

[89] Childs, *BTC*, 99.

as an important idea.[90] He makes several points in reference to and in support of his claim: the status of canonicity is a faith claim;[91] the canon originally delineated the area in which the Church should hear the word of God;[92] the canon contains a normative body of tradition;[93] the biblical texts must be interpreted 'in relation to their function within the community of faith that treasured them';[94] the Bible is a vehicle to know God;[95] the canonical forms of the biblical texts have priority;[96] the canon is a unique context through which the Holy Spirit works.[97] How can coherent sense be made of these various points? Childs' new approach to Biblical Theology was an attempt to correlate his belief that the Bible is a vehicle with a new proposal that it is also a corpus of religious literature which has been intentionally shaped to function as Scripture (he did not yet use the term 'canonical shaping'), and thus the proper way to read it is to accept this (i.e. to read *in the context of the canon*) and observe how the Bible has been shaped in order that it will then function as a vehicle for knowing God. Sheppard illuminates this point further.

> For the practical activity of interpreting a biblical text as Scripture, what becomes important is the Bible's own 'canonical context'. This context informs readers regarding both how to read the originally prebiblical traditions within a biblical book and how to hear books as commentaries on each other. This mode of interpreting – often anachronistic from an older modern historical-critical perspective – is warranted by the canonical context and belongs integrally to how Jews and Christians have read their respective Scriptures scripturally.[98]

It therefore appears that Childs' theory of canonical shaping (§4.1), which does not appear fully until 'Exegetical' in 1978,[99] already underlies *BTC*. The justification for this suggestion comes from the case studies in *BTC*, each of which attempts to show how the canon has been intentionally shaped to provide guidance on how it should be read.[100] Thus, *BTC* is Childs' first

[90] Sheppard, 'Childs', 578.
[91] Childs, *BTC*, 99.
[92] Childs, *BTC*, 99. See also Childs, *BTONT*, 720.
[93] Childs, *BTC*, 99.
[94] Childs, *BTC*, 99.
[95] Childs, *BTC*, 99-100.
[96] Childs, *BTC*, 102
[97] Childs, *BTC*, 104.
[98] Sheppard, 'Childs', 578.
[99] Childs, 'Exegetical'.
[100] Childs, *BTC*, 149-222.

contribution to the discipline of Biblical Theology; it expands on his earlier articulations of his belief that the Bible is a vehicle to know God by adding the theory of canonical shaping. However, *BTC* lacks methodological precision and was not a complete Biblical Theology so Childs needed to return to the discipline again later in his career.[101]

Childs' theoretical comments regarding the production of an OT commentary in 'Interpretation' were turned into a practical reality with the publication of *Exodus* in 1974.[102] To write his commentary, Childs theorised (but did not consistently implement[103]) a six-stage methodology, three stages of which were from 'Interpretation' (above). As with any critical commentary, Childs provides a translation of the text (stage 1) as well as a history of the text's composition (stage 2). Stage 3 then studies OT context, stage 4 the NT's treatment of the OT, stage 5 is a 'history of exegesis' which includes Jewish interpretation, and stage 6 is 'an attempt to move from witness to substance'.[104] Childs later stated that he was not satisfied with this structure.[105] Both Childs' belief that the Bible is a vehicle and his theory of canonical shaping are present in *Exodus*; hence the commentary is his attempt to grasp how the Book has been shaped to function as Scripture (canonical shaping) and how it functions as a vehicle for knowing God.

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101 Driver provides a quotation of Childs which explains why it took Childs so long to return to Biblical Theology after writing *BTC*: 'Most of the crucial issues such as the relationship of the two testaments and the other kinds of judgments beyond exegesis which are part of the hermeneutical task, I have not been able to address directly within the scope of an OT Introduction. [In *BTC*] I tried to cover some of these larger issues. Only after the book had been published did I realize that the groundwork had not as yet been carefully enough laid to support a theology of both testaments. Therefore, I decided to re-examine the foundations before pursuing Biblical Theology any further (Driver, *Childs*, 3). Unfortunately, Driver does not provide a reference for this quotation, but does claim that Childs made these comments just after the publication of *IOTS* in 1979.

102 Childs, *Exodus*.

103 For example: Childs' study of the 'return to Egypt: 4.18-6.1' (Childs, *Exodus*, 90-107) does not include a NT section, a history of exegesis section, or a theological reflection section (he also incorrectly numbers OT context as section '4' when he meant '3' (compare Childs, *Exodus*, 93 and 101); his study of 'Statutes and Ordinances of the Covenant: 20.22-23.33' (Childs, *Exodus*, 440-496) contains no theological reflection section; his study of 'The Sealing of the Covenant: 24.1-18' (Childs, *Exodus*, 497-511) contains no history of exegesis or theological reflection sections.

104 Childs, *Exodus*, xvi.

105 Norman Samuel Wilson, 'Interpretation and exegesis: An investigation into the canonical approach of B. S. Childs', M.Litt. Dissertation, Durham University, 1999, 236.

Childs' concern for the shaping of the biblical texts articulated in *BTC* and *Exodus* had developed into a fully-fledged theory of canonical shaping by the time his article, 'The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament', was published in 1978.[106] In this article, Childs argues that each book of the OT has been shaped in some way to function as Scripture for future generations, and that this shaping is principally to be found in the canonical forms of the biblical texts.[107] He provides six examples to justify his point (see §4.3.1). The 'exegetical significance' of this shaping is that the Bible should be read with particular attention to how it has been shaped (§4.1). One notable aspect of this article is that Childs' belief that the Bible is a vehicle, which had previously been attested regularly, is now absent. Does this imply that he no longer believed in it? On the contrary, it is more likely that Childs left his ideas about the Bible being a vehicle to know God out of the article because he wanted his theory of canonical shaping to be taken seriously by biblical scholars as a historical theory distinct from theological concerns. Indeed, the theory of canonical shaping is not logically dependent upon the belief that the Bible is a vehicle to its subject matter.

Next for consideration is Childs' major monograph, *IOTS*, published in 1979.[108] *IOTS* was Childs' attempt to contribute to the established genre of 'Introduction' (*Einleitungswissenschaft*) from his canonical perspective. It is notable that Seitz describes *IOTS* as 'a book with arguably the greatest impact on Old Testament scholarship in this century'.[109] Childs was dissatisfied with previous introductions to the OT because they had failed to read it in accordance with his theory of canonical shaping, i.e. with the assumption that it had been shaped to function as 'religious literature'.

> This Introduction attempts to offer a different model for the discipline from that currently represented. It seeks to describe the form and function of the Hebrew Bible in its role as sacred

106 Childs, 'Exegetical'.

107 Childs, 'Exegetical', 67, 69.

108 Childs, *IOTS*.

109 Christopher R. Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 102.

> scripture for Israel. It argues the case that the biblical literature has not been correctly understood or interpreted because its role as religious literature has not been correctly assessed.[110]

Childs' rhetoric led many to believe that he was hostile to Historical Criticism. However, Childs was not against Historical Criticism, rather he was against the way in which it was often used (see §3.1.2). The concern of *IOTS* is not the use of the OT as a vehicle to God in the contemporary Church, but rather how the HB functioned as Scripture in ancient Israel.[111] In other words, *IOTS* is an attempt to describe how the witness of the HB functioned as a vehicle between *ancient Israel* and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it is not a book which seeks to prescribe theology for Christianity today. *IOTS* is thus a 'descriptive' rather than 'normative' study of the HB.[112] The title of *IOTS* is therefore misleading; it claims to be an introduction to the OT as Scripture, but it is technically an introduction to the HB as Scripture for ancient Israel.[113] Childs is aware of this,[114] however, and hence the final chapter of *IOTS* is dedicated to considering the relationship between the Hebrew and Christian Bibles.[115] Whereas many of Childs' earlier works argued for a faith commitment at the outset of interpretation, *IOTS* rejects this requirement; his analysis 'does not assume a particular stance or faith commitment on the part of the reader because the subject of the investigation is the literature of Israel's faith, not that of the reader'.[116] In *IOTS*, Childs significantly develops his theory of canonical shaping[117]

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110 Childs, *IOTS*, 14.

111 As demonstrated by the fact that, in *IOTS*, Childs follows the structure of the Hebrew canon and not that of any form of the Christian OT.

112 Childs' comments on whether his approach in *IOTS* is descriptive or normative are difficult to reconcile. He argues that his approach is 'descriptive in nature' (Childs, *IOTS*, 14), but later writers that 'The major task of a canonical analysis of the Hebrew Bible is a descriptive one' (Childs, *IOTS*, 72), which suggests that there is a 'minor' normative task involved.

113 What is also problematic, as Sheppard observes, is that *IOTS* 'does not teach a beginning student the rudiments of modern historical criticism' in the manner of traditional Introductions (Sheppard, 'Childs', 580).

114 'The major concern of this Introduction has been to describe the canonical shape of each of the OT books within the context of Hebrew scriptures' (Childs, *IOTS*, 660-1).

115 Childs, *IOTS*, 659-71.

116 Childs, *IOTS*, 72. Childs then writes that the faith of a reader can play a part after the descriptive task has been completed (Childs, *IOTS*, 72), though, from the content of *IOTS*, it seems this was excluded from his methodology in practice.

117 In particular see the section, 'The Canonical Process and the Shaping of Scripture', in Childs, *IOTS*, 77-9.

(§4.1) and his reasons for prioritising of the canonical text of the OT (§5.1).[118] As there is no single manuscript for any one biblical book, Childs defines which text contains the pinnacle of normative traditions that have been passed on for future generations. The canonical text of the OT, then, is a form of the Masoretic text-type that he thinks was sanctioned as authoritative by the central Jewish authorities before the close of the first century CE at the latest (§5.2).

Childs published a companion volume to *IOTS* on the NT in 1984: *NTC*.[119] Again, the volume was situated within the academic context of the genre of 'Introduction' and attempted largely the same task for the NT that *IOTS* undertook for the OT. Indeed, *NTC* describes how the witness of the NT serves as a vehicle between Christians of the early Church and Jesus Christ, their divine reality. However, unlike in *IOTS*, Childs is not clear on whether his approach demands an initial faith commitment. He writes, 'In one sense, this descriptive task can be performed by anyone regardless of religious commitment',[120] but he later nuances this view.

> Nevertheless, the lines begin to blur and the complexity of the descriptive task of canonical literature emerges when one includes within the enterprise the pursuit of the inner theological logic of the canon's witness. It is still possible for someone who does not share the theological concerns of the canonical literature to describe the theological struggle of a biblical text in bearing witness to a theological reality of the Christian faith, the testimony to which transcends – some would say, distorts – the dimensions of historically verifiable accounts. Still it is rare to find penetrating theological exegesis of the New Testament by one who shares little or nothing of the faith reflected by the literature. A different scale of priorities within the exegetical task usually leads these scholars into different concerns with the text. The hermeneutical issue at stake is not the piety of the interpreter which provides a capacity for proper interpretation – this confusion in inherent in all forms of pietism – but rather the willingness to work within a received context of faith, which lies at the heart of the canon's normative function.[121]

What it seems Childs intends to communicate here is not that faith is required to observe how the NT functions as Scripture in an esoteric sense (i.e. that having faith somehow grants the ability to see what could otherwise not be), but rather that those with faith are *more likely* to observe how it functions as Scripture because their confessional stance aligns with that of those

[118] In particular see the section, 'Text and Canon', in Childs, *IOTS*, 84-108.

[119] Childs, *NTC*.

[120] Childs, *NTC*, 38.

[121] Childs, *NTC*, 38-9.

who shaped the NT.[122] Childs advocates for more than just descriptive exegesis from a Christian standpoint by again referring to his belief that the Bible is a vehicle to know God: 'Within this context the modern Christian interpreter strives to discern how the time-conditioned, historical witness of the Bible becomes the medium of revelation of God's present and enduring will'.[123] Thus, whilst *NTC* is primarily descriptive in its aims, it does contain normative aspects as well. In parallel to *IOTS*, Childs also develops his idea for the canonical text of the NT, arguing that the canonical text of the NT is a set of readings which the Church has deemed to be authoritative (§5.3).

An explicit renewed interest in Theological Interpretation for the present day can be seen in *OTTCC*, published in 1985.[124] Here Childs applies his belief that the Bible is a vehicle to know God, along with his theory of canonical shaping, within the academic context of OT Theology, as practised in the past by major scholars such as Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad[125] (both of whom Childs studied under[126]). Regarding his belief in the Bible as a vehicle, Childs recognises that the HB functioned as a vehicle between Israel and YHWH, and argues that the task of the modern Christian interpreter is to utilise that same vehicle for oneself in the present day.

> In conscious opposition to this legacy of the Enlightenment [i.e. the assumption of objectivity], the canonical approach seeks to approach the problem with a different understanding of how the Bible functions as a vehicle of God's truth. By accepting the scriptures as normative for the obedient life of the church, the Old Testament theologian takes his stance within the circle of tradition, and thus identifies himself with Israel as the community of faith. Moreover, he shares in that hermeneutical process of which the canon is a testimony, as the people of God struggled to discern the will of God in all its historical particularity. Its shaping of the biblical tradition indicated how it sought to

122 See also Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 51; Noble, *Canonical*, 55. Long makes a similar point about reading literature in general: 'The compatibility (or, as the case may be, incompatibility) of the view of the world held by the interpreter and the worldview evinced by the text is a significant conditioning factor in the interpretive process' (Long, *History*, 43).

123 Childs, *NTC*, 40.

124 Childs, *OTTCC*.

125 E.g. Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Teil I* (6th edn, Stuttgart: Ehrenfried Klotz Verlag, 1959); Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: I: Die Theologie der historischen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1957). For a study of the two, see David G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies: A Comparative Evaluation of the Contributions of Eichrodt and von Rad to our Understanding of the Nature of Old Testament Theology* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1975).

126 Childs, *IOTS*, 15.

> appropriate the tradition as a faithful response to God's word. In an analogous context of a received witness, the modern biblical theologian takes his stance within the testimony of Israel and struggles to discern the will of God. Fully aware of his own frailty, he awaits in anticipation a fresh illumination through God's Spirit, for whom the Bible's frailty is no barrier.[127]

Childs argues that by accepting the traditions communicated by the canonically-shaped texts of the OT, one can, just like ancient Israel, utilise these texts as a vehicle to the same divine reality. And, as he affirmed early on in his career, the Holy Spirit will operate through the vehicle of the biblical texts and make Himself known to the reader when one seeks to read them in this way (§6.2.2). Now, this is a theory for how the OT can function as Scripture, but it does not explain how *OTTCC* is an attempt at OT Theology. As far as it is possible to tell (for Childs does not present a clear methodology), the aim of *OTTCC* is to present, in thematic form, the theological claims that are made by the OT as a whole when read in accordance with its signs of canonical shaping, to benefit Christianity today.[128] Thus, Childs argues that a canonical approach to OT Theology is both descriptive and *normative*.[129] *OTTCC* provides, in theory at least, a systematic compendium of the theological claims Childs believes are articulated by the OT as a whole.

Childs did not publish a companion volume to *OTTCC* on the NT, instead he returned to the discipline of Biblical Theology with the publication of his *magnum opus*, *BTONT*, in 1992.[130] This monumental work clarifies his earlier ideas and presents (to use a Childsian principle) the canonical form of Childs' thinking. Thus, when studying the main elements of Childs' canonical approach, one can see that *BTONT* is their most developed iteration. Indeed, Childs comments on the relationship between *BTONT* and his earlier works.

> In 1970 [i.e. *BTC*] I made my first effort at sketching some of the problems of Biblical Theology at a time in which the older consensus had begun to fall apart. Almost immediately I realized that I

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[127] Childs, *OTTCC*, 14-5. Notice that this quote is almost identical to what is found in Childs, 'Interpretation', 443, yet what is new in *OTTCC* is the incorporation of the theory of canonical shaping.

[128] In Childs' words from a later work: 'I organized the material topically and explored the peculiar contours by which the biblical material was construed within its canonical context. By offering a modern constructive reflection I tried to move from the biblical witness (*verbum*) to its theological subject matter (*res*) within the confines of the Hebrew Bible' (Childs, *BTONT*, 101).

[129] 'Constructive' in his words (Childs, *OTTCC*, 12).

[130] Childs, *BTONT*.

> had not thrown the net wide enough. The hermeneutical issues of Biblical Theology involved far more than simply joining together the critical study of the Old Testament with that of the New, as if one could spend the first semester with Eichrodt and von Rad and the second with Bultmann and Jeremias! It slowly began to dawn on me that everything turned on how one understood the material which was being described. I set out to rethink the role of the Old Testament as scripture [i.e. *IOTS*] which took almost a decade of work before turning to the similar task for the New Testament [i.e. *NTC*].[131]

Thus, *BTC*, *IOTS*, and *NTC* were not disconnected works, rather they were necessary stepping stones on the path to *BTONT*.

It is helpful to note the structure of *BTONT* and how each section functions. The book is split into seven parts. In the first ('Prolegomena'), Childs studies the history of Biblical Theology as it had been practised up until the book's publication. This shows Childs' concern to locate his approach within existing scholarship and define the insufficiencies of all other approaches (§3.1).[132] In the second ('A Search for a New Approach'), Childs presents the major arguments to support his canonical approach to Biblical Theology. Here one finds the most comprehensive re-articulation of his earlier ideas. In the third and fourth parts, Childs studies the 'discrete witness' of the OT and NT respectively. He does this by tracing the development of traditions throughout each Testament in a manner which seeks to preserve the OT and NT as distinct corpora, with many parallels to both *IOTS* and *OTTCC*. *BTONT* changes tone from its fifth part ('Exegesis in the Context of Biblical Theology') onwards, in which Childs gives two examples of how exegesis could be conducted in accordance with his new canonical approach to Biblical Theology. In the sixth part ('Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible'), Childs presents a selection of themes which he thinks are addressed by the Bible when studied according to his approach.[133] Here one sees Childs' ideas in practice for how one can move

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131 Childs, *BTONT*, xv.

132 Barr took particular issue with this aspect of Childs' works: '*Everyone* but himself is wrong! And in many cases they are not only wrong, but are portrayed by Childs as basically stupid: lacking in subtlety, prone to "easy" solutions, ready to swallow any current opinion rather than "wrestle" with the real problems. […] His book [*BTONT*] might well have adopted as sub-title the title of Edward de Bono's work *I am Right and You are Wrong*' (Barr, *Concept*, 403).

133 Barton observes that, 'When he begins to outline the message of the Bible taken as a whole, in [*BTONT*], the generally Reformed character of the enterprise becomes even more apparent' (John Barton, 'Canonical Approaches Ancient and Modern', in J. -M Auwers and H. J. de Jonge (eds.), *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 199-209 (206)). The format of *OTTCC* also has the flavour of a Reformed position, opening with three chapters on

from the witness of Scripture to its subject matter using a kind of *Sachkritik* (a critical study of the how the Bible's content relates to its subject matter in reality - §6.2.1). *BTONT* re-articulates Childs' theological belief that the Bible is a vehicle to know God, and his theory that the Bible has been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations (canonical shaping). Though Childs went on to publish further works, *BTONT* was his methodological *pièce de résistance*.[134]

In sum: the above demonstrates that Childs' canonical approach is not a fixed entity and rather developed over time, containing several distinct elements which were variously employed for different academic tasks. Early on in his career, Childs expressed his desire to read the Bible theologically as Christian Scripture. One also sees the belief emerge early on that the Bible functions as a vehicle between the reader and God, as well as the notion that one can move from the witness of Scripture to the divine reality to which it points in a process guided by the Holy Spirit. By the 1970s, Childs had begun to develop the theory that the canon contains a normative body of tradition which has been transmitted and shaped from one generation to another. Childs integrated this theory of canonical shaping into an approach which sought to utilise the Bible as a vehicle to know God. He also claimed that the canonical texts of the OT and NT contain the pinnacle of intentionally-shaped normative theological tradition and should therefore be given priority during interpretation. By the early 1990s, Childs had weaved his ideas together more clearly and advanced his thinking on how exactly the witness of Scripture could be used as a vehicle for accessing the subject matter to which it points (i.e. God). Following Barth primarily, he defined his approach as being a kind of *Sachkritik* (§6.2.1) which reflects on the witness of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who ultimately reveals to the reader that which is true about God (§6.2.2).

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how God is known (Childs, *OTTCC*, 20-50 – compare with Calvin, *Institutes*, I). As a Presbyterian who studied at Princeton (an explicitly Presbyterian and Reformed school), it may well be that a Reformed pattern of doctrine came naturally to Childs. However, one wonders if Childs' presentation of his material in a systematic format and its parallel with Reformed theology may have just been coincidental.

[134] Noble rightly calls *BTONT* 'a major landmark in the development of his programme' (Noble, *Canonical*, 65).

This literature review has revealed that the canonical approach is constituted by what can be called three main 'elements': (i) the claim that the Bible contains a normative body of intentionally-shaped tradition (§4); (ii) the claim that this normative tradition reached its peak in the canonical texts and thus that these texts should have priority for interpretation (§5); (iii) the claim that one can access the subject matter of the Bible through a kind of *Sachkritik* that utilises the witness of the Bible and is guided by the Holy Spirit (§6). As the above shows, each of these elements developed over time and were variously implemented for different academic tasks. Thus, Seitz is incorrect when he claims that 'the basic defining features of the approach had been lain out' by 1970.[135] Therefore there is no single methodology for 'the' canonical approach, and it should not be portrayed as a process with clearly defined stages; all of which makes it difficult to understand.[136] Further compounding this issue is Childs' failure to define exactly how his three elements are connected and thus how his canonical approach could be replicated by those in the Church whom he sought to rescue from an apparent impasse (§3.1.2.2).

2.3 Doctrine of Scripture

Let us now consider Childs' doctrine of Scripture, i.e. what he believed the nature of the Bible to be, and, therefore, how he believed it should be used. This thesis has already touched on this topic in the above, but it shall now consider the matter in detail as it provides the rationale for his canonical approach.

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135 Seitz, *Character*, 28. Similarly, Thiselton is incorrect when he claims that the canonical approach had reached its 'full flower' by 1984 (Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Introduction', in Craig Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, et al. (eds.)*, Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 1-32 (7)) and Xun who claims that, 'The fundamental elements of Childs's theological thinking remained more or less unchanged throughout his career' (Xun, *Canonical*, 269).

136 The comments of Mead are perceptive: '[…] some scholars raise a question about the *clarity of the method* itself, that is, what precisely is this method […]? Part of the problem here is that Childs has produced several works – commentaries, introductions, and theologies bearing the "canonical" label but each emphasizes different aspects of his method' (James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 145).

2.3.1 Sacred Scripture as a Vehicle to Know God

> I am much concerned with the various forms of the text that bear witness to a divine reality. I am not concerned with the text in itself. I mean, the text is not just a story. I want to know what the story tells us about God.[137]

It is one thing to state that the Bible is a collection of ancient texts, it is another thing altogether to claim that those texts are Sacred Scripture which have normative value in Christianity (i.e. they can be used as an authoritative source for determining matters of faith and practice). The difference between these two statements is that they make different value judgments about the nature of the Bible. Whereas the former is a general claim that anyone can make, the latter is a confessional claim which requires an act of faith. Childs rightly recognises that the decision to venerate the Bible as Sacred Scripture, as well as to venerate particular books as canonical, is made solely on the basis of faith. Indeed, the status of the Bible as Sacred Scripture is something which one receives as a doctrine through tradition and affirms by faith as one becomes part of Christianity.[138]

As a practising Christian, Childs believes that the Bible is Sacred Scripture. What precisely, though, does Childs consider the nature of Scripture to be (i.e., what is his doctrine of Scripture)? Primarily, Childs believes that the Bible is a vehicle which one can use to know God, either intellectually and/or experientially, and therefore should be used in this way in the Church. Childs expressed this belief in a number of ways, though the general idea is the same.[139]

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137 Childs as quoted in Wilson, 'Childs', 227.

138 'The status of canonicity is not an objectively demonstrable claim but a statement of Christian belief' (Childs, *BTC*, 99); 'First of all, the theological concept of canon is a confession' (Childs, *Exodus*, 300); 'The authority of the canon of Scripture is not a claim of objective truth apart from the community of faith but it is a commitment to a particular perspective from which the reality of God is viewed' (Brevard S. Childs, 'The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem', in Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart and Rudolf Smend (eds.)*, Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Fetschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93 (92)); 'In my judgement, the acceptance of the canon as normative does not function initially as a derivative of reasoned argument. The canon is the deposit of the religious community's sacred tradition which one receives as a member of that body. The acknowledgment of a normative rule functions confessionally as a testimony to one's beliefs' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Response to Reviewers of Introduction to the OT as Scripture', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 5/16 (1980), 52-60 (56)). See also Xun, *Canonical*, 156.

139 'The Bible is the human vehicle pointing beyond itself to these unchangeable verities' (Childs, 'Jonah', 57); 'The Scriptures of the church are not archives of the past but a channel of life for the continuing church, through which God instructs and admonishes his people' (Childs, *BTC*, 99); 'the appeal to the canon understands Scripture as a vehicle of a divine reality, which indeed encountered an ancient people in the historical past, but which continues

Thus, as will be shown later (§6), the final main element of his canonical approach aligns with this aim as it is concerned with knowing the subject matter (God) to whom the biblical texts witness in such diverse ways. Because the Bible is Sacred Scripture and functions as a vehicle for knowing God, it therefore serves as the primary epistemological source within Childs' theological method, as opposed to an alternative such as reason, tradition, or experience. Importantly, Childs does not deny the validity of other epistemological sources, but the Bible is his main source.

How does Childs' theory of canonical shaping relate to his belief that the Bible is a vehicle for knowing God? As will be shown in detail later (§4.1), Childs thinks that the Bible has been intentionally shaped to function as Scripture for future generations. It is the normative traditions found in the canonical texts of the biblical texts that provide the witness which one can use as a basis for reflecting theologically on the subject matter to which the texts point. In this process, one sits under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will use the Bible's witness as a vehicle to reveal that which is true (§6.2.2).

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to confront the church through the pages of Scripture' (Childs, *BTC*, 100); 'the Bible, when understood as the Scriptures of the church, functions as the vehicle for God's special communicating of himself to his church and the world' (Childs, *BTC*, 104); 'Fundamental to the exegetical task is the assumption with which we have already dealt that these text as Scripture of the church are witnesses to a divine reality' (Childs, *BTC*, 112); 'The ancient medium becomes a living vehicle into the presence of God' (Childs, *BTC*, 219); 'I believe that the ancient church was right in bearing witness in the formation of the canon that the Spirit of the resurrected Christ continues to make his will known to his church through the medium of Scripture, which is not merely a memorial to the past but the bearer of life for sustaining the future' (Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 714); 'Yet the canonical scriptures do not serve as a frozen deposit of tradition or doctrine, but a living vehicle through which the will of God is perceived' (Childs, *NTC*, 40); 'I regard the biblical text as a literary vehicle, but its meaning is not self-contained. Its function as scripture is to point to the substance (*res*) of its witness, to the content of its message, namely, to ways of God in the world' (Childs, *Isaiah*, 4).

As noted by others commenting on Childs: 'In the midst of the build of criticism and analysis, of historical recollection and dogmatic reflection, of exegesis and interpretation, Childs's single perduring theme is that of the canon as vehicle to encounter with God' (Harrisville, 'Schoolmate', 18); 'For Childs the Bible is more than a classic and indispensable witness to God's concern and action, however embodied; its understanding more than a contemporizing of the church's traditions; its ontology more than a paradigm, and more than a documenting of the human experience. For Childs the Bible, in the context of the church's confession, is the instrument of encounter with the living God' (Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (2nd edn, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 324-5); 'the Bible as Scripture functions as the vehicle for God's special communication of himself to the church and to the world' (Xun, *Canonical*, 161); 'Childs argues that Christian biblical interpreters should treat Scripture as an authoritative collection of sacred writings, so that they can effectively understand the Bible as the continuing vehicle of divine manifestation within the Christian community of faith' (Xun, *Canonical*, 171).

2.3.2 The Authority of the Bible

In the above, this thesis explored Childs' belief that the Bible is a vehicle through which one can know God. However, this belief does not express a view on the *authority* of the Bible, thus it is necessary to reflect on this topic here.

2.3.2.1 Does He Think the Bible is Authoritative?

> If one were to investigate the status and authority of the Bible in the work of B.S. Childs, would there be a coherent theory?[140]

Let us first consider whether Childs thinks that the Bible is authoritative, by which I mean whether it has the power to determine matters of faith and practice in Christianity. Childs affirms that the Bible is authoritative, and there are two key reasons why he does so; importantly, I am ascribing ideas to Childs which he does not clearly articulate himself, though I believe he would have affirmed them. The first reason is connected to his theory of canonical shaping (§4.1): the Bible is authoritative because it contains those traditions which have been intentionally shaped and passed on for future generations. Thus, the authority of the Bible derives from the traditions which the Bible contains as part of the canonical process, rather than from the source of those traditions. As Xun writes, 'He is interested in supporting the authority of Scripture, but not by referring to any theory akin to verbal inspiration. He believes the authority of Scripture is best established on the theory of the canonicity of the Bible'.[141] The second reason, Childs thinks the Bible is an authority, then, is because God chooses to use it as a special context through which to operate.[142]

In what *way* is the Bible authoritative in Childs' view? Again, this is no easy question to answer, but an answer can be found implicitly within his works. Childs uses those views which are affirmed in the canonical texts as the basis for constructing a corpus of theological

[140] This question was posed to Childs by Wilson ('Childs', 232). Childs' answer is unsatisfactory, which is in keeping with the analysis of this section.

[141] Xun, *Canonical*, 177.

[142] Childs, *BTC*, 104.

propositions (the witness of the Bible) that he then uses as the foundation for a *Sachkritik*, i.e. for a critical reflection of how that witness relates to the subject matter (the *Sache*) to which it points (§6.2.1). The biblical texts, or more specifically, the views which are affirmed by the canonical texts, are authoritative, not in the sense that they are to be accepted as true and therefore used epistemologically for the determination of knowledge, but rather in the sense that they are to be used as the textual basis for ascertaining the theological witness of the Bible. This is a complex but important point. Thus, whilst Childs is willing to accept the canonical texts as authoritative when it comes to having priority during interpretation, he is not willing to accept that they are inerrant. Also important to understand is that Childs entrusts responsibility for determining the truthfulness of the Bible's witness to the Holy Spirit, who will reveal the connection between the Bible's witness and its subject matter to the faithful reader (§6.2.2).

2.3.2.2 Does He Think the Bible is from God?

Traditionally, Christians have believed that the Bible is authoritative because of its divine origin, i.e. because it is from God. The key question to explore next, then, is whether Childs thinks that the Bible is from God. This thesis will answer this question in three stages. Firstly, it will consider those aspects of Childs' work which suggest that he does *not* believe the Bible came from God (§2.3.2.2.1). Secondly, it will conversely consider those aspects of Childs' work which suggest that he *does* believe the Bible to be from God (§2.3.2.2.2). Thirdly, then, it will examine several additional comments that Childs makes on the topic which are relevant, but which bring no further clarity (§2.3.2.2.3).

2.3.2.2.1 Against Divine Origin

There are several parts of Childs' works which suggest that he does *not* believe the Bible to be from God. Firstly, though there are occasional implicit comments (see below §2.3.2.2.2), Childs nowhere argues explicitly that the Bible is itself from God. If he thought it was then surely he would have made this important point clearly. This is an argument from silence, but Childs was

well aware of the doctrinal and methodological considerations that needed to be made clear in his works. His decision to not make a belief in the Bible's divine origin clear may well be evidence that he did not, in fact, hold that belief himself. Secondly, in a section of *BTC* Childs criticises the Biblical Theology Movement's 'failure to come to grips with the inspiration of Scripture'.[143] He then argues that his approach does properly make sense of divine inspiration (see §1.3.3) and writes the following.

> In our opinion, the claim for the inspiration of Scripture is the claim for the uniqueness of the canonical context of the church through which the Holy Spirit works. Although there are innumerable other contexts in which to place the Bible – this is a way of claiming a special prerogative for this one context. The Bible, when understood as the Scriptures of the church, functions as the vehicle for God's special communicating of himself to his church and world. This understanding of the Scripture's uniqueness remains a statement of faith.[144]

In this passage, it seems Childs is redefining divine inspiration as traditionally understood. Rather than it being a process through which the Bible was composed (§1.3.3), Childs thinks it is an ongoing event in which God connects with (inspires) a reader using the Bible as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Bible is unique in that it is a special context through which God chooses to work and is therefore distinct from other books, indeed it has a 'special prerogative'. However, others have interpreted this quotation as evidence that Childs believes in a traditional doctrine of divine inspiration and thus that the Bible is from God. Indeed, Noble argues that divine inspiration is lying 'just below the surface' of Childs' canonical approach.

> Although, officially, "canonical context" is the fundamental principle of his approach, what often seems to be doing the real work (although from just below the surface) is a belief in the "inspiration" (in quite a strong sense) of the canonical text: If the Old and New Testaments are both inspired by God then it follows immediately that the interpreter ought to read them as dual witnesses to the one divine reality, accept them as theologically normative, eschew searches for a "positivity behind the text," etc. In other words, granted a suitable doctrine of inspiration, the rest of Childs' programme flows naturally from it.[145]

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[143] Childs, *BTC*, 103.

[144] Childs, *BTC*, 104.

[145] Noble, *Canonical*, 30-1. Noble is not alone in this observation: see §2.3.2.3; 'The canonical approach has not released itself from the historical dimension of inspiration. It has broadened this considerably to include the entire process and especially the consolidation of that process consisting in the "final form of the text"' (Seitz, *Character*, 80-1); 'Childs's strong emphasis on the canonicity of the Bible seems already to imply that he needs some kind of theory, or doctrine, of biblical inspiration to support his view about the theological particularity of the canonical books' (Xun, *Canonical*, 175).

In a similar manner, Brett argues that Childs is 'concerned to rehabilitate a doctrine of biblical inspiration'.[146] Noble is correct that, *if* Childs did believe in divine inspiration, the doctrine would provide the intellectual foundation for many of the elements of Childs' canonical approach.[147] The problem is, however, that *nowhere* in Childs' works does he explicitly affirm that divine inspiration is the basis for any of the elements of the canonical approach. Indeed, he barely even mentions the term. Again, as above, Childs' silence on the matter may in fact be evidence that he does not believe in divine inspiration and thus that he does not believe the Bible to be from God.[148]

2.3.2.2.2 For Divine Origin

In direct contrast to the above, however, there are several passages within Childs' corpus which do imply that he believes the Bible to be from God.

> The object of biblical exegesis is the text itself as well as the subject matter of which the text speaks. The study of the text cannot be separated from its reality, nor can its reality be divorced from the text. In terms of classic Christian theology, any appeal to a doctrine of revelation apart from inspiration must be resisted.[149]

Firstly, then, in this section of his article, Childs provides several suggestions for a new understanding of the *sensus literalis* of Scripture. In this passage he makes the point, which he does regularly, that one cannot make a distinction between the witness of the Bible ('the text') and the subject matter ('its reality) to which it points.[150] As will be shown later (§6.2.2), this is

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146 Brett, *Crisis*, 165. Brett gives two references to support his claim: Childs, *BTC*, 131 and Childs, *OTTCC*, 12. However, neither of these passages contains evidence justifying Brett's claim.

147 E.g., if the final canonical shapers were inspired by God, then the texts which they shaped (the canonical texts) would be authoritative.

148 This thesis rules out the possibility that Childs deliberately chose to not mention divine inspiration despite believing it. He was not afraid to justify his approach on controversial grounds, thus is seems unlikely that he was scared of criticism.

149 Childs, 'Sensus', 92.

150 'There are no "objective events" which can be divorced from the particular colouring of Israel. We cannot penetrate 'behind" Israel to find reality. Only as it is reflected in the experience of this people do we have access to it' (Childs, *M&R*, 99); 'The canonical writings function as God's vehicle specifically in its human form. There is no way to extract the purely "divine" elements' (Childs, *Exodus*, 301); 'The emphasis on scripture as canon focuses its attention on the process by which divine truth acquired its authoritative form as it was received and transmitted by a community of faith. Accordingly, there is no biblical revelation apart from that which bears Israel's imprint. All of scripture is time-conditioned because the whole Old Testament has been conditioned by an historical people. There is no pure doctrine or uncontaminated piety. Any attempt to abstract elements from its

something which can only be achieved through the Holy Spirit. Childs therefore concludes that 'any appeal to a doctrine of revelation apart from inspiration must be resisted'. Though it is not certain, what Childs likely means by this is that any understanding of the Bible as revelation[151] must be constructed on the assumption that it was produced through the process of divine inspiration, which for Childs includes the idea that the biblical authors actively shaped their texts in such a way that one cannot distinguish between the witness of those texts and the divine initiative which prompted their creation. This could therefore be evidence that Childs does affirm divine inspiration and thus the divine origin of the Bible. Xun rightly criticises Childs' imprecision: 'Childs's disregard of the doctrine of biblical inspiration exemplifies his lack of competence in matters of dogma'.[152] Whilst Childs is a biblical scholar and not a systematic theologian, it is a serious problem that Childs' position is unclear.

> The basic error to be avoided is confusing the framework of faith – which is the Bible as the Word of God – with any theories of sacred language or sacred text which restrict the full freedom of the exegesis and destroy the grounds of precise textual description.[153]

This second comment is found in a section where Childs is articulating the first stage of his interpretative methodology for the writing of an OT commentary: 'The exegete interprets the single text in the light of the whole Old Testament and, vice versa, he understands the whole of the Old Testament in the light of the single text'.[154] Here, Childs is arguing that to understand the 'single text' one must undertake proper philological analysis in accordance with rigorous

present form by which, as it were, to distinguish the kernel from its husk, or inauthentic existence from authentic expression, runs directly in the face of the canon's function' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 14, see also 12, 25); 'The substance of the text must not be construed as a static deposit or according to some philosophical schema, but must continue to be encountered within the dynamic of the biblical witness' (Childs, *BTONT*, 380).

This concept appears also in Barth (David W. Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 2015), 731); Xun argues that Childs 'ignored' Barth's idea and that this is 'a major discrepancy between Barth and Childs' (Xun, *Canonical*, 232). As the above quotations from Childs demonstrate, Xun is wrong on this point. See also Brett, *Crisis*, 74-5.

151 By 'revelation' is meant 'knowledge given by God that was previously unknown'. The concept of 'revelation' continues to be a complex theological concept. For a collection of helpful essays see Paul Avis (ed.), *Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

152 Xun, *Canonical*, 267.

153 Childs, 'Interpretation', 439.

154 Childs, 'Interpretation', 438.

descriptive standards that are commonplace within Historical Criticism. He argues that the sacred nature of the Bible does not exempt it from proper linguistic examination. What is notable about the above initial quotation is that Childs refers to the Bible as 'the Word of God'. It is not a 'vehicle', nor a 'witness' to the Word of God, it is ontologically *itself* the Word of God. The use of this particular phrase suggests that Childs believes the Bible to be from God, spoken by God Himself – God's 'Word'.

A third passage is found in the final sentence of Childs' *magnum opus*, *BTONT*.

> The good news is that the Christian Bible in its twofold witness of an Old and a New Testament, remains God's gift to the church and the world, an inexhaustible source of life for the present and an unshakable promise for the future.[155]

The topic of Childs' final paragraph is the nature of the Bible, which he seems keen to restate in light of all that has come before. This makes sense, as Childs believes that one's understanding of the nature of Scripture will determine how one reads it.[156] Part of his description of the Bible's nature is that it is 'God's gift to the church and the world'. If the Bible is a gift, and God is its giver, then the Bible has been given by God.

A fourth passage can be found in an interview given to Wilson, the transcript of which is provided in Wilson's M.Litt. dissertation.

> [Q] So, could it be said that underpinning your concern for treating the Old and New Testaments as Holy Scripture, you are informed as to some understanding of the authority of Scripture?
>
> [A] To interpret a N.T. or O.T. passage in the light of its canonical context implies that the Bible has a coherence which suggests that it has a single author. The term 'canon' means that the text is not just a story, but it is an authoritative written standard of church authority. Canon means authority. On one level, God is the author of Scripture, and in another, we know that one book is by Isaiah, one is by Jeremiah, John, Matthew and so on. Ultimately, the Bible has God as its author.[157]

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[155] Childs, *BTONT*, 726.

[156] E.g. regarding the quests for the historical Jesus, Childs writes, 'The present confusion regarding Jesus Christ is derived in large measure from the failure to understand the nature of the Scripture that bears testimony to him. How one conceives the Bible directly affects how one views the Christ. If Scripture is not regarded as a vehicle of truthful witness, but instead as a faulty filtering prism through which the person of Jesus has been impaired or severely distorted, then by necessity one must find another access to this figure' (Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 4).

[157] Wilson, 'Childs', 233.

Wilson's question, as well as the one which precedes it, is designed to explore Childs' views on the authority of the Bible. What is notable about Childs' answer for our purposes are his claims of divine authorship: 'On one level, God is the author of Scripture' and 'Ultimately, the Bible has God as its author'. These quotations strongly imply that Childs believes the Bible to be from God.

A fifth and final reference, which is the clearest made by Childs, can be found in one of his later works.

> The term scripture refers, above all, to the divine authority of these writings. The scriptures derive from the inspiration of God's Spirit in the revelation of God to his people. The scriptures not only are inspired in their origin, but are continuously infused with the promise of divine illumination. Depending on its particular context, scripture can be described both as being the Word of God and as becoming the Word of God.[158]

The context for this quotation is a paragraph in which Childs attempts to distinguish traditional Christian beliefs about the nature of Scripture from those proposed in the speech-act theory of Wolterstorff.[159] As part of this, Childs explains that the nature of Scripture is that it has 'divine authority' because it derives 'from the inspiration of God's Spirit'. Childs further explains that this inspiration concerns both the origin of scripture and its continuing function as inspirational literature. He then closes by affirming that the Bible 'can be described both as being the Word of God and as becoming the Word of God'. This seems to be clear evidence that Childs, at this late stage of his career, believes that the Bible derives from God. Yet, he still leaves matters uncertain. For example, he does not explain what he means when he describes the Bible 'as being' and 'as becoming' the Word of God nor how these ideas connect to his canonical approach.[160]

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[158] Brevard S. Childs, 'Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58/4 (2005), 375-92 (380).

[159] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[160] This is likely a reference to Barth's doctrine of the threefold Word of God.

2.3.2.2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the conflicting statements across his works make it impossible to determine whether Childs thought that the Bible was from God. There is, therefore, a significant theological lacuna in his canonical approach; ironically, this was one of Childs' major criticisms of the Biblical Theology Movement.[161] Childs' lack of clarity on the topic can be seen as a failure, but it may have been intentional.

> […] the canonical method is not tied to one narrowly conceived dogmatic stance respecting the problem of scripture and tradition.[162] The approach seeks to work descriptively within a broad theological framework and is open to a variety of different theological formulations which remains the responsibility of the systematic theologian to develop. I would admit, however, that the canonical method which is here described does run counter to two extreme theological positions. It is incompatible with a position on the far right which would stress the divine initiative in such a way as to rule out any theological significance to the response to the divine Word by the people of God. It is equally incompatible with a position on the far theological left, which would understand the formation of the Bible in purely humanistic terms, such as Israel's search for self-identity or a process within nature under which God is subsumed.[163]

In contrast to those on the 'far right', Childs rejects the notion that the biblical authors made no difference to the form of the biblical texts (thereby rejecting the theory of divine dictation[164]). This of course aligns with Childs' theory of canonical shaping in which he believes that the biblical authors did make an active contribution to the forms of the normative traditions they received (§4.1). It is also important to note here that, in contrast to fundamentalists, Childs rejects that the biblical texts are without error (i.e. inerrancy/infallibility).[165] Yet, in contrast those at the other end of the spectrum (the 'far theological left'), he argues that it is also incorrect to understand the formation of the Bible as a purely human process without any divine

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[161] 'The confusion was never dispelled as to whether the element of revelation claimed for the Bible lay in the text, in some positivity behind the text, or in a combination of text and event or mode of consciousness' (Childs, *BTC*, 52).

[162] By 'the problem of scripture and tradition', Childs means 'the relationship between the divine initiative in creating Israel's scripture and the human response in receiving and transmitting the authoritative Word' (Childs, *IOTS*, 80).

[163] Childs, *IOTS*, 81-2.

[164] The idea that the biblical authors were simply instruments under God's complete control.

[165] Childs, *Exodus*, 300; Childs, *BTC*, 104, 141; Childs, *NTC*, 44; Childs, 'Response', 55. For an example of the affirmation of inerrancy, see the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which can be found in: Richard Mayhue, 'The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy', *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 25/1 (2014), 1-10. Childs also affirms Barth's notion that 'all scripture suffers from human frailty; there is no untainted position' (Childs, *BTONT*, 215).

involvement. Thus, Childs seeks to chart a path between these two extremes,[166] though it is far from clear exactly what his precise position is.[167] Ultimately, however, Childs' lack of clarity is problematic, because, in writing a normative Biblical Theology, Childs had a responsibility to articulate a clear position regarding the nature of the Bible.

2.3.2.3 Excursus: Chapman's Communal Model of Divine Inspiration

Related to the topic at hand is an essay written by Chapman[168] which attempts to reformulate the Christian doctrine of divine inspiration from an evangelical canonical perspective. Chapman wrote his essay primarily because he believes that divine inspiration is underlying Childs' canonical approach.

> In describing this canonical account of inspiration, it will be argued that the work of Brevard Childs provides the crucial groundwork – that an account of inspiration is in fact throughout his writings […].[169]

As covered above in relation to the same suggestion made by Noble (§2.3.2.2.1), a doctrine of divine inspiration would provide the intellectual foundation for many of the elements of Childs' canonical approach. However, the problem is that nowhere in Childs' works does he explicitly affirm that divine inspiration is the basis for any of his main elements. This is not something that Childs would have intentionally hidden, and if it were underlying his approach then surely he would have said so. Yet, as above (§2.3.2.2.3), Childs' view on the divine origin of the Bible is unclear.

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166 See also Barr, *Scripture*, 150.

167 Barr argues that Childs falls on the 'conservative' side (Barr, *Concept*, 409). However, Sheppard thinks that canonical criticism (including Childs' canonical approach) leans more towards the liberal perspective with regard to its stance on the Bible's composition history (Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Canonical Criticism', in D. N. Freedman (ed.)*, The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 861-6 (861)). It is notable that a liberal (Barr) finds Childs to be conservative, and a conservative (Sheppard) finds Childs to be liberal. Perhaps this demonstrates that Childs did indeed incorporate elements from both ends of the theological spectrum. As Seitz notes, 'The fact is that Childs is trying to set forth an approach to Christian scripture that will disappoint both ends of a spectrum' (Seitz, *Word*, 108).

168 Chapman, 'Inspiration'.

169 Chapman, 'Inspiration', 172.

Chapman believes that evangelical Christianity needs to maintain its doctrine of divine inspiration[170] but recognises that it needs to be revised to encompass the complexity of canon formation that Childs has rightly highlighted with his canonical approach. Indeed, Chapman writes that Childs has provided the 'crucial groundwork' for a 'canonical account of inspiration'.[171] Chapman shows how evangelical scholars (notably Carl Henry) have rejected Childs' canonical approach in the past because it conflicts with the general evangelical doctrine of divine inspiration. Whilst Childs' particular stance on divine inspiration is unclear (as above §2.3.2.2), Childs rejects prioritising the inspired original autographs favoured by the evangelical author-centred model of divine inspiration and instead favours the prioritisation of later canonical texts (§5); hence why Henry and others have found the canonical approach unsatisfactory.[172] Yet Chapman argues that Childs' model provides evangelicals with a more compelling doctrine of divine inspiration and thus that the evangelical doctrine needs to be revised.

> A canonically oriented view of inspiration, one that is suggested and even warranted by the historical study of canon formation, retains room for the transcendent but sees the divine-human encounter as occurring over a lengthier period of time and as including more people than just one author alone. In this view, inspiration would extend throughout the entirety of the process of the Bible's formation and focus as much on the community that transmitted the text as on the role of the text's putative author.[173]

Chapman proposes that the evangelical doctrine should incorporate a broader account of God's providence over the Bible's formation. Rather than inspiration ending with the biblical authors, Chapman believes that the 'divine-human encounter' occurred 'over a lengthier period of time', and thus inspiration extends 'throughout the entirety of the process of the Bible's formation'. One can see, then, how Chapman wishes to articulate 'a version of inspiration able

[170] For studies of what constitutes the evangelical doctrine of scripture, see Robert G. Brown, 'The Bible after Evangelicalism: Ideas for a Liberal Doctrine of Scripture', *Modern Believing*, 61/4 (2020), 335-43 (336); Stephen R. Holmes, 'Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture in Transatlantic Perspective', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 81/1 (2009), 38–63.

[171] Chapman, 'Inspiration', 172.

[172] Chapman, 'Inspiration', 176.

[173] Chapman, 'Inspiration', 172.

to account for the fullness of what the history of canon formation teaches'.[174] This wider communal model of divine inspiration proposed by Chapman can be seen elsewhere,[175] but its association with Childs' canonical approach is distinctive. Chapman's model does integrate well with Childs' ideas. Childs regularly highlights the complexity of the canon's formation, including the diachronic development of individual texts. For Childs, this complex process is the gradual shaping of tradition toward the end of providing normative Scripture for future generations (§4), with the result that the canonical texts are the authoritative pinnacle of the tradition-shaping process (§5). Chapman supplements Childs' proposals by affirming that the *entire* process of the Bible's formation was inspired by God; thus, all of those involved in shaping the biblical texts were operating under God's providence.[176] Chapman's claim that the Church has inherited 'the canonical text',[177] coupled with his repeated suggestion that 'the text' is divinely inspired,[178] implies that Chapman views the canonical texts as the pinnacle of the canonical process and thus as authoritative for Christianity today. Chapman thus provides a theological argument for the authority of the canonical texts which bolsters Childs' canonical approach,

174 Chapman, 'Inspiration', 199.

175 'If there is inspiration at all, then it must extend over the entire process of production that has led to the final text. Inspiration therefore must attach not to a small number of exceptional persons like St. Matthew or St. Paul: it must extend over a large number of anonymous persons, so much so that it must be considered to belong more to the community as a whole than to a group of quite exceptional persons who through unique inspiration 'gave' the scriptures to the community. In this sense scripture emerged from the community: it was a product of the church' (Barr, *Scripture*, 27) (importantly, this does not reflect Barr's own view but is his suggestion for what someone who wishes to maintain a belief in divine inspiration should reckon with); Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to its Sources, Principles, and History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 128. Chapman finds the idea in David G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John J. Brogan, 'Can I have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture', in Vincent E. Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez and Dennis L. Okholm (eds.)*, Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 93-111.

176 Importantly, Chapman rejects the idea that only the final canonical shapers were inspired by God: 'With respect to the matter of inspiration, moreover, its attribution cannot simply be shifted from an "original" author to a putative final redactor or "canonicler" […]. Such a move still privileges single-person authorship at the expense of a broader canonical view of inspiration' (Chapman, 'Inspiration', 195-6).

177 Chapman, 'Inspiration', 188.

178 'inspiration is in the *text*' (Chapman, 'Inspiration', 189); 'inspiration has always been properly a characteristic of the text' (Chapman, 'Inspiration', 196); 'A canonical account of inspiration keeps the theological interpretation of Scripture focused where it should be – on the text' (Chapman, 'Inspiration', 200).

though Childs himself never referred to divine inspiration as justification for the authority of the canonical texts (§5).

One significant problem with Chapman's communal model of divine inspiration is that it lacks the detail necessary for it to be deemed sufficient. Let me provide several examples of why this is the case. Firstly, it is problematic that Chapman does not define the identity of the canonical text which he thinks stands at the end of the canonical process and is therefore authoritative. As will be demonstrated later (§5), there are several candidates for this role, which is why Childs specifically defined the canonical text of the OT as a form of the Masoretic text-type and that of the NT as a set of authoritative readings which he thinks form the best received text. As above, Chapman regularly affirms that 'the text' is inspired by God, but he does not define the identity of that text. Secondly, he does not explain how to reconcile his proposal that the entire process of canon formation was inspired by God with his claim that the text which stands at the end of the canonical process is the canonical text of the Church today. Following his logic, if the entire process of canon formation was inspired, then so too is every single manuscript and variant ever produced. This leads to a pluralist understanding of scriptural authority; i.e. that all forms of the scriptural texts are authoritative. Chapman's logic does not lead to the conclusion that *only* the canonical texts recognised by Childs are authoritative.

Thirdly, in a similar manner to the above point, Chapman does not engage with the details of how his theory relates to examples of canonical and textual plurality.[179] Focusing only on the former, as McDonald writes, 'for two thousand years the church still has not fully agreed on the full scope of its Bible – even if there is wide agreement on most of it'.[180] The two major denominations of Christianity today, Catholicism and Protestantism, do not unanimously agree on which books constitute the Bible and thus, by implication, do not unanimously agree on which books were inspired by God. The difference in opinion concerns the so-called

[179] The following is largely taken from Brown, 'Inspiration', 435-8.

[180] Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, vol 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 9.

deuterocanonical books and additions which Protestants relegated during the Reformation into the Apocrypha.[181] Though some may view this disagreement as minor, it raises the question of which books are inspired by God. This is a question Chapman needs to engage with beyond his current assertion that the entire canonical process was inspired by God. Yet, the problem of plurality is not limited to just the deuterocanonical books. Throughout Christian history there has been considerable disagreement regarding several books which both Catholics and Protestants today recognise as Scripture. Based on references in the Church Fathers, by the second century CE the 'core' of the New Testament, i.e. the four Gospels and the letters of Paul, had become stable parts of the Christian scriptures, but those books that were peripheral to this core continued to be disputed up to the fourth century CE.[182] According to Eusebius, the canonical status of James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation were disputed at this time.[183] Chapman needs to show how his theory relates to the disagreement that existed during the key centuries of the Christian canon's formation. A further issue for Chapman is that references to and discoveries of extra-biblical books (e.g. the Gospel of Thomas) and alternative collections (e.g. Marcion's reduced corpus) have revealed that many Christians recognised collections of Scripture different from those deemed authoritative today.[184] This raises the question of how Chapman's proposal aligns with the existence of non-canonical (from today's perspective) Jewish and Christian scriptural texts. Indeed, he needs to define whether or not these books are inspired within his communal model of inspiration. It may be that Chapman wishes to restrict divine inspiration to only the composition and canonisation of the canonical

[181] Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sira, additions to Jeremiah (Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah), additions to Daniel, and 1 & 2 Maccabees.

[182] Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 32, 40; Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 321.

[183] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25.1-7.

[184] See Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books that did not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

(from today's perspective) books, yet he does not comment on the topic and hence his proposal lacks the necessary detail.

In sum, Chapman's theory needs more detailed consideration of the specifics of canonical and textual composition to demonstrate why his theory is correct. Without this level of detail his communal model of divine inspiration exists only at the formal level, disconnected from the materiality of the Bible's formation. The problems raised above may not in fact be problems for Chapman, but his current essay does not provide adequate scholarly evidence for this conclusion to be drawn.

2.4 Belief in God: Reading from a Framework of Faith

In its previous section (§2.3), this thesis showed how Childs' belief about the nature of the Bible informs his canonical approach. Childs believes that the Bible is a vehicle for knowing God, and therefore seeks to read it in such a way that reflects this, hence his emphasis on moving from witness to subject matter (§6.1). This section thus seeks to show how Childs' belief in God affects his canonical approach.

To re-state what was discussed in §2.2, Childs believes that Christian faith plays an important role when one is interpreting the Bible. Namely, it allows one to better access the subject matter of the Bible, which is of course the aim of Childs' entire approach. Early on in his career Childs writes, 'The great challenge of the exegete comes, as in prayerful expectation, God's Spirit opens his eyes to the full reality known only in faith'[185] – note the use of 'only'. Whether or not Childs maintained this same view throughout his career is unclear, for his insistence upon having a confessional standpoint wavers throughout his publications. Again, as has already been shown, in *IOTS* Childs assumes no 'faith commitment on the part of the reader'.[186] The practical reality of Childs' approach, however, as manifested in its canonical form

[185] Childs, 'Jonah', 59.
[186] Childs, *IOTS*, 72.

(i.e. that of *BTONT*) is that it requires one to hold a Christian faith to practice it. The logic of the canonical approach is deeply connected to the notion that God exists, that the Bible attests to him, that the Holy Spirit uses the Bible to reveal him, and that the entire point of the canonical approach is to reach him. The canonical approach is thus fundamentally a confessional approach to interpretation, despite containing several elements that are not.[187] Whilst Childs' belief in God does not have an impact upon his hermeneutics (i.e. the methodology which he employs to read the Bible, which is essentially the plain sense approach generally accepted within Biblical Studies), it does provide the entire *raison d'être* for the canonical approach: the aim of reading the Bible is to better know the God whom one already believes to exist.

Childs' approach is thus best understood as a Christian approach to Theological Interpretation which seeks to prompt a reformulation of exegetical practice through a focus on the canonical shape of the Bible in a way that will benefit the Church. This is not to say that Childs is hostile to secularism or, indeed, other religions, but rather that Christianity is the context in which his approach is primarily located. However, it is feasible that the implications of his approach will extend out from this one context and, indeed, they have already.[188]

[187] For example, Childs' theory of canonical shaping is a historical theory whose validity is to be verified by all of the analytical processes of a sound historiography, and not simply assumed on the basis of faith.

[188] E.g. see the comments of Levenson on Childs in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

3 Childs and Scholarship

> He may be considered one of the most important biblical scholars of the twentieth century, because he has not only kept track of changes in disciplines related to his field but also made original contributions to them.[189]

The aim of this chapter is to locate Childs in scholarship. In the first section (§3.1), several key connections are established between Childs and other approaches/disciplines/scholars that have influenced him, which he has influenced, or which are related to his approach in a substantial way. In the second section (§3.2), responses to Childs are considered from several key scholars; this second section constitutes this thesis' secondary literature review.

3.1 Key Connections

3.1.1 Biblical Theology

In its most complete (or canonical) form Childs' approach is an attempt at Biblical Theology;[190] a discipline which has historically concerned itself with the academic study of the entire Bible and sometimes with its interpretation as authoritative theological literature. Biblical Theology is a post-Reformation discipline which emerged in Germany as a protest against scholastic and ecclesial uses of the Bible.[191] A famous lecture given by Gabler (1753-1826) in 1787 provides a turning point for the separation of Biblical Theology from Systematic (in Gabler's terms, 'dogmatic') Theology, making them distinct but yet related academic disciplines - though Gabler owed much to the earlier Zachariae.[192] Gabler suggested that Biblical Theology should be responsible for distinguishing the normative ('pure') theological content of the Bible from the 'human' content that is contextually bound; the normative content should then be passed to

[189] Sheppard, 'Childs', 575.

[190] For a more detailed history of Biblical Theology, see Mead, *Biblical*, 13-60.

[191] Childs, *OTTCC*, 2; Childs, *BTONT*, 4. Childs is also quoted in Mead, *Biblical*, 24.

[192] John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, 'J. P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33/2 (1980), 133-58 (151-2).

Systematic Theology for processing and, ultimately, use within Christianity.[193] In the nineteenth century, Biblical Theology continued to progress but was constantly having to re-state its value in light of challenges from Historical Criticism. Its full awakening (its 'golden age'[194]) would come in the twentieth century, particularly between the 1930s-60s. North America developed its own form of Christian Biblical Theology during this era which is known as the 'Biblical Theology Movement' (BTM).[195] The BTM flourished as a means for transcending the liberal-conservative impasse exemplified by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.[196] In contrast to the practice of Biblical Theology on the European continent, the American Movement was explicitly confessional (Protestant and often Presbyterian[197]) and normative in its interests. By the 1960s, however, the Biblical Theology Movement was in decline, hence the title of Childs' 1970 monograph, *Biblical Theology in Crisis.*[198] Childs' canonical approach is thus yet another attempt at Biblical Theology, written by a confessional American scholar with strong abilities in the German language, to further Biblical Theology generally and provide hope to those in the American Church who had gained so much from the discipline.

Biblical Theology has three discernible characteristics that are regularly attested across the field and in surveys of the discipline. Firstly, Biblical Theology is an academic discipline which is distinct from other types of Theology; what makes it distinct is that its corpus for reflection is restricted to the Bible. Childs helpfully distinguishes Biblical Theology from Systematic Theology: Systematic Theology 'seeks also to test the conformity of its proclamation with the scriptures but performs its task within a different context. It carries on its reflection

193 Wunsch and Eldredge , 'Gabler', 138.

194 Mead, *Biblical*, 42.

195 For a detailed study see Childs, *BTC*, 13-90.

196 Childs, *BTC*, 20-1. For a full contextual overview of this period in American biblical scholarship, see Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith & Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986).

197 Childs, *BTC*, 21.

198 See also Brett, *Crisis*, 1-3.

with conscious attention to the creeds of the church, and to the history of dogma'.[199] This maintains the legacy of Gabler and explains why Biblical Theology is most often undertaken by biblical scholars of either the OT or NT.[200] Biblical Theology, then, has no real concern for theological sources beyond the Bible.

Secondly, Biblical Theology is 'theological' in the sense that it seeks to study the theological claims of the Bible. However, there are two different forms of Biblical Theology which approach this task in different ways: the descriptive and the normative. Indeed, as Mead writes, 'the way that these two aspects have been combined, separated, or distinguished by scholars remains a significant challenge to developing a definition of Biblical Theology'.[201] The descriptive form understands Biblical Theology to be a historical enterprise which seeks to *describe* the theological perspectives that, as Barr puts it, 'existed back there and then'.[202] This form seeks to describe, for example, the views of the prophet Amos on the theological importance of justice, or the views of Paul on the place of the Jewish law in Christian practice. The normative form, however, seeks to discern the theological content of the Bible with the assumption that it is an authoritative corpus for the people of God today; it asks whether Amos and Paul were *right*. This latter form has, of course, been popular within the Church and amongst confessional scholars because it seeks to engage with the Bible as Scripture in the present day. Though both forms have a shared interest in describing the theological claims of the biblical texts, the latter has tended to develop an additional stage for biblical interpretation which considers the normativity of these claims for Christianity today.[203]

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[199] Childs, *BTONT*, 369. Childs uses the older term 'dogmatic theology' where this thesis uses 'Systematic Theology'.

[200] Barr, *Concept*, 2.

[201] Mead, *Biblical*, 7.

[202] Barr, *Concept*, 4.

[203] The addition of a second stage for Theological Interpretation has often been based on the assumption of there being a hermeneutical gap between the plain sense meaning of the biblical texts in their original historical contexts (i.e. in the past), and the meaning of the biblical texts. Krister Stendahl is particularly responsible for this dichotomy in the modern era and coined the memorable phrases, 'what the texts meant' (past), versus 'what they mean' (present) (Krister Stendahl, 'Biblical Theology: Contemporary', in George A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 418-32 (430)). Stendahl refers to the search for

Thirdly, Biblical Theology focuses on the interpretation of the Bible as a whole, rather than on just parts of it.[204] Whilst Biblical Theology does incorporate the exegesis of an individual passage, it does so often to use that passage as one part of a larger picture with, importantly, the initial assumption that there really *is* a larger picture (or unity) to be found.[205] Biblical Theology has two sub-disciplines: OT Theology and NT Theology, which also have holistic interests though they are restricted to each Testament. The holistic interests of Biblical Theology are often directed towards a search for unity amidst the Bible's diversity.

Childs' canonical approach to Biblical Theology embraces each of these three characteristics: (i) Childs is a biblical scholar and the subject for his study is exclusively the Bible; (ii) his approach is theological in that he wishes to use the combined theological claims of the Bible (its 'witness') as a means for discerning the subject matter to which this witness points; (iii) Childs' approach is Biblical Theology in the sense that, in its fullest expression (e.g. *BTONT*) it seeks to use the Bible as a whole as a vehicle to know God..

3.1.1.1 Childs and the Biblical Theology Movement

It is important to note the connection between Childs' approach and the American BTM; this was, in fact, the topic of *BTC*. The BTM has already been introduced (above), thus the purpose here is to focus on why Childs thought that the BTM was in 'crisis' and why he thought his approach was the solution. In *BTC*, Childs identifies several problems with the BTM, arising from a number of different areas. He argues that the BTM failed to resolve 'the problem of the

contemporary meaning as 'the hermeneutic question', and it is referred to elsewhere as 'application' or 'actualisation' (Barr, *Concept*, 15). Childs rejects Stendahl's dichotomy because he thinks the actualisation of the biblical texts is found in the plain sense of the texts themselves (§4.1.1).

[204] Barr, *Concept*, 13. Hence why in German scholarship it exists as *gesamtbiblische Theologie* (pan/whole-biblical Theology) (e.g. Manfred Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart: das Verhältnis von AT und NT in der hermeneutischen Diskussion seit Gerhard von Rad* (2nd edn, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987)).

[205] Barr, *Concept*, 379. Though there are some who reject this assumption, e.g. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, trans. by John Bowden (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

Bible'[206] (the relationship between the Bible and revelation;[207] how to relate the two Testaments;[208] agreement on the Bible's central thrust;[209] the ability to engage with every book in the Bible and not a select few[210]), it was not useful for confessionally-minded seminary students,[211] and it was unable to engage with the modern world because of archaising tendencies that tried to locate revelation in the actions of God in the ancient past or in a distinct biblical mentality.[212] Childs then moves on to describe the internal and external factors which he thinks led to 'the cracking of the walls'.[213] Regarding the former, despite a wide array of publications, the BTM had a lack of consensus on its key topics. This problem was furthered by the undermining of previously assumed positions, such as the validity of a search for revelation in history,[214] the unity of the Bible,[215] the distinctive biblical mentality (all but destroyed by Barr[216]),[217] the contrast of the Bible to its environment[218] (undermined by studies of comparative religion), and the loss of a neo-liberal consensus on exactly how a theological dimension should be incorporated within the Movement.[219] Regarding the latter, i.e. external factors, Childs argued that Biblical Theology was unable to produce anything useful for the post-war generations in the new American cultural climate because it was irrelevant to contemporary religious experience.[220] In addition to these factors, Childs notes that the BTM failed to develop itself as a rigorous discipline because it had not properly defined the relationship between descriptive

206 Childs, *BTC*, 51.
207 Childs, *BTC*, 52.
208 Childs, *BTC*, 52.
209 Childs, *BTC*, 53.
210 Childs, *BTC*, 55.
211 Childs, *BTC*, 56.
212 Childs, *BTC*, 57-8.
213 Childs, *BTC*, 61.
214 Childs, *BTC*, 62.
215 Childs, *BTC*, 66.
216 See James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
217 Childs, *BTC*, 70.
218 Childs, *BTC*, 73.
219 Childs, *BTC*, 77.
220 Childs, *BTC*, 82-4.

and normative study,[221] and it also failed to articulate a proper understanding of divine inspiration.[222] As one can see, Childs saw the downfall of the BTM as a consequence of multiple factors. Of course, this is not to say that the discipline of Biblical Theology disappeared from the academic scene, rather just that the particular BTM incarnation of the discipline did.

3.1.2 Historical Criticism

> [The canonical approach] does not ignore dimensions of the text that can only be explained by recourse to "sources" or "authors," which account for divergences and tensions in the final form but it judges the task far from complete when attention to these features fails to ask what effect has been achieved by bringing them together in one historical-theological portrayal in the final form of the text.[223]

3.1.2.1 Introduction

Historical Criticism (or the historical-critical method[224]) is a discipline of Biblical Studies which until recently was largely dominant across the field. Barton helpfully identifies four features which characterise the discipline. Firstly, Historical Criticism has an interest in asking 'genetic questions' of the biblical texts: 'when and by whom books were written; what were the stages by which they came into being', etc.[225] This aspect of Historical Criticism has proved to be of great value for improving our understanding of how the Bible came to be, but it has caused problems for those who view the Bible as Scripture by calling into question the historical accuracy of many biblical books. Secondly, Historical Criticism focuses on the plain sense of the biblical texts,[226] as opposed to any alternative sense of meaning that is not derived from the semantic content of the texts themselves (the spiritual sense, etc). This is largely a consequence of the discipline's concern for the history of a text which requires one to understand a text in

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221 Childs, *BTC*, 93.

222 Childs, *BTC*, 93.

223 Seitz, *Character*, 31-2.

224 Note Barton's helpful critique of this term in Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 31-68.

225 John Barton, 'Historical-critical Approaches', in John Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9-20 (9).

226 Though Historical Criticism is interested primarily in reading the plain sense, it does so at various literary strata. Thus, Historical Criticism is interested in the plain sense of both the canonical and any earlier reconstructed texts, though, because of its interest in genetic questions, it leans more towards the latter.

its historical context.[227] Thus, Historical Criticism challenges traditional theological approaches to interpretation such as allegory or *midrash*. Thirdly, Historical Criticism is interested not only in reconstructing the history of textual formation but also in reconstructing a history of past peoples and events (e.g. ancient Israel, the life of Jesus, etc.).[228] Fourthly, Historical Criticism attempts a kind of 'disinterested scholarship' in the sense that one attempts to not allow religious convictions to predetermine the results of interpretation.[229] It is this aspect of the discipline which makes it science-like.[230]

3.1.2.2 Childs' Criticism of the Discipline

Childs received his academic training in contexts dominated by twentieth-century German biblical scholarship (§2.1) and so he was well trained as a historical critic. However, he expressed substantial dissatisfaction with Historical Criticism at multiple points across his career. He believes that Historical Criticism creates an impasse for Christians who wish to use the Bible as Scripture in both the Academy and the Church.[231] Childs laments, 'how many of our seminary-trained pastors conscientiously work through the *International Critical Commentary*, or for that matter the more recent *Interpreter's Bible*, and come away with the sense of frustration and utter sterility. There is little which quickens the mind, and nothing which touches the heart'.[232]

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227 Barton, 'Historical-critical', 10.

228 Barton, 'Historical-critical', 11.

229 Barton, 'Historical-critical', 11.

230 The use of precise methods akin to those used in the Natural Sciences for the interpretation of texts in the Humanities has been significantly challenged by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960). Note the comments of Childs: 'Biblical interpretation contains elements that can be classified both as a science and as an art. As a science there is a constant advance in knowledge that is commensurate with a refinement of research method. […] But Biblical interpretation as an art does not operate by a precise accumulation of scientific data, nor is its method so easily outlined. One rather tends to describe the product as illuminating, profound, or brilliant' (Childs, *BTC*, 140).

231 See also Theodore P. Letis, 'Brevard Childs and the Protestant Dogmaticians: A Window to a New Paradigm', in Theodore P. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority, and the Popular Mind* (2nd edn, Ithaca, NY: Just and Sinner Publications, 2018), 105-28 (121); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (rev edn, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 301.

232 Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 710. Childs wrote this line as a critique of the optimism of W. Robertson Smith who had thought that Historical Criticism was of vital importance to the Protestant denomination. See also Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutics of Consent*, trans. by Roy A. Harrisville (London: SPCK, 1977), 65; Xun, *Canonical*, 139.

In relation to the above taxonomy of Historical Criticism's four main features (§3.1.2.1), Childs is primarily against the study of a text's prehistory (i.e. the asking of genetic questions) in such a way that it destroys the canonical texts. When Historical Criticism is employed in this way it inevitably results in the atomisation of the biblical texts into 'bits and pieces'[233] which can no longer be used for Theological Interpretation. Thus, though its interests may be commendable,[234] Historical Criticism is in reality often a destructive enterprise, destroying the form of the text which today is regarded by many as Scripture; hence why many religious scholars and clergy have found the discipline to be discouraging and unhelpful. For Childs, this atomisation is a major problem because of his theory of canonical shaping.[235] As Childs believes that the canonical forms of the biblical texts are to be received as authoritative Scripture today, any interpretative approach which destroys these forms is making a grave error.[236] As the signs of canonical shaping are found in the canonical texts, if one pulls them apart one will destroy the foundation for Theological Interpretation.

> A recovery of the true historical dimension of the Old Testament is possible only when one takes seriously the biblical text as religious literature of a community of faith. Its peculiar features must be handled in a way compatible with the literature itself. A corpus of religious writing which has been transmitted within a community for a thousand years cannot be properly compared to inert sherds which have lain buried in the ground for centuries. The frequent assumption at work in much critical study that each Old Testament text must be established with an ostensive historical reference in order to recover its correct interpretation fails to reckon with the historical forces generated from within the community of faith which often transformed an original role into one more suitable for a canonical function. The attempt to bring a biblical passage into sharper focus by means of historical reconstruction runs the acute danger of destroying those very features which reveal how the historical tradents understood the tradition.[237]

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233 Childs, *Exodus*, xiv-xv.

234 As Barton rightly points out, Historical Criticism arose not because there was a desire to atomise the biblical texts, but because scholars sought to rationally justify 'observable discrepancies' within the biblical texts without resorting to precritical creative hermeneutics (i.e. allegory or midrash) (Barton, *Reading*, 22.). To give one example, early historical critics sought to explain why it was that the Israelite deity had so many different names within the Pentateuch, even within the same book (e.g. in Gen. 1:1-2:3 God is referred to as אֱלֹהִים, whereas in Gen. 2:4-25 he is יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים). Rather than assuming that each name indicates a particular trait of God, scholars hypothesised that each name indicates the perspective of a theological 'school' who composed that portion of the text. Thus, scholars sought to dissect the texts into the parts produced by each school, thereby proposing a new solution to a discrepancy which had been observed since ancient times.

235 Hence Xun writes, 'Childs sought a new canonical approach in order to overcome the atomization of the Bible into unrelated separate texts' (Xun, *Canonical*, 159).

236 Scalise, *Prolegomena*, 55.

237 Childs, 'Exegetical', 78. See also Childs, *IOTS*, 73. Also note the similar complaints of Levenson: 'Having decomposed the Bible into its historically diverse constituent sources, its [Historical Criticism's] practitioners lack

Childs also finds signs within the biblical texts themselves (§4.3) which resist attempts to recover their prehistories, which for him is evidence with exegetical significance (§4.1) that encourages the reader to stay at the level of the canonical texts. He writes about the OT that, 'the various elements have been so fused as to resist easy diachronic reconstructions which fracture the witness of the whole'.[238] In addition, Childs notes that those who were responsible for the canonical texts of the biblical texts went to great lengths to hide their identities. For Childs, this demonstrates how such information is therefore irrelevant for exegesis.

> But basic to the canonical process is that those responsible for the actual editing of the text did their best to obscure their own identity. Thus the actual process by which the text was reworked lies in almost total obscurity. Its presence is detected by the effect on the text. Moreover, increasingly the original sociological and historical differences within the nation of Israel – Northern and Southern Kingdom, pro- and anti-monarchical parties, apocalyptic versus theocratic circles – were lost, and a religious community emerged which found its identity in terms of sacred scripture. Israel defined itself in terms of a book! The canon formed the decisive *Sitz im Leben* for the Jewish community's life, thus blurring the sociological evidence most sought after by the modern historian. When critical exegesis is made to rest on the recovery of these very sociological distinctions which have been obscured, it runs directly in the face of the canon's intention.[239]

3.1.2.3 A Canonical Reorientation of the Discipline

Some have taken Childs' critiques of Historical Criticism in combination with his prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5.4) as evidence that he is actually *against* the discipline and the features identified above.[240] What matters for Childs, so it is often claimed, is the synchronic study of the final/canonical text *alone* without regard for diachronic study.[241] Childs understood these

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the means to do justice to the Book currently in our possession as a synchronic, systemic entity' (Levenson, *Criticism*, xiv); 'I have argued that the price of recovering the *historical* context of sacred books has been the erosion of the largest *literary* contexts that undergird the traditions that claim to be based upon them' (Levenson, *Criticism*, 4).

238 Childs, *OTTCC*, 11. Childs gives an example: 'to seek to give theological autonomy to a reconstructed Yahwist source apart from its present canonical context is to disregard the crucial theological intention of the tradents of the tradition, and to isolate a text's meaning from its reception' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 11).

239 Childs, *IOTS*, 78.

240 Barr writes that Childs saw Historical Criticism as 'a serious enemy' (Barr, *Concept*, 411) and describes Childs' approach as 'anti-critical' (Barr, *Scripture*, 169, see also 138); Davies calls Childs' approach 'anti-historical', 'unhistorical', and 'de-historical' (Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (London: SPCK, 1998), 51-3). See also the discussion on this topic in John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (2nd edn, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996), 98-9.

241 'Childs is interested not in the *process* but in the canonical *text* itself, the text which results from the process' (Barr, *Scripture*, 158); 'Exegesis should be of the text as it stands, the final form as it emerged from the process of redaction and canonization. Increased emphasis on this means increased hostility to any and all exegesis that seeks in any way to penetrate back to an earlier stage. The worse of all offences, it now appears, is to try to "reconstruct" an "original" text or an "original" form of the tradition. Thus historical investigation moves from being something

claims about his approach, writing in *IOTS*, 'it has often been alleged that the canonical approach being here defended has no use for the diachronic dimension and is basically a static handling of the text' - in response he writes, 'nothing could be further from the truth!'.[242]

To Childs, the problem with Historical Criticism is not that it is wrong *per se*, but rather that it is often used in a way which is not fruitful for Theological Interpretation.[243] As Seitz observes, 'Clearly Childs felt the methods were not wrong, but were being put to wrong use'.[244] Thus, despite the destructive potential of Historical Criticism, Childs does not wish to do away with it and return to a form of precritical interpretation.[245] On the contrary, he seeks to incorporate Historical Criticism within his canonical approach as a means for achieving a greater end: the illumination of the canonical texts.[246] Indeed, Childs believes that by utilising Historical

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that is dubious and unreliable to something that is in principle wrong and destructive' (Barr, *Concept*, 393); 'Childs insists that we should read the biblical text only at the canonical level. We must ignore all earlier, "pre-canonical" stages and interpret it only within the web of meanings constituted by the final form of the canon as the early Church and synagogue established it' (Barton, *Reading*, 96. See Childs' response in Childs, *OTTCC*, 6). Childs traces some of these misunderstandings in Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 320-1.

242 Childs, *BTONT*, 104.

243 'The issue at stake is not whether to be critical or not, but what kind of critical understanding can best serve the Christian church in her theological task of proclamation to the world in the 20th century' (Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 711); 'the issue turns on how the critical enterprise is envisioned and how its analysis is used in interpreting the biblical text' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis', *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*, 6/1 (1997), 16-26 (17-8)); 'It is erroneous to infer that the canonical approach which is being outlined is opposed to Historical Criticism in principle. The issue at stake turns on how it is used' (Childs, *NTC*, 50).

244 Seitz, *Word*, 102.

245 Notably, in *BTONT* Childs provides four reasons why diachronic study must be incorporated within his canonical approach (Childs, *BTONT*, 104-6). See also: Childs 'consistently invests in diachronic analysis' (Driver, *Childs*, 94); 'Childs emphasises throughout *IOTS* the positive contribution which the critical tools make to his work, thus setting off canonical hermeneutics from precritical interpretation' (Noble, *Childs*, 39 n.7); 'Obviously canonical reading is not a return to pre-critical reading, as it takes the form it does in the light of and in conversation with a previous historical-critical legacy' (Christopher R. Seitz, *Convergences: Canon and Catholicity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 14).

246 'In my judgment, the study of the prehistory has its proper function within exegesis only in illuminating the final text' (Childs, *Exodus*, xiv-xv); 'Ultimately the use of source and Form Criticism is exegetically deficient if these tools do not illuminate the canonical text' (Childs, *Exodus*, 149); 'It is simply not the case that the more historical and literary knowledge acquired, the better one is able to understand the biblical text […]. Rather the issue turns on the use of proper discernment. How does one wisely use historical-critical tools in illuminating the canonical text?' (Brevard S. Childs, 'On Reading the Elijah Narratives', *Interpretation*, 34/2 (1980), 128-37 (128)); 'It seems obvious that this final form can be much better understood, especially in its crucial theological role as witness, if one studies carefully those hundreds of decisions which shaped the whole. Thus it greatly sharpens one's vision of the final form of the Pentateuch which is the goal of exegesis if one first distinguishes between earlier and later levels within the witness. To shift the imagery, one can better appreciate a symphony if one has been trained to recognize the contribution of each of the various musical instruments involved. The crucial test is the extent to which the recognition of the parts aids rather than impairs the hearing of the whole' (Childs, *BTONT*, 105);

Criticism the interpreter can come to a deeper understanding of the canonical form. Thus, Childs is not against Historical Criticism (or historical study),[247] but recognises that it only has what Oeming calls 'relative value' to the canonical approach;[248] i.e. it is only useful if it is focused on illuminating the canonical texts.

Childs' approach has been called 'post-liberal' (§3.1.7),[249] 'post-Enlightenment',[250] and 'post-critical',[251] the last of which is a term he has used.[252] These labels can be useful if they are

'Ultimately, the analysis of distinct layers and compositional growth must be used to enrich the book as a whole' (Childs, *Isaiah*, 4).

Others have correctly grasped the role of Historical Criticism within Childs' approach: 'Knowledge of the process that led up to canonization can certainly be illuminating, but only so long as it is recognized as *ancillary* to the theological task' (Barton, 'Canonical', 201); 'Childs does not deny all theological relevance to the sources and prehistory of a text. On the contrary, he emphasises the value of such study for sharpening one's perception of the contours of the received text and for adding a depth dimension to one's reading. What he does insist on, however, is that the various levels of meaning perceived in a text's prehistory should serve the task of sharpening appreciation of the received text, rather than competing with the received text or even replacing it' (Moberly, 'Childs', 107); Childs 'believes that one use of the critical tools […] is to further our semantic understanding of the final form' (Noble, *Canonical*, 83); 'All other methodological steps which question the prehistory of the text only have an ancillary relevance' ('Alle anderen methodischen Schritte, die nach der Vorgeschichte des Textes fragen, haben eine bloß dienende Bedeutung') (Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische*, 189); 'Childs wanted method to serve the purpose of helping him understand the theological implications of the final form of the text, not for the reproduction of a full scale history of religion behind the text or a seamless tradition-history straddling it (Seitz, 'Tribute', 4).

The same idea has been taken up within the Theological Interpretation movement: 'One should not abandon scholarly tools and approaches in order to interpret the Bible theologically. On the contrary, modern and postmodern tools and methods may be usefully employed in theological interpretation to the extent that they are oriented to illumining the text rather than something that lay "behind" it (e.g., what actually happened) or "before" it (e.g., the ideological concerns of an interpretative community)' (Vanhoozer, 'Theological', 22).

247 Others agree: 'the canonical approach should not be tied to any attacks on critical, historical reconstruction' (Brett, *Crisis*, 13); 'What Childs was after was not the abolition of Historical Criticism, but a new kind of Historical Criticism, in which the unfair (and unhistorical!) prejudices of its past employment could be corrected and its blind spots opened up to scholarly examination' (Stephen B. Chapman, 'Brevard Childs as a Historical Critic: Divine Concession and the Unity of the Canon', in Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richard (eds.)*, The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 63-84 (65)); 'any suggestion to the effect that a "canonical" approach is harmonizing or ahistorical rests upon a mistaken mythology generated by critics who have never properly engaged with it' (Thiselton, 'Introduction', 9); 'it is not right to label his canonical approach either as *absolutely anti-historical* or as *essentially a-historical*' (Xun, *Canonical*, 166).

248 'form and tradition history questions about the history of the text and its situation in life have only relative value […] when the final form and the "situation of the text in literature" stand at the centre' ('form- und überlieferungsgeschichtliche Frage nach der Vorgeschichte des Texts und seines Sitzes im Leben hat nur relativen Wert […], wenn die final form und der "Sitz des Textes in der Literatur" im Zentrum stehen') (Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische*, 193).

249 Moberly, 'Childs', 105.

250 Moberly, 'Childs', 105.

251 Barton, *Reading*, 98 (see also, 'Is the Canonical Approach Anti-critical?', 84-6); Theodore P. Letis, 'The Prologue of John and the Egyptian Manuscripts: John 1:18 as a Case Study in the Canonical Approach', in Theodore P. Letis*, The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority, and the Popular Mind* (2nd edn, Ithaca, NY: Just and Sinner Publications, 2018), 129-58 (129); Xun, *Canonical*, 178.

252 Childs, *IOTS*, 127.

taken to mean incorporating and 'recalibrating'[253] Historical Criticism as a means to a greater end. Textual examples will be used later on (§4) to demonstrate how Childs employs diachronic study in a manner which illuminates the canonical texts.

In sum: a 'hallmark' of Childs' approach is that it seeks to integrate Historical Criticism and its concern for diachronic study within a theological approach that ultimately seeks to read the Bible as Sacred Scripture.[254] Childs thus finds a way to unite two often-opposed fields of study, providing Christians with a methodology for integrating historical-critical scholarship with their religious beliefs.[255] It is perhaps for this reason that Childs primarily achieved such success.

3.1.3 Sub-disciplines of Historical Criticism

3.1.3.1 Redaction Criticism

As a kind of Historical Criticism, Redaction Criticism seeks to understand the personality and perspectives of the author (or editor/redactor) of a biblical text.[256] This is useful because it helps one to grasp how and why he shaped the material he received. Redaction Criticism emerged within NT Studies as an approach to studying the Synoptic Gospels and consisted of studying the redactions (hence 'Redaction' Criticism) which an author made to earlier traditions. Hence, a redaction-critical approach may attempt to understand 'Luke' by assessing how he engaged with earlier material from the Gospel of Mark.[257] How, then, does this compare with the canonical approach? The difference lies in the point of focus. Where Redaction Criticism is focused on understanding the author of a biblical text, the canonical approach is focused on

253 Seitz, *Character*, 29.

254 Driver, *Childs*, 61.

255 On which see Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington S. J., *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

256 See also David J. A. Clines, 'Methods in Old Testament Study', in John Rogerson (ed.)*, Beginning Old Testament Study* (2nd edn, London: SPCK, 1998), 25-48 (32).

257 See also Childs, *BTC*, 69.

understanding the text which he wrote.[258] To use hermeneutical categories, Redaction Criticism is focused on intention whereas the canonical approach is focused on texts. For Childs, 'It is not the (redactional) process which is normative for the later community, but the scriptures which reflect the process'[259] thus the latter must be the focus during interpretation. Brett observes this correctly, referring in particular to Childs' commentary on Exodus.

> Many scholars took this concern to be simply a variant of a more recent historical discipline, Redaction Criticism, that focused on the final editing of the biblical manuscripts. But this was not the case. Childs was not primarily concerned with the intentions or historical settings of these final editors; he was concerned with the meaning of the texts as such, irrespective of what any author or editor might have intended at some particular stage in a text's development.[260]

Of course, both Redaction Criticism and Childs' canonical approach involve detailed analysis of how a text developed diachronically, but for different ends.

3.1.3.2 Form Criticism

Childs' approach can be compared to another historical critical sub-discipline: Form Criticism. The discipline of Form Criticism has its origins in nineteenth-century classical and folklore studies; its formulation within Biblical Studies is thanks in particular to the work of Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932). Broadly defined, Form Criticism shares with Source Criticism the desire to understand the composition history of a biblical book, but introduces a new angle of approach. Form Criticism seeks to understand, as Sanders writes, 'the kinds of literature out of which the various units of the Bible are composed'.[261] This means that it has a particular interest in genre, as well as considering the historical situation (*Sitz im Leben*) in which an earlier oral

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[258] See also, 'a canonical approach uses the reconstructed depth dimension within the text gained by critical analysis to bring into sharper focus the means by which the canonical text actualized the tradition. It focuses not on the redactor's intentionality, but on the effect of the redactional shaping of the text's witness' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Analysis of a Canonical Formula: "It Shall be Recorded for A Future Generation"', in Eckhard Blum and et. al (eds.)*, Hebräische Bibel und ihre Zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 357-64 (363); Childs, 'Exegetical', 68); 'It is not a sub-type of redaction criticism; it is an attempt to read "the text itself"' (Barton, *Reading*, 102, see also 90, 259 n.12); 'the canonical approach is just not focused on the minds behind the text' (Brett, *Crisis*, 145).

[259] Sheppard locates this quotation in Childs, *IOTS*, 429 (Sheppard, 'Childs', 580). However, this page number is incorrect and I unfortunately cannot find the correct one.

[260] Brett, *Crisis*, 3.

[261] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (2nd edn, Eugene, OR: Cascade Book, 2005), ix.

form of a biblical tradition may have been used. Thus, for example, form critical study of the Psalms has shown that they are often based on genres associated with different events in the life of Israel,[262] and that Genesis contains ancient myths/legends, some of which may have been known across the ancient Near East (e.g. Gen. 6-9). Childs draws the comparison: 'In one sense, I have simply extended the insights of the form critical method';[263] both seek to understand how the biblical books functioned as Scripture to those communities who revered them. However, where Form Criticism focuses on individual discourse units, the canonical approach seeks to study the entire Bible. Furthermore, while Form Criticism focuses on the original communities who used the oral biblical traditions, the canonical approach focuses on the 'canonical' community at the opposite end of Bible's formative process.

3.1.3.3 Tradition Criticism

> The canonical approach does not make sense apart from the insights garnered from tradition criticism.[264]

Tradition Criticism, also viewed as a type of Historical Criticism, seeks to study how various oral traditions that were once used in real life settings have been combined in the canonical form of the Bible. It shares an interest with Form Criticism in the Bible's oral traditions, but differs in that it focuses not on locating these traditions in their original settings but rather on how they developed over time, including how they were fixed in the canonical form of the Bible. Of note in particular is Gerhard von Rad, whose *Theologie des Alten Testament*[265] provides a paradigmatic study of how traditions have been combined in the OT in ways which transcend

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[262] See the classic studies of Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926); Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. by D. R. Ap-Thomas, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). See also John Muddiman, 'Form Criticism', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 240-3.

[263] Childs, 'Response', 52.

[264] Mark S. Gignilliat, *Reading Scripture Canonically: Theological Instincts for Old Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 21-2.

[265] Von Rad, *Theologie*.

their original function as a means for theological appropriation by future generations.[266] In a manner which undoubtedly influenced Childs, von Rad emphasises that what matters is how these traditions were combined to function theologically for ancient Israel, not whether they are historically accurate. Thus, he argues that what is authoritative theologically is the revelatory 'salvation history' (*Heilsgeschichte*)[267] presented by these texts. Morgan and Barton rightly locate a flaw in this idea: 'How can we locate "revelation" in the process that led Israel to develop and eventually to "canonize" traditions, when the explicit conceptual content of these traditions states that revelation is actually located somewhere else, namely, in certain things that God has said and done?'[268] Childs, like von Rad, is not primarily concerned with ascertaining the historical accuracy of the biblical texts (though he does undertake historical investigation if it aids the illumination of the canonical texts) and accepts the canonical texts as a basis for theological reflection regardless of their historical accuracy. However, unlike von Rad, Childs also includes a stage within his approach that (theoretically) reflects on whether the Bible's witness accurately reflects the subject matter to which it points (§6). Ultimately, then, Tradition Criticism is utilised within Childs' canonical approach to clarify how the traditions that the Bible contains have been intentionally shaped to function as Scripture for future generations so that this can be used as the basis for theological reflection.

3.1.4 Literary Criticism

Next, it is important to make a comparison between the canonical approach and Literary Criticism – a comparison made most notably by Barton.[269] Literary Criticism is a synchronic

[266] Joseph A. Greig, 'Geschichte and Heilsgeschichte in Old Testament interpretation with particular reference to the work of Gerhard von Rad', Ph.D Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974, 64-5; Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 99.

[267] The idea of salvation history was not invented by von Rad, though his appropriation has been particularly influential (Childs, *OTTCC*, 4). For an in depth study see: John Goldingay, 'Salvation History', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 606-7; Greig, 'Geschichte'.

[268] Morgan with Barton, *Interpretation*, 102.

[269] Barton, *Reading*, 100-3.

approach to interpretation because it focuses on the analysis of one particular form of a biblical text, rather than a text's (diachronic) development over time. It is not necessarily anti-historical (though its re-emergence was in part due to a disenchantment with Historical Criticism[270]); history is just not its area of focus. Within Biblical Studies, Literary Criticism had a renaissance in the late twentieth century,[271] though it dates back far earlier.[272] Literary Criticism in general seeks to study the biblical texts with a focus on traditional literary features such as genre, structures and patterns, characterisation, imagery, rhythm, and word-play. How, then, does Literary Criticism compare with the canonical approach? Both approaches share an interest in a detailed study of the form of the biblical texts at a single moment in time (though with varying degrees of skill[273]). Some have viewed this as evidence that Childs has no concern whatsoever for the historical development of the biblical texts, thinking that he is only interested in studying their final form. However, as has been shown (§3.1.2), this is a misunderstanding of the canonical approach. Childs is not against diachronic study as embodied in Historical Criticism, rather he is against the way in which it is often *used*. Diachronic study has a part to play in the canonical approach when it is employed to illuminate the canonical texts. Indeed, knowing how the canonical form came to be can be highly instructive for understanding it more deeply. Thus, a major difference between the canonical approach and Literary Criticism is that the canonical approach is both synchronic *and* diachronic, whereas Literary Criticism is purely synchronic. Hence, Literary Criticism is insufficient by itself for Childs' canonical approach; though, as Barr

[270] E.g. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. edn, New York: Basic Books, 2011), 13-4.

[271] E.g. Alter, *Narrative*; David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[272] As an approach, it dates as far back at least as Aristotle's *Poetics* in the 4th century BCE.

[273] Melugin has highlighted that Childs' synchronic analysis is less sophisticated than others who study features like characterisation, plot, and vocabulary, etc. (Roy F. Melugin, 'Canon and Exegetical Method', in Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (eds.), *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 48-61 (51-4)).

rightly notes, the resurgence of Literary Criticism created an academic climate within which the canonical approach could emerge.[274]

3.1.4.1 Is the Canonical Approach a 'Final Form' Approach?

The term 'final form' has been commonplace within Biblical Studies ever since the re-emergence of Literary Criticism in the twentieth century.[275] Childs' approach has regularly been called a 'final form' approach to interpretation, both by himself[276] and by others.[277] However, is this an accurate label?[278]

Within the discipline of Textual Criticism, the textual history of a biblical book is normally split into two main phases: 'composition' and 'transmission'.[279] Though the phases are distinct, they do overlap in various ways.[280] The composition (in Childs' terms, 'literary') phase is the phase in which a text is first written and comes to reach a stable literary form; the transmission (in Childs' terms, 'textual') phase, then, is the phase in which the literary form of a book is copied and transmitted. Childs helpfully distinguishes between the two phases in the context of OT/HB Textual Criticism.

> […] both phases involved a process which exerted critical judgments respecting the preservation and transmission of the literature. Nevertheless, there are some equally important elements of difference between the literary and textual phases. The literary process involved major moves affecting the understanding of the literature, such as combining sources, restructuring the material into new patterns, and providing new redactional contexts for interpreting the tradition. By contrast, the textual phase of Old Testament formation was minor in comparison. […] Again, the literary phase often involved considerable freedom on the part of the tradents in exerting an active,

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274 Barr, *Scripture*, 158-9.

275 See John Barton, 'Intertextuality and the "Final Form" of the Text', in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds.)*, Congress Volume: Oslo 1998*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 80 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 33-60.

276 Childs, *Exodus*, xiv; Childs, *IOTS*, 75-7; Childs, 'Endform', 246.

277 Barton, *Reading*, 96; Barr, *Concept*, 393, 440; Brett, *Crisis*, 19; Gignilliat, *Canonically*, 27; Seitz, *Character*, 49; Ron Haydon, 'A Survey and Analysis of Recent "Canonical" Methods (2000–2015)', *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 10/1 (2016), 145-55 (152-3); Philip Sumpter, *The Substance of Psalm 24: An Attempt to Read Scripture After Brevard S. Childs*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 22.

278 See Childs' (insufficient) reflection on this matter in Brevard S. Childs, 'Retrospective Reading of the Old Testament Prophets', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 108/3 (1996), 362-77 (376-7).

279 See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd edn, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 181-2; Ernst Würthwein and Alexander Achilles Fischer, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*, trans. by Errol F. Rhodes (3rd edn, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 69-72, 158-62.

280 Würthwein and Fischer, *Text*, 72.

> intentional effect. By contrast, the textual phase reflects a far more conservative, passive role with the activity focused on preserving and maintaining traditions rather than creating them'.[281]

With this in mind, there are two possible definitions of 'final form'. The first understands the final form to be the form of a biblical book which stands at the end of the *composition* phase, i.e. it is the form of a book which is then transmitted in the transmission stage.[282] One problem with this definition is that it is possible that a biblical book had multiple final literary forms – what Tov refers to as a series of 'determinate originals'.[283] Thus, it is not clear which of these is the 'final' form. In addition, there are no *extant* final compositional forms, so all reconstructions are hypothetical. The second definition, on the other hand, understands the final form to be the form of a biblical book which stands at the end of the *transmission* phase.[284] Thus, the final form of the Book of Genesis would, for example, be its form in a text which stands at the end of the transmission process. The problem with this second definition is that it uses the adjective 'final' inappropriately. Technically, there is no *final* text at the end of the transmission phase, rather the biblical manuscripts which are extant today that are often called 'final' are actually snapshots of a complex textual tradition at different points in time. As Melugin writes, 'It is admittedly misleading to speak of the "final form of the text," for biblical texts never reached a totally fixed form. Textual criticism is a witness to that fact'.[285] The transmission phase of the biblical texts continues with every new copy/edition. Indeed, anytime a book is copied or translated, a new text is produced; this is particularly true for eclectic editions which themselves

[281] Childs, *IOTS*, 94.

[282] This is Childs' definition of the term, see Childs, *IOTS*, 88.

[283] Tov, *Textual*, 165. A good example of which is the Book of Jeremiah, which appears to have had at least two Hebrew *Vorlagen*, as demonstrated by the Masoretic text-type and the LXX, the latter of which is supported by 4QJer^{b} and 4QJer^{d} (Tov, *Textual*, 287). Metzger and Ehrman make the same claim for the NT (see Bruce M. Metzger, and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (4th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 272).

[284] So Xun: 'the form given to the text by the last editor or redactor' (Xun, *Childs*, 71).

[285] Melugin, 'Canon', 50.

are still developing.[286] Therefore there is never a 'final' form of a biblical book and scholars should be careful with how they use the term.[287]

Now, as will be shown later (§5), Childs is interested in finding neither the 'final' compositional forms of the biblical texts, nor their 'final' transmissional forms; instead he seeks their *canonical* forms. The canonical texts which he seeks are, for the OT, the Hebrew text which he thinks was favoured by the central Jewish authorities in the first century CE, and, for the NT, a collection of readings which he believes were sanctioned as authoritative in the early Church. Thus, it is incorrect and misrepresentative to categorise Childs' approach as a 'final form' approach to interpretation[288] and this terminology should be dropped from future descriptions of Childs' approach.

3.1.5 Reception History and the Recovery of Precritical Interpreters

For well over a thousand years the Bible has inspired its readers/hearers to respond by creative means. Within recent times, Biblical Studies has begun to recognise the value that these responses might have, not only because they provide insights for the historian into how biblical texts have been used in the past, but also because they can be valuable to the interpreter today.[289] This recognition has resulted in the establishment of a sub-field dedicated to the study of the history of the how the Bible has been received: Reception History (*Wirkungsgeschichte/*

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[286] New eclectic editions are currently being produced for the Hebrew Bible by the Society for Biblical Literature (*The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition*) and the Oxford Hebrew Bible Project. Also note the recent Dirk Jongkind and Peter J. Williams, *The Greek New Testament: Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2018) [*GNTTH*].

[287] Barr is incorrect when he writes that 'the final form of each individual book, is in a way an objective fact, in that there is no doubt about the existence of such a final form' (Barr, *Scripture*, 79). Moberly is insightful when he writes, 'There are difficulties over whatever terminology one chooses to use. Early advocates of a canonical approach tended to speak of working with the final form of the text, because the concern was to articulate an alternative to inquiries into the sources and tradition-history behind the text. Yet, of course, in relation to text-critical issues and the ancient versions, final form is a less comprehensible or useful notion. The terminology of received form encounters some of the same difficulties, but remains preferable, I think, because it shifts the focus to the role of the biblical text in relation to Jewish and Christian communities that have received it' (R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41 n.35).

[288] E.g. Scalise, who writes a section on Childs entitled, 'The Final Form of the Text' (Scalise, Prolegomena, 50-3).

[289] Joyce and Lipton have coined the term 'reception exegesis' as a discipline focused on the use of these responses for interpretation (Paul Joyce and Diana Lipton, *Lamentations Through the Centuries*, Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 17).

Auslegungsgeschichte).[290] Childs' engagement with Reception History[291] is found primarily in his commentary *Exodus*, and in *Struggle*, which is a supplement to his commentary *Isaiah*. *Exodus* was the first commentary of its kind to include a survey of how the Book had been interpreted in the past.[292] Thus, Childs has played a significant role in the growth of Reception History within Biblical Studies.

Why did Childs incorporate Reception History within his approach? Firstly, because he values Reception History as a tool for sharpening one's own interpretative skills. By studying how others have interpreted a text one can see how context has influenced past interpretations, which in turn may improve one's own interpretative abilities. By becoming aware of one's own context, one may undertake a better reading of the canonical texts.[293] Childs was likely influenced by Gadamer, whose philosophical writings on the 'history of effects' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) show how one's interpretation is affected by one's horizon (context).[294] Secondly, Childs utilises Reception History because he believes that precritical[295] interpreters can be valuable for illuminating the canonical texts. Childs rightly believes that his approach shares with certain precritical interpreters (namely Calvin[296]) the belief that the Bible in its canonical form functions as a vehicle to know God.[297] Thus, Childs believes that the recovery

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290 E.g. Blackwell Bible Commentary series (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006>); The Encyclopedia of the Reception of the Bible series (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009>); John F. A. Sawyer (ed.), *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and Its Reception* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

291 What Childs calls the 'history of exegesis' (Childs, *Exodus*, xv) and the 'history of interpretation' (Childs, *Struggle*, ix).

292 So Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Biblical Interpretation', in David F. Ford (ed.)*, The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (3rd edn, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 287-304 (301).

293 Childs, *Exodus*, xv.

294 Gadamer, *Warheit.*

295 Childs rejects the term 'precritical' as he claims it is 'both naïve and arrogant' (Childs, *Exodus*, x). However, it is accurate if 'critical' means having a focus on semantics, genre, and neutrality (so Barton, *Nature*, 58).

296 E.g. Childs, *BTC*, 22, 52, 53, 110, 144, 145, 148, 159, 177, 243; Childs, *IOTS*, 32, 43, 44, 324, 413, 420, 523, 536, 659; Childs, *BTONT*, xviii, 47ff, 72, 247, 326, 523, 528, 708, 711. See also Xun, *Canonical*, 225.

297 George A. Lindbeck, 'Postcritical Canonical Interpretation: Three Modes of Retrieval', in Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (eds.)*, Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 26-51 (27). See also, 'According to Childs the decisive lesson from the history of interpretation lies in that the "precritics" took seriously the end-form and did not obstruct the immediate theological approach through a drilling back behind the current text' ('Die entscheidende Lehre aus der Auslegungsgeschichte liegt nach Childs darin, daß die "Vorkritischen" den in seiner Endgestalt ernst nahmen und sich den unmittelbaren

of these interpreters can help to illuminate the canonical texts. In this sense, Childs is not interested in Reception History as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an interpretative end (as with Historical Criticism - §3.1.2). Whilst it is true that Childs shares several key beliefs with precritical sources, he does not recognise that his approach also significantly breaks with the past. For example, none of the precritical sources that Childs draws upon conceived of his theory of canonical shaping.

It should also be noted that Childs saw his approach as 'recovering an exegetical tradition',[298] i.e. he found value in the approaches of precritical interpreters and sought to utilise them within his approach alongside historical critical concerns. In addition to the desire to search for the subject matter of the Bible, Childs also finds value in precritical interpreters': study of the Bible in the context of the whole canon;[299] exegesis of the canonical text;[300] and application of the Bible to the present.[301] Each of these finds its way into Childs' canonical approach, though not without significant revision, thus it is incorrect to label Childs as precritical.[302]

3.1.6 Inner-biblical Interpretation

As Lester writes, 'Inner-biblical interpretation is the study of biblical texts that appear to interpret or otherwise intentionally evoke other biblical texts',[303] and Sommer is right when he

theologischen Zugang nicht durch ein Zurückbohren hinter den jetzigen Text verstellten') (Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische*, 191).

298 Childs, *BTC*, 139-48.

299 Childs, *BTC*, 144.

300 Childs, *BTC*, 146.

301 Childs, *BTC*, 146.

302 Sheppard, 'Childs', 578.

303 G. Brooke Lester, 'Inner-Biblical Interpretation', in Stephen L. McKenzie (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 444-453. For an introduction see Danna Nolan Fewell, *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy Andrew Huizenga, *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

says, 'The interpretation of the Bible begins in the Bible itself'.[304] There are several different forms of inner-biblical interpretation,[305] ranging from direct quotation (e.g. the quotation of Ps. 22:1 in Mark 15:34) to loose allusion (e.g. the allusions to Gen. 1-2 in Prov. 8:22-36). Of particular importance in the context of OT/HB studies is Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*.[306] In his seminal work, Fishbane sought to demonstrate that by observing inner-biblical interpretation one can gain diachronic insights into the formation of the HB as well as synchronic insights into how the Jewish Scriptures are supposed to be understood. He also sought to show that the process of reinterpretation found within postbiblical Jewish exegetical literature can actually be found within the HB itself; Childs found this idea compelling in his book review.[307]

Childs does not make an explicit connection between his canonical approach and inner-biblical interpretation, and it is not clear whether he was substantially influenced by the discipline. However, it is easy to show how the two overlap. Childs' theory of canonical shaping leads him to search for signs within the Bible of how it has been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations. Some of these signs necessarily include examples of inner-biblical interpretation which provide guidance on how a text is to be understood. For example, as will be shown later (§4.3.2.1), Childs believes that Deuteronomy provides a normative re-interpretation of Genesis-Numbers as an actualised form of Mosaic tradition for a new generation. Importantly, though, Inner-biblical interpretation is just one of the signs of canonical shaping that Childs observes.

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304 Benjamin D. Sommer, 'Inner-Biblical Interpretation', in Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler and Michael Fishbane (eds.)*, The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1829-35 (1829).

305 Also referred to as 'inner-biblical exegesis'.

306 Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

307 'Fishbane has mounted an impressive case for the deep roots of an interpretative process which reflects the strongest possible analogies with later post-biblical Jewish exegesis' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel', *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 106/3 (1987), 511-3 (513)).

3.1.7 Postliberal Theology/ The Yale School

> […] there is a distinct family resemblance among several recent theological proposals stemming from Yale.[308]

Within modern Theology it is possible to speak of a distinct movement known as 'Postliberal Theology' (or 'The Yale School').[309] The latter term comes from the fact that the two seminal proponents of the movement both completed their undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and then went on to teach at, Yale University's Divinity School: Hans Frei[310] and George Lindbeck.[311] Notably for this thesis, both Frei and Lindbeck were academic colleagues with Childs.

In *NTC*, Childs devotes several pages to considering the similarities and differences between his canonical approach and Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, which was published soon after Childs had completed the manuscript for *NTC*, hence why he includes his consideration of the book in an excursus.[312] In *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck seeks to provide a new understanding of the nature of doctrine within the context of modern Christianity. He argues for a 'cultural-linguistic' approach which sees doctrine as a grammar that determines Christian thought, operating within its own conceptual framework that is not dependent upon reality. Here one sees an immediate parallel to Childs' canonical approach, which views the

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308 Childs, *NTC*, 540.

309 David Lauber, 'Yale School', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.)*, Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 859-61. Moberly also uses the term, 'the Yale School', to refer to a group of scholars who all spent time at Yale and who have furthered Childs' approach. Namely Christopher Seitz and Stephen Chapman, though he also names Gerald Sheppard (R. W. L. Moberly, 'The Canon of the Old Testament: Some Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections from the Western Perspective', in Ivan Z. Dimitrou, James D. G. Dunn, Ulrich Luz, et al (eds.)*, Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 239-57 (247)).

310 E.g. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Hans W. Frei and Mark Alan Bowald, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (rev. edn, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

311 George A. Lindbeck, 'Barth and Textuality', *Theology Today*, 43/3 (1986), 361-76; Lindbeck, 'Canonical'; George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (25th Anniversary edn, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Also of note is David Kelsey, who studied and taught at Yale with Frei and Lindbeck.

312 Childs, 'Excursus III: The canonical approach and the "new Yale theology"', *NTC*, 541-6.

canon as the grammar for determining the theological claims which are themselves the basis for reflection on the ultimate subject matter of the Bible, i.e. God. Childs finds a further parallel between Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach and his canonical approach: both seek to find a third way between approaches which only seek to describe reality on the one hand, and those which reject any kind of universal truth in favour of individual expression and experience on the other.[313] However, Childs also makes a key distinction between the approaches. He notes how his canonical approach *is* concerned with reality (and thus making propositions about it). Childs' Biblical Theology, in contrast to Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach, seeks to make propositions about reality, whereas Lindbeck's doctrinal framework is content to operate within its own internal framework. Childs also notes how this same criticism leads him to reject the narrative theology of his other Yale colleague Frei (and indeed exclusively synchronic approaches in general); the Bible points to realities that exist beyond itself and it is they, rather than the biblical texts, which are definitive for Christian faith (§6.4). Thus, any approach which does not reckon with these realities is problematic; after all, 'Christians have always understood that we are saved, not by the biblical text, but by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who entered into the world of time and space'.[314]

Let us now consider further similarities between Childs' canonical approach and Postliberal Theology. Of course, it is beyond this thesis to produce a detailed study of Postliberal Theology,[315] though there are two major connections worth touching on briefly. Firstly, as Fodor identifies, Postliberal Theology is concerned with the retrieval and reuse of

313 Childs, *NTC*, 543.

314 Childs, *NTC*, 545. See also Driver, *Childs*, 139-43.

315 On which see Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); James Fodor, 'Postliberal Theology', in David F. Ford (ed.)*, The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (3rd edn, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 229-48; George Hunsinger, 'Postliberal Theology', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.)*, The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-57; Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

precritical theological sources.[316] This thesis has identified this feature in Childs' approach already (§3.1.5). Secondly, Root identifies that Postliberal Theology emerged out of a concern to establish a Protestant third way between a 'Biblicist conservatism' on the one hand and a 'reductive liberalism' on the other.[317] This interest is suggested by the term 'Postliberal Theology'; i.e. it is a theology which cannot go back to a pre-liberal era of 'Biblicist conservativism' and must transcend the limitations of 'reductive liberalism' to establish something new. Childs tries to portray his approach as finding a third way between these two ideologies as manifested in the biblical disciplines, i.e. between the liberalism of Historical Criticism and the conservativism of precritical Theological Interpretation. Hence, Childs wants to establish an approach to biblical interpretation which is both theologically oriented and informed by Historical Criticism (§3.1.2).[318]

In sum: Childs was an active member of the Yale community during the golden era of Postliberal Theology, and it is inevitable that its ideas influenced him (and, perhaps, vice-versa). A detailed study of the relationship between Childs and Postliberal Theology would be a good topic for future research.[319]

3.1.8 Karl Barth

> I have […] argued at length that the hermeneutics of Karl Barth provides the appropriate theological context for understanding Childs' canonical approach.[320]

It has regularly been noted that Childs' thought was heavily influenced by Karl Barth.[321] Childs' own views on the topic can be found scattered throughout his works, though a 1969 paper he

316 Fodor, 'Postliberal', 230.

317 Michael Root, 'What is Post Liberal Theology? Was there a Yale School? Why Care?', *Pro Ecclesia*, 27/4 (2018), 399-411 (405).

318 Xun, Canonical, 262. Xun also notes how this same interest is found in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI (Xun, *Canonical*, 243-44).

319 Brett presents a case for integrating the canonical approach 'with the intratextual theology developed by Childs's colleagues, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck' (Brett, *Crisis*, 156).

320 Scalise, *Prolegomena*, 51.

321 E.g. Barr, Concept, 405-11; Richard Bauckham, 'Review to Childs' Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible', *Biblical Interpretation*, 2 (1994), 246-50 (250); Driver,

delivered on 'Karl Barth as Interpreter of Scripture' is particularly illuminating.[322] Childs knew Barth personally as he spent three years 'listening to Barth' during his graduate study at the University of Basel.[323] However, Childs insists that he did not go to Basel because of Barth but rather to learn Hebrew grammar from Walter Baumgartner.[324] Childs' fondness for Barth can be found throughout his works, both explicitly and in quotations/references.[325] Scalise has undertaken an excellent analysis of the similarities and degree of influence between Childs and Barth which will now be drawn upon.

Firstly, on the value of the 'final' form, Barth recognised the value of historical study but argued that it is only useful for aiding the interpretation of the final form.

> The most important implication, however, of Barth's analysis of the interpretive process for Childs' canonical hermeneutics may be found in Barth's statement: A representation (*Darstellung*) based on such an examination (*Beobachtung*) will allow even the detailed words of the text to speak exactly as they stand […]. Here *in nuce* is the focus upon the final form of the text as the norm for interpretation, which plays such a determinative role in Childs' canonical approach. Although historical investigation is a vital preliminary step in biblical interpretation […], its usefulness is determined by its success in allowing "the texts to speak exactly as they stand."[326]

Though Childs' approach technically focuses on the 'canonical' rather than the 'final' forms of the biblical texts (§3.1.4.1), the parallel to Barth's thought is clear. Both Barth and Childs recognise the value of diachronic study, but it is always subordinated to the synchronic study of, in Barth's case, the texts which the Church utilises today, and, in Childs' case, the canonical texts. Thus, in Childs one sees a refinement of Barth's idea that better incorporates text-critical scholarship.

Secondly, on the desire to be 'postcritical', Barth sought to affirm an approach to interpretation which recognised the value of historical investigation but sought to go beyond it

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Childs, 93; Noble, *Canonical*, 77; Charles J. Scalise, 'Canonical Hermeneutics: Childs and Barth', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 47/1 (1994), 61-88; Scalise, *Prolegomena*, 51; Xun, *Canonical*, 225-36.

322 Childs, 'Barth'.

323 Childs, 'Barth', 30.

324 Childs, 'Barth', 30. See also Driver, 'Childs', 259; Scalise, 'Barth', 69.

325 E.g. Childs, *BTC*, 16, 17 19 20, 22, 25, 33, 51, 52, 57, 78, 80, 110, 235, 240, 241, 243; Childs, *IOTS*, 16, 69, 144, 395, 526, 544; Childs, *BTONT*, xviii, 15, 20, 22, 88, 89, 215, 248, 400, 404, 450, 470, 552, 560, 566, 586, 588, 622, 679.

326 Scalise, 'Barth', 63.

to undertake a theological reading of the Bible that focused on its claims about its subject matter.[327] Because of this Scalise describes Barth's approach as having a 'postcritical nature'.[328] As shown above (§3.1.7), Childs and Postliberal Theology both have postcritical interests and were inevitably influenced by Barth. Yet the degree of influence from Barth to Childs is not exactly clear. Anyone engaged in Biblical Studies who has a belief that the Bible is Sacred Scripture is presented with two beliefs which are often in tension: (i) the belief that Biblical Criticism is valuable and (ii) the belief that the Bible is Sacred Scripture.[329] Thus, whilst a desire to hold these two ideals in tension is a marker of postcritical thought, it is not clear that Childs was influenced directly by Barth – he may have been driven more by his academic experience and religious convictions. Interestingly, both Childs and Barth were unfairly criticised for rejecting Historical Criticism, though both technically sought to incorporate it within their interpretive approaches.[330]

Thirdly, on the authority of the canon: as Scalise writes, 'For Barth the Christian canon provides the "context" for postcritical exegesis'.[331] This of course sounds very similar to Childs' claim that 'the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology'.[332] Childs and Barth agree that the Bible is authoritative because it is the vehicle (the context) through which the subject matter (in Barth's terms, the Word of God) is encountered. However, for Childs, the Bible is also authoritative because of canonical shaping: it is a collection of intentionally-shaped normative traditions which have been passed on for

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327 Stuhlmacher, *Historical*, 49-50.

328 Scalise, 'Barth', 64.

329 On which see Brettler, Enns, and Harrington, *Bible*.

330 'But I do not reproach Historical Criticism, whose rightness and necessity I on the contrary once again emphatically acknowledge. But its halt at an explanation of the text, which I cannot call explanation but rather only the first primitive attempt of such' ('Aber nicht die historische Kritik mache ich ihnen zum Vorwurf, deren Recht und Notwendigkeit ich vielmehr noch einmal ausdrücklich anerkenne, sondern ihr Stehenbleiben bei einer Erklärung des Textes, die ich keine Erklärung nennen kann, sondern nur den ersten primitiven Versuch einer solchen') (Barth, *Römerbrief*, 10).

331 Scalise, 'Barth', 68.

332 Childs, *BTC*, 99.

future generations (§4.1). Thus, for Childs, the authority of the Bible is rooted in the history of its composition (§2.3.2.1).

Fourthly, on the search for subject matter through the Bible: as Scalise shows, Barth was concerned to utilise the Bible as a means through which the subject matter (the 'reality') shines through to the reader.[333] Childs refers to this idea in Barth's thought as a 'transparency'.

> And it wasn't simply the text, but the text which was a transparency, pointing to the reality of which it was only a witness.[334]

> And yet it seems to me it's the fact that Barth wants to go through the text, to the reality, that the text becomes a transparency, that the walls that separate the Apostle from the reader are dissolved, and one then begins to confront the reality itself – and for Barth there can be no antiquarian interest. And that means that Barth has the tendency always to move down, to move through, and talk about the transparency. Very soon one is wrestling with the realities of Grace, Judgment, and Nature and Grace – all the rest of these things […].[335]

Childs thinks this idea is important: 'by confronting in such a massive way the reality of this material, one confronts God, and one [*sic*] leads into a sort of ringing in one's ears. It seems to me that that's something that we can learn again'.[336] One sees Barth's notion of 'transparency' appear in Childs' works both explicitly[337] and implicitly (e.g. Childs' key phrase: 'from witness to subject matter' - §6.1). Childs thus shares with Barth a desire to read the Bible to know what it says about God. As will be shown later (§6.2.1), Childs also uses a *Sachkritik* inspired by Barth as a means for reading the Bible in this way.

Barr also compares Childs and Barth.[338] Regarding similarities, Barr claims that both Childs and Barth had a 'combativeness' and a 'need to dominate'.[339] Also, both were quick to reject any external support[340] and condemn the opinions of others without proper

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333 Scalise, 'Barth', 77.

334 Childs, 'Barth', 32.

335 Childs, 'Barth', 33-4.

336 Childs, 'Barth', 35.

337 Childs, 'Jonah', 59.

338 In particular see the sections, 'Childs and Barth' in Barr, *Concept*, 405-8, and 'Childs differing from Barth', in Barr, *Concept*, 408-12.

339 Barr, *Concept*, 406.

340 Barr, *Concept*, 406.

justification.[341] Furthermore, Barr claims that Childs shares the 'Barthian aspect' of 'intellectual superiority' over his peers.[342] Finally, Barr thinks that both Childs and Barth often claimed to speak for 'the Church' when it was apparent that their 'Church' was in fact a construct of their own ideas.[343] Barr is being too harsh in his criticisms of Childs, but he is correct in that Childs does only venture forward his opinion after analysing the perceived failures of those who have come before him. However this is not a problem as this is how scholarship operates; i.e. by addressing perceived faults within existing knowledge. Barr's challenge that Childs' Church is his own creation is somewhat accurate, as one of the reasons Childs prioritises the canonical texts is because he thinks they have been accepted as authoritative by the Church, but there is no denomination today which knows of what he speaks (§5.4).

With regard to differences, Barr notes several. Childs' concern for meaning as constructed within the boundaries of canonical shaping is something foreign to Barth,[344] as is Childs' insistence that Biblical Theology as a unifying approach is feasible.[345] Barr writes that 'canonical criticism as now practised is quite far from Barth, and is as much against his mind as according to it',[346] and that 'the fact remains that Barth, unlike Childs, got through hundreds of pages without feeling any need for the word "canon." Thus, in spite of his constant invocation of Barth, Childs is taking a line which in this respect is entirely innovative in relation to Barth'.[347] On this point Barr is surely correct. In sum: Childs is undoubtedly influenced by Barth, but his canonical approach is by no means just a reworking of neo-orthodox theology in the context of Biblical Studies.

341 Barr, *Concept*, 407. This is an ironic criticism in light of Barr's misunderstanding of Childs.
342 Barr, *Concept*, 407.
343 Barr, *Concept*, 408.
344 Barr, *Scripture*, 140.
345 Barr, *Concept*, 413-4.
346 Barr, *Scripture*, 141.
347 Barr, *Concept*, 412.

3.1.9 Systematic Theology

As has already been shown (§3.1.8), Childs was heavily influenced by the work of the Systematic Theologian, Karl Barth. Thus, whilst the discipline is not one which Childs regularly engages with, it is underlying parts of his thought. In *BTONT*, Childs attempts to engage with Systematic Theology as a distinct stage in his methodology. Notably, this is the only place in his published works where he reflects on this idea. As shown earlier (§2.2), *BTONT* contains several sections which each address a topic of Christian theology ('the identity of God' (§6.3), 'God the creator', etc). For each topic, once Childs has completed his Biblical Theology, he moves on to consider several (*ad hoc*) connections between what emerged and Systematic Theology, all under various headings.[348] At several points Childs explains that he is only attempting to draw a few brief connections between the two disciplines,[349] which is accurate considering his engagement with Systematic Theology on each topic is only ever a handful of pages long.

It is not clear whether Childs' engagement with Systematic Theology in *BTONT* should be considered part of his canonical approach *per se*. It is clear that Childs considers Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology to be different disciplines (see below); it is also clear that Childs thinks that his canonical approach is an approach to Biblical Theology (hence *BTONT*). But it is not clear if his canonical approach includes Systematic Theology, or if Systematic Theology is just annexed to his approach in *BTONT*. Regardless, the fact that he only incorporates Systematic Theology in one publication (and only then very briefly), suggests that the integration of Biblical Theology with Systematic Theology is *not* a main element of Childs'

348 'From Biblical Theology to Dogmatics: Trinitarian Theology' (Childs, *BTONT*, 375); 'Dogmatic Theological Reflection on Creation' (Childs, *BTONT*, 403); 'Dogmatic Theological Reflection on the People of God' (Childs, *BTONT*, 447); 'Biblical Theology and Dogmatic Reflection' (Childs, *BTONT*, 481); 'Reconciliation in the Context of Dogmatic Theology' (Childs, *BTONT*, 523); 'Biblical and Dogmatic Theological Reflection on Law and Gospel' (Childs, *BTONT*, 550); 'Dogmatic Theological Reflection' (Childs, *BTONT*, 592); 'Dogmatic Theology and Faith' (Childs, *BTONT*, 618); 'Dogmatic Theology and the Kingdom of God' (Childs, *BTONT*, 651); 'Theology and Ethics' (Childs, *BTONT*, 712).

349 E.g. Childs, *BTONT*, 403, 523, 592.

canonical approach. Ultimately, Childs uses Systematic Theology as an alternative means of shedding light on the subject matter identified by the Bible.

Childs discusses the methodology of integrating Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology in a section of *BTONT* appropriately entitled, 'The Relation between Biblical Theology and Dogmatics'.[350] After introducing the history of the debate, Childs offers a few paragraphs of comment. Firstly he encourages the integration of Biblical Theology with Systematic Theology, writing, 'If there is some overlap in approach, this can only be welcomed as a benefit'.[351] He also encourages the integration of Biblical Studies generally with other academic fields.[352] Secondly, he comments on the nature of the relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology: 'In sum, at this juncture probably little more precision in theory is required other than to urge biblical scholars to be more systematic, and systematic theologians to be more biblical, and to get on with the task'.[353] As one can see, this is a vague claim as it is not clear what being 'more systematic' and 'more biblical' means. Thirdly, he offers an indicator for measuring a successful relationship between the two disciplines: 'The ultimate test of the success of co-operation between the two fields lies in the degree to which the biblical text and its subject matter are illumined'.[354] A primary concern to understand the Bible's subject matter is something which Childs thinks is shared by both Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology: 'Neither Biblical Theology nor dogmatic theology is an end in itself, but rather they remain useful tools by which to enable a fresh access to the living voice of God in sacred scripture'.[355]

[350] Childs, *BTONT*, 88-9.
[351] Childs, *BTONT*, 89.
[352] Childs, *BTONT*, 89.
[353] Childs, *BTONT*, 89.
[354] Childs, *BTONT*, 89.
[355] Childs, *BTONT*, 89.

Unfortunately it is beyond my ability to comment on the quality of Childs' engagement with Systematic Theology. What is clear, however, is that Childs does not think that the Bible is the only vehicle which one can use to access God, though he does of course think it is special.

3.2 Key Responses (Secondary Literature Review)

> It would be hard to overestimate the influence of the work of the late Brevard Childs.[356]

Childs' work has had a profound impact upon Biblical Studies. His canonical approach has entered the 'canon' of Theological Interpretation and catalysed an array of responses. It is the purpose of this section, therefore, to consider these. It begins by examining published doctoral theses[357] written on Childs (§3.2.1), then considers the other major players in the debate on the canonical approach (§3.2.2). One may notice that all of the figures quoted below are men from the Protestant Christian tradition. Importantly, this selection of scholars was not driven by any bias and rather reflects Childs' major respondents; this matter is considered further in §3.2.3.

3.2.1 Doctoral Theses

Childs' canonical approach has been a significant part of at least thirty doctoral theses. These can be separated into (i) those which seek to apply Childs' canonical approach to a biblical passage or task and therefore do not contain a major methodological study of Childs' approach

[356] Stephen E Fowl., *Theological Interpretation of Scripture: A Short Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Paternoster Press, 2009), 82.

[357] By 'published doctoral theses', I mean those revised versions of doctoral theses which have been published by a professional publication house; I do not mean those forms of doctoral theses which are stored in University archives.

itself,[358] and (ii) those which provide a dedicated study of Childs' approach alone.[359] The latter are of interest to this thesis and, of these, four have been published in recognition of their quality and contribution to the debate: Mark Brett (1991), Paul Noble (1993), Daniel Driver (2010), and Chen Xun (2010).[360] It is therefore these theses which are primarily of interest to

[358] Elmer H. Dyck, 'Canon and interpretation: recent canonical approaches and the Book of Jonah', Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, 1986; Matthew Y. Emerson, 'Christ and the new creation: a canonical approach to the theology of the New Testament', Ph.D. Thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011; Darlene R. Gautsch, '"The words of the wise" and canon: a canonical critical study of Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22', Ph.D. Thesis, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991; Chingboi Guite, 'The Golah community and the other in the Book of Ezra: a literary study', Ph.D. Thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2018; Parlaungan Gultom, 'A taxonomy of approaches of five representative scholars to the creation stories in the Old Testament in the light of Genesis 1-2', Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Evangelical School, 1997; Ron Haydon, '"Seventy sevens are decreed": a canonical approach to Daniel 9:24-27', Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2014; John D. Hays, 'An exegetical and theological study of the Abrahamic covenant in a canonical context', Ph.D. Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992; Hubert J. Keener, 'A canonical exegesis of the eighth Psalm: YHWH's maintenance of the created order through divine reversal', Ph.D. Thesis, Baylor University, 2010; Brian C. Labosier, 'Matthew's exception clause in the light of canonical criticism: a case study in hermeneutics', Ph.D. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1990; Andrew Y. Lee, 'The canonical unity of the scroll of the Minor Prophets', Ph.D. Thesis, Baylor University, 1985; William J. Lyons, 'What must the "judge of all the earth" do exactly?: a critique through praxis of the canonical approach of Brevard S. Childs', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1999; A. J. Meenan, 'An interpretative study of the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32)', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980; Guy M. O'Neal, 'Interpreting Habakkuk as scripture: an application of the canonical approach of Brevard S. Childs', Ph.D. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996; Chong H. Pae, 'The "Book of Watchers" and the "Book of Daniel": apocalypses engaged in the interpretation of the canonical Torah', Ph.D. Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 2000; David D. Pettus, 'A canonical-critical study of selected traditions in the Book of Joel', Ph.D. Thesis, Baylor University, 1992; Anna Rozonoer, 'The invariable variability of the cherubim', Ph.D. Thesis, Boston University, 2014; Jinsung Seok, 'In search of the theological and hermeneutical significance of Psalm 33 in the Psalter: a canonical-theological approach', Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2017; Charles E. Shepherd, 'Theological interpretation and Isaiah 53: a study of Bernhard Duhm, Brevard Childs, and Alec Motyer', Ph.D. Thesis, Durham University, 2012; Jerry E. Shepherd, 'The Book of Psalms as the book of Christ: a christo-canonical approach to the Book of Psalms', Ph.D. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995; Felisi Sorgwe, 'The canonical shape of Ezra-Nehemiah and its theological and hermeneutical implications', Ph.D. Thesis, Baylor University, 1991; Timothy J. Stone, 'The compilational history of the "Megilloth": canon, contoured intertextuality and meaning in the writings', Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011; Philip E. Sumpter, 'The substance of Psalm 24: an attempt to read scripture after Brevard S. Childs', University of Gloucestershire, Ph.D. Thesis, 2011; David M. Williams, 'Not beyond what is written: theological exegesis of scripture', Ph.D. Thesis, Boston College, 2001.

[359] Mark G. Brett, 'The canonical approach to Old Testament study', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1988; Gustav F. Claasen, 'The canonical approach of B. S. Childs', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1996; Daniel R. Driver, 'Brevard Childs: The logic of scripture's textual authority', Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2009; David F. Hartzfeld, 'Gerhard von Rad, Brevard S. Childs: Two methodologies', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990; Paul R. Noble, 'The canonical hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs: a critical reconstruction', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1991; Charles J. Scalise, 'Canonical hermeneutics: The theological basis and implications of the thought of Brevard S. Childs', Ph.D. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987; Chen Xun, 'Theological exegesis in the canonical context: Brevard S. Childs' methodology of biblical theology', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2009.

At the Masters-level: David Barr, 'The pneumatology of Brevard S. Childs', M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 2014; Marc A. Jolley, '"Canonical context" in the recent exegesis of Brevard Childs', M.T. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987; Wilson, 'Childs'. What is particularly useful about Wilson's thesis is that it contains the transcripts of two interviews with Childs (218-37).

[360] Scalise has not been included in this list because his thesis was not published as a whole, though parts were significantly reworked into Charles J. Scalise, *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena: A Canonical Approach* (Macon,

this thesis. These theses can again be subdivided into those which seek to evaluate the canonical approach (Driver and Xun) and those which seek to repair its faults (Brett and Noble). With regard to format, in depth reviews of each published thesis are not provided, though references to where these can be found are.

3.2.1.1 Mark Brett

Brett's thesis[361] was published in 1991 by Cambridge University Press and is the first *published* doctoral thesis on Childs' canonical approach. The sub-title of Brett's published monograph is odd, since it suggests that he is going to consider 'the impact of the canonical approach on Old Testament studies', yet this is not what he does.[362] Rather, the book is an analysis and reconstruction of Childs' canonical approach from a purely OT perspective. The restriction of perspective means that Brett refuses to consider Childs' canonical approach as it relates to the NT (indeed he ignores *NTC*), which is problematic since he excludes the canonical shaping of the NT (§4.3.2.2) as well as how Childs integrates the Testaments (§4.3.3.3). Also problematic is the unfortunate fact that Brett's book was published one year before *BTONT*. As *BTONT* is Childs' main methodological work, and Brett's book is an analysis of Childs' methodology, the latter became out-of-date almost immediately.

With regard to structure, following an introduction Brett presents (chapter 1) an *ad hoc* collection of analytic points which are supposed to sit within his overall aim of the chapter: to place 'the canonical approach within a pluralist understanding of contemporary Biblical Studies'.[363] Brett rejects Childs' 'totalitarian tendency',[364] arguing instead that the canonical

GA: Mercer University Press, 1994). Scalise writes from the perspective of a systematic theologian and seeks to use a reconstructed canonical approach as a means for enabling an evangelical postcritical theology.

361 Brett, *Crisis*. Adapted from, Brett, 'canonical'. Supervised by John W. Rogerson. Brett's external examiner was John Barton. Major reviews include James Barr, 'Review of Mark Brett, Biblical Criticism in Crisis?', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 43/1 (1992), 135-41; John J. Collins, 'Review of Mark Brett, Biblical Criticism in Crisis?', *Theological Studies*, 53/2 (1992), 339-40.

362 Collins, 'Brett', 339.

363 Brett, *Crisis*, 10.

364 Brett, *Crisis*, 11.

approach should be one of many possible approaches within Biblical Studies. Chapter 2 is where Brett's primary literature review begins. He focuses initially on Childs' early monographs, by which he means *M&R*,[365] *BTC*, and *Exodus*. Again, in an *ad hoc* fashion he draws out several aspects of the canonical approach, such as 'the progressive refinement of biblical tradition'[366] (Childs' 'canonical shaping'), 'the privilege of theological reference', and the relationship between a text's composition history and its final form,[367] all with various examples from the books in question. Chapter 3 continues the primary literature review, this time focusing on *IOTS* and *OTTCC*. Chapter 4 moves in a different direction, criticising Childs because he does not take historical particularity seriously.[368] Brett frames this discussion, following Ollenburger, in reference to Gabler's classic distinction between historically-bound claims and normative eternal truths (§3.1.1), questioning whether Childs has made an error by assuming a similar stance.[369] He rightly concludes, 'the canonical approach is not simply a quest for universal ideas'.[370] Chapter 5 is an investigation of the relationship between the canonical process and 'canonical intentionality' (i.e. the theory of canonical shaping). The chapter is hermeneutical in its interests, reflecting deeply on the question of how texts create meaning. Brett follows Gadamer, who classically argued that textual meaning is at least in part constructed by the reader, and not simply by the text. Brett argues that Gadamer can be used to better understand Childs and support the notion that the canonical text can continue to offer 'fresh' meanings.[371] One can see how Brett's use of Gadamer aligns with his preference for pluralism in Biblical Studies. The final chapter 6 seeks further input from Gadamer[372] and also seeks to link the

[365] Childs, *M&R*.
[366] Brett, *Crisis*, 28.
[367] Brett, *Crisis*, 43.
[368] Brett, *Crisis*, 76.
[369] Brett, *Crisis*, 79-80.
[370] Brett, *Crisis*, 81.
[371] Brett, *Crisis*, 146.
[372] Brett, *Crisis*, 149.

canonical approach 'with the intratextual theology developed by Childs's colleagues, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck' (§3.1.7).[373] Brett argues that chapters 4 and 5 are his attempt to provide a charitable reconstruction of Childs' approach,[374] though chapter 6 works towards this aim as well.

Brett's book is often insightful and he offers some excellent criticisms, such as that there is insufficient evidence to fully support Childs' theory of canonical shaping. However, the book also has the feel of a set of *ad hoc* unstructured comments, many of which are now, unfortunately, out-of-date.

3.2.1.2 Paul Noble

Noble's thesis[375] was published in 1995 within Brill's Biblical Interpretation Series. Following Brett, Noble also seeks to provide a 'reconstruction' of Childs' canonical approach.

With regard to structure, in chapters 1-3, Noble provides an overview of Childs' approach, noting several of its key features as well as its academic context, focusing in particular on the work of Stendahl whom he sees as paradigmatic for establishing the difference between descriptive and normative study. Noble then devotes chapters 4-5 to discussions of history and historical methodology as he believes these are problematic in Childs' approach. Chapter 6 discusses Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts, which Noble erringly calls the 'final form' (§3.1.4.1). Chapter 7 focuses on the topic of textual meaning, locating Childs' thought within the context of major hermeneutical discussions. Chapters 8-9 study several philosophical approaches to textual hermeneutics, with particular attention given to Gadamer and his relationship to Childs' thought (as Brett). Chapter 10 studies what Noble calls 'the illumination

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373 Brett. *Crisis*, 156.

374 Brett, *Crisis*, 75.

375 Noble, *Canonical.* Adapted from Noble, 'canonical'. Supervised by G. I. Davies and N. L. A. Lash. I have not been able to locate his examiners. Major reviews include Iain Provan, 'Review of Paul Noble, the Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 52/4 (1999), 530-3; John W. Rogerson, 'Review of Paul Noble, the Canonical Approach. A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 50/1 (1999), 164-7.

by the Spirit' which refers to Childs' notion that the Holy Spirit can use the Bible as a vehicle (§6.2.2) to the reader. Chapter 11, though entitled 'canonical exegesis', is actually a discussion of the relationship between the OT and NT, as well as the practice of figural interpretation (§6.2.3) in Childs' thought. The final chapter 12, then, is Noble's manifesto containing a critical reconstruction of Childs' programme in which he presents eight 'principal elements'.[376]

Noble's thesis is often insightful and has been drawn upon heavily throughout my own. Noble recognises each of the three main elements of Childs' canonical approach which this thesis identifies (though not in the same way and to the same degree), and his criticisms of Childs' weaknesses are often measured and valid. There are, however, several major problems with Noble's thesis. Firstly, Noble's understanding of Childs' methodology is primarily drawn from 'Interpretation'.[377] Whilst this is understandable, because it is in this article that Childs presents the clearest methodology for his approach, it is not correct to assume that 'Interpretation' presents the methodology for Childs' entire approach across time. As has been shown (§2.2), Childs' approach developed substantially over time and thus each iteration needs to be understood in context. 'Interpretation' was written to establish how one should go about writing an OT commentary; it was not a methodology for Biblical Theology, though there are of course crossovers.[378] Secondly, Noble spends too much time analysing the academic context and influences of Childs, rather than on the details of the canonical approach itself. This limits the value of Noble's analysis as it invites the question of whether he has fully wrestled with the fundamentals of Childs' thought. In fact, this is a general trend amongst all of the methodological theses studied for this thesis.

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[376] Noble, *Canonical*, 369.

[377] Childs, 'Interpretation'.

[378] The three dialectics introduced in 'Interpretation' (§2.2) are incorporated in *BTONT*. However, Childs did not have a theory of canonical shaping when he wrote 'Interpretation' nor had he developed the idea of the prioritisation of the canonical texts. Thus, 'Interpretation' misses out two of the three main elements which constitute the canonical approach.

3.2.1.3 Daniel Driver

Driver's[379] monograph was first published in 2010 and, along with Xun, is one of the most recent theses focused solely on Childs' canonical approach. Though it does not say so, the angle of the book is primarily to assess Childs' *influences* (e.g. Gunkel, von Rad, Barth) and *influence upon* academia (whether positive, e.g. Noble and Brett, or negative, e.g. Barr). Driver's book is an excellent literature review, leaning heavily on German scholarship in a manner not attested in similar theses, through which one gains an understanding of Childs' canonical ideas. His summary of Childs' 'career thesis' is as follows: 'the historically shaped canon of scripture, in its two discrete witnesses, is a Christological rule of faith that in the church, by the action of the Holy Spirit, accrues textual authority'.[380] One of the unique contributions of Driver's thesis is that it incorporates for the first time in an academic work items that Childs submitted in a small box to the Princeton Theological Seminary Library archive in the summer of 1995.[381]

With regard to structure, the book is split into three parts, though it is difficult to ascertain their function. After the introduction, part I is entitled 'reading Childs in English and German', and contains an extensive review of the secondary literature (chapter 2). However, it also includes a section on 'What is Biblical Theology?' (chapter 3) that reviews the Barthian influence upon Childs. Thus, the heading for the part is misleading. Part II, then, is entitled 'The Inner Logic of Scripture's Textual Authority', which is a phrase that Driver drew from Childs (as above) and used for the title of his PhD thesis. What this title has to do with the

379 Driver, *Childs*. Adapted from Driver, 'Childs'. Supervised by Nathan MacDonald (primary) and Mark Elliott (secondary). His external examiner was Walter Moberly and his internal Grant Macaskill. Major reviews include Richard S. Briggs. 'Review of Daniel R. Driver, Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian for the Church's One Bible', *Ecclesiology,* 9/1 (2013), 122-25; Collett, 'Driver'.

380 Driver, *Childs*, 4; Driver, 'Childs', 248. Driver's summary (and PhD title) is taken from a quote of Childs (Childs, 'Retrospective', 376; Driver, *Childs*, 101). Driver writes, 'To understand what Childs means here is to understand his entire project' (Driver, *Childs*, 101). Whilst this is an exaggeration, if what Driver means by 'accrues textual authority' is that the canonical texts are authoritative because they have been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations, then he has rightly identified two of the three main elements of Childs' canonical approach. However, what exactly Driver means is unclear.

381 Driver, *Childs*, 13, 319.

content of part II is, however, unclear. Driver proceeds to explore the work of Gunkel and his influence upon Childs (chapter 4), then the topic of Childs and the Yale School (§3.1.7) with particular regard for historical referentiality (chapter 5), followed by an exploration of Childs' thoughts on *midrash* (chapter 6). The final part III, then, is titled 'The Mystery of Christ' and contains a comparison of Childs and James Barr on the topic of allegory (chapter 7), and a case study of Psalm 82 (chapter 8). The section then closes with an epilogue (chapter 9) that summarises what has come before.

Driver's analysis is piercing, informed, and enjoyable to read, but the structure of his thesis is unclear and, unfortunately, unhelpful.[382] For example, one cannot easily locate the major ideas within Childs' approach, which makes the work inaccessible. A further major problem is that, whilst it does wrestle in great deal with biblical (and systematic) *scholarship*, it does not apply an equal level of erudition to the *material evidence* of the Bible itself and how this relates to Childs' ideas. This is not just a problem with Driver, however, and seems to be a general trend amongst those theses which are focused solely on Childs' methodology. Furthermore, whilst he does study Childs' thought in detail, Driver nearly always does so through the work of another scholar (e.g. Rendtorff, Gunkel, Seeligmann, Neusner, Barr, etc.). Whilst this does provide contextual analysis of Childs' thought, it means that less space has been devoted to Childs than is required. Ultimately, the lasting value of Driver's analysis is that it provides a comprehensive contextual understanding of Childs' academic influences and how his work has been received in the Academy. This helpfully frees up this thesis to spend more time studying Childs' ideas.

[382] See also Briggs, who writes, 'If I have a caveat, though, it is that it is not always obvious why each chapter takes the shape it does, or why the chapters come in the order they do: each is thoroughly engaging, but the links are not straightforward' (Briggs, 'Driver', 124).

3.2.1.4 Chen Xun

Xun's[383] monograph on Childs' canonical approach also appeared in 2010 and was published in Peter Lang's Studies in Biblical Literature series. The aim of Xun's book is 'to analyze Brevard S. Childs's concept of theological exegesis in the canonical context and to find out how, on the basis of his canonical approach, he relates modern Biblical Studies with the issues of systematic theology'.[384] Xun expresses that the 'deepest concern of Childs's canonical approach to biblical interpretation is to combine modern Biblical Studies with doctrinal theology'.[385] Whilst it is clear that Childs is concerned with removing the 'iron curtain' between the two disciplines,[386] it is far from clear that this is his 'deepest concern'. Xun approaches the topic, therefore, to see how Childs bridges the gap between the fields of Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology.

Xun's book has seven chapters. After the Introduction (chapter 1), he studies the development of Childs' approach in 'three stages' (chapter 2).[387] In chapter 3 he studies the canonical approach itself, focusing on the concept of the canon. In chapter 4 he then considers at length Childs' dissatisfaction with Historical Criticism and how Childs sought to reform its use within his canonical approach. Chapter 5 considers 'Theological Exegesis' and is concerned with 'how Childs connects biblical exegesis with theology'.[388] Chapter 6, then, though titled 'Evaluation and Reflection' reflects at length on the influence of Barth on Childs, the nature of

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383 Xun, *Canonical*. Adapted from Xun, 'Theological'. Xun was supervised by Miikka Ruokanen. Though it is unclear, his internal examiner was Antti Raunio, and his external was Aleksander Radler. I have been unable to locate any book reviews.

384 Xun, *Canonical*, 269, see also 11.

385 Xun, *Canonical*, 2. It is possible that Xun derives his understanding from Seitz, who, when speaking of *BTONT*, writes that 'Childs's [*sic*] manifest concern is to bring biblical studies and theological reflection into renewed connection, to tear down the "iron curtain" separating the two disciplines' (Seitz, *Word*, 103).

386 Xun, *Canonical*, 179. See Childs, *BTONT*, xvi. Childs also refers to an 'iron curtain' between the study of each Testament (Childs, *NTC*, xv).

387 Xun, *Canonical*, 17. Xun's stages make good sense of the literature. For example, Xun claims that the distinction between the first and second stage (in the 1970s and 1980s) was Childs' departure from the historical critical method and the creation of a canonical approach to Biblical Theology. Yet, the notion that Childs departed from Historical Criticism is incorrect; Childs did not depart from the discipline but rather advocated that it be used in a different way (§3.1.2). It is correct that Childs' first publication on Biblical Theology was published in 1970, but Childs' holistic interests which led to this book were already present far earlier (e.g. Childs, 'Interpretation').

388 Xun, *Canonical*, 167.

Childs' method, its use in the Catholic Church, its relation to Sociology and Philosophy, and whether Childs is post-critical, and liberal or conservative.[389] Chapter 7 is then a conclusion which summarises what has come before.

The structure of Xun's analysis is confusing. For example, chapter 5 is strangely disconnected from chapter 3, despite both being studies of Childs' approach. Also, chapter 6 seems to be an *ad hoc* collection of thoughts which it would have been better to include elsewhere. Despite this, Xun offers many helpful insights into Childs' approach which are drawn upon throughout this thesis. However, Xun's analysis is also unsatisfactory for several reasons. Firstly, he offers no comment on the validity of Childs' approach from the perspective of Biblical Studies. Thus, he does not consider whether there is actually any material evidence to validate Childs' claims, particularly regarding canonical shaping. Secondly, he does not properly analyse the main elements of Childs' approach. He does recognise the theory of canonical shaping (§4), the prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5), and the move from witness to subject matter (§6), but his analysis is shallow as it does not properly wrestle with Childs' ideas and the assumptions which underlie them. Thirdly, Xun makes several strange and incorrect claims.[390] Fourthly, the quality of Xun's footnotes is often poor; he will often make a statement or present a quotation but then not indicate where these are taken from,[391] which makes it difficult for one to engage with his arguments.

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389 Xun claims that, 'In the sixth chapter I present a critical evaluation and methodological reflection of Childs's theological exegesis in the canonical context' (Xun, *Canonical*, xiii). However, it appears that this chapter is an ad hoc collection of elements which Xun has struggled to fit elsewhere.

390 E.g. 'we know with certainty that the Jewish canon was closed by A.D. 100' (Xun, *Canonical*, 68-9) – this is not correct. He also writes, 'the final form of the text means the form given to the text by the last editor or redactor' (Xun, Canonical, 71) – this is not what Childs is arguing (§3.1.3.1). Furthermore, Xun writes that 'Childs's canonical intentionality accepts the criteria of apostolicity' (Xun, *Canonical*, 82), which (i) does not make sense, and (ii) is not something Childs has ever said.

391 E.g. Xun, *Canonical*, 80 n.72, 81 n.75. Sometimes he even makes quotations without including any footnotes, see the second paragraph on page 81.

3.2.2 Other Key Scholars

A handful of key scholars who have contributed to the debate regarding Childs' canonical approach will now be considered, arranged chronologically by birth date. These scholars were selected using the criterion of multiple attestation in the sense that they are regularly referred to as the major voices on the topic of the canonical approach within the field of Biblical Studies.[392] Notably, all five of these key scholars are OT/HB specialists (three of whom were presidents of the Society for Old Testament Study – thus they are major scholars in the field), which reflects Childs' limited influence upon NT studies; a point Childs bemoans.[393]

3.2.2.1 James Sanders

In 1972 James Sanders published *Torah and Canon*[394] in which he advocated for an approach called 'canonical criticism'. As Sanders was active in the same period as Childs, some have grouped them together as if they were advocates for the same approach. Whilst there is overlap, it is a mistake to understand Sanders' 'canonical criticism' and Childs' 'canonical approach' as synonymous.[395] Notably, Childs explicitly rejected the labelling of his approach as 'canonical

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[392] Other relevant, but not major, figures include: Gignilliat, *Canonical*; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: ein kanonischer Entwurf*, 2 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999-2001) (notably, Rendtorff sees his approach as a development of Gerhard von Rad's approach, rather than Childs' (Rendtorff, *Theologie*, 1)); John H. Salihamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995). For a study of Childs' influence upon German-speaking scholarship, see Driver, *Childs*, 60-79. The extent of Childs' influence upon this scholarship is disputed; Barton claims he has 'little following in Germany' (Barton, *Reading*, 95) whereas Seitz claims, 'It is hard to say whether any non-German biblical scholar has ever been so thoroughly read and reacted to in German-speaking circles' (Seitz, *Character*, 63).

[393] Speaking about *NTC*: 'By and large in N. America and in Britain the N.T. book has had no impact. It hasn't even been read' (Childs as quoted in Wilson, 'Childs', 219). Seitz observes that it is 'surprising' how little impact *NTC* had upon NT scholarship (Seitz, *Word*, 103).

[394] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (2nd edn, Eugene, OR: Cascade Book, 2005). See also James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984); James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987); James A. Sanders, 'Scripture as Canon in the Church', in *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa: Atti del Simposio promosso della Congregazione per la doctrine della fede, Roma, September 1999* (Vatican City: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2001), 121-43; James A. Sanders, 'The Issue of Closure in the Canonical Process', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 252-63.

[395] 'Although many biblical scholars do not distinguish between "canonical criticism" and the "canonical approach," this distinction is crucial if we are to attain any clarity on the issues at stake' (Brett, *Crisis*, 20); 'it would be unfair to compare the two models or evaluate the merits of the two terms, as though they were valid competitors in a market yet to make up its mind' (Seitz, *Character*, 29).

criticism', though it was because he did not want his approach to be categorised as yet another sub-discipline of Historical Criticism, not because he wanted to distinguish his approach from Sanders.[396] Childs wrote a review article for *Torah and Canon* which comments on the similarities and differences between his canonical approach and Sanders' canonical criticism.[397] Also, both Spina and Xun have undertaken extensive studies of the relationship between the two.[398] These studies will not be rehearsed here and instead the following brief analysis is offered. What Childs and Sanders share is a desire to understand how the Bible (though Sanders has a particular focus on the Torah and OT) has been shaped throughout its long history to use this understanding as a paradigm for using the Bible in the present Christian Church. Indeed, Sanders praises Childs for this desire.[399] Where they differ substantially, however, is their understanding of the significance of canonical shaping. Childs sees the canonical texts as the pinnacle of canonical shaping, and thus it is they which are to provide the basis for interpretation in the Church. Sanders rejects this[400] and instead finds exegetical significance in the flexible attitude which the Bible's tradents had in shaping their traditions, with the implication that this attitude can be imitated today.[401] Ultimately, both Childs' canonical approach and Sanders' canonical criticism can be seen as two attempts to deal seriously with the way the Bible was shaped in actual communities, though they derive different exegetical implications from this shaping and have different overall aims and methodologies.[402]

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396 Brevard Childs, 'The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature', *Interpretation*, 32/1 (1978), 46-55 (54); Childs, *IOTS*, 82. See also Barton, *Reading*, 90; Barton, 'Canonical', 203; Scalise, *Hermeneutics*, 44; Gerald T. Sheppard, 'True and False Prophecy within Scripture', in Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen and Robert R. Wilson (eds.)*, Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 262-84 (264). Xun presents a detailed study of this rejection, including an extensive list of references within the secondary literature to Childs' approach as 'canonical criticism' (Xun, *Canonical*, 153-6).

397 Brevard S. Childs, 'A Call to Canonical Criticism', *Interpretation*, 27/1 (1973), 88-91.

398 Frank A. Spina, 'Canonical Criticism: Childs Versus Sanders', in W. McCown and J. B. Massey (eds.)*, Interpreting God's Word for Today*, Wesleyan Theological Perspectives, vol. 2 (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1982), 165-94; Xun, *Canonical*, 160-4.

399 Sanders, *Torah*, xii.

400 Sanders, 'Canon', 163. See also Soulen and Soulen, *Biblical*, 33; Xun, *Canonical*, 163-4.

401 'A canon is basically a community's paradigm for how to continue the dialogue in ever changing socio-political contexts' (Sanders, 'Canonical', 262).

402 Note Sanders' hostility towards Biblical Theology in Sanders, *Torah*, 135.

3.2.2.2 James Barr

> Childs' publications in Biblical Theology are likely to do great harm to the subject and its prospects, particularly because they confirm the most significant suspicions of the enemies of Biblical Theology, who will see it as a mode for the enunciation of personal convictions and for the advancement of existing and established modern theologies. Even for those devoted to the advancement of Biblical Theology Childs offers little. He does not offer a method which can be followed by others, especially if they do not share his views in full. The whole work, as already stated, is an apologetic for the rightness of his own methods and his own personal theology; and his arguments consist in large measure of ruling out as illegitimate all methods and evidences that might lead to a different exegesis than his and all theological values that differ from his.[403]

> It is obvious that James Barr and this reviewer differ widely on many essential points. However, what is far more disturbing is what appears to be the level of misunderstanding. I come away from reading Barr's book with the impression that the major concerns of my *Introduction* have been badly misinterpreted and that much of the attack has missed the mark. It would be unfair to imply that all the problem lies with Barr. Certainly some of my formulations need improvement and more precision. It is troubling when an author scarcely recognizes his own profile in another's mirror. Nevertheless, I feel strongly that Barr has misconstrued my approach and consistently read my book against the grain.[404]

Amongst Childs' critics, there is none more vociferous, aggressive,[405] and inaccurate than James Barr.[406] Though he has stated that he found the canonical approach to be interesting and stimulating,[407] and that he thought Childs to be 'a great person and a great friend',[408] Barr also took the time to fully explain why Childs' canonical approach was flawed. His views can be found primarily in his review article for *IOTS*,[409] his monograph dedicated to criticising the authority of the canon,[410] a *Festschrift* article 'dedicated' to Childs (though the article itself is

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403 Barr, *Concept*, 438.

404 Brevard S. Childs, 'Review of Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism, by James Barr', *Interpretation*, 38 (1984), 66-70 (67). See also Noble, *Canonical*, 3 n.14. Childs also believed his approach had been misunderstood more widely: 'Frequently, I have had genuine difficulty in even recognizing those features that have been assumed by reviewers to be constitutive of my approach' (Childs, *Isaiah*, xii).

405 On which see Walter Brueggemann, 'James Barr on Old Testament Theology: A Review of the Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective', *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 22/1 (2000), 58-74; Seitz, 'Canonical', 70 n.36.

406 In Driver's more restrained tone: 'Barr's voice can obstruct a fair and balanced assessment of the canonical approach. He is known for a critical style as incendiary as it is incisive, and some find this to have tarnished his account of Childs' (Driver, *Childs*, 42).

407 Barr, *Concept*, 428.

408 James Barr, 'The Theological Case Against Biblical Theology', in Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (eds.), *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 3-19 (18).

409 James Barr, 'Childs' Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 5/16 (1980), 12-23.

410 Barr, *Scripture*.

hostile to Childs' ideas),[411] and an extensive chunk of his monolithic *The Concept of Biblical Theology*.[412] His relationship with Childs has also been the subject of academic attention.[413]

Summarising Barr's comments on Childs' canonical approach is no easy task because of their sheer volume, and because Barr's writing style, though profound and highly informed, is loosely structured. Before diving into some of Barr's key comments, it is important to note that he has been called to account for both the tone of his criticisms and the validity of his portrayal. For example, Noble writes that Barr 'shows little comprehension of the structure and goals of Childs' programme; on the contrary, his expositions of Childs often descend into caricature and misrepresentation'.[414] As the above quotation shows, Childs also thought that Barr had misconstrued his approach to the point that it was unrecognisable.

Let us consider Barr's criticisms of Childs. Firstly, Barr challenges the notion that Childs' Biblical Theology can be called 'theology' at all. What Barr means is that Childs' approach is not concerned with the truth of the claims made in the biblical texts and therefore is descriptive (as opposed to normative) Biblical Theology (§3.1.1).

> In spite of the many claims made by canonical criticism to be a more truly *theological* approach to scripture than other scholarly approaches have been, its actual product thus far has shown no results that could be said to justify these claims. Simply to *say* that it is more theological does not prove anything. The only aspect of canonical criticism, as developed up to the present time, that might justifiably claim to be really theological seems to be its insistence that the starting point of exegesis must be the Bible as it is, since it is to scripture as it is, in its present form and defined by the canon, that Judaism and the church offer allegiance. But no step in the actual operation of canonical criticism can be described as genuinely theological. It does not attempt to wrestle with the question of *truth*.[415]

As will be demonstrated later (§6.4), this is a misunderstanding of Childs' approach. Childs *is* concerned with truth, but in a nuanced way. I.e., he investigates the historical accuracy of the biblical texts when it contributes to the illumination of the canonical wordings (§3.1.2), and he

411 Barr, 'Case'.

412 Barr, *Concept*.

413 Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Barr on Canon and Childs', *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, 7 (1983), 2-4; Richard Topping, 'The Canon and the Truth: Brevard Childs and James Barr on the Canon and the Historical-Critical Method', *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 8/2 (1992), 239-60.

414 Noble, *Canonical*, 3.

415 Barr, *Scripture*, 102. See also Xun, *Canonical*, 253.

entrusts responsibility for determining the theological truth of the Bible's witness to the Holy Spirit as part of a *Sachkritik* which attempts to move from witness to subject matter (§6.2).

Secondly, Barr levels the criticism against Childs' that his approach is not 'canonical', but is instead a presentation of Childs' doctrinal opinions reinforced by proof texts.[416] Barr claims he formed his opinion after considering the structure of Childs' *BTONT*, which he thinks is arbitrary and does not derive from the canon itself.[417] Though he makes the point in too harsh a tone, Barr is correct to some extent. Childs' methodology for his Biblical Theology is not entirely derived from the canon itself. Indeed, the canon does not affirm the identity or priority of the canonical text, nor does it provide a hermeneutical methodology for moving from witness to subject matter in a kind of *Sachkritik*. However, Barr is not correct to call the structure of *BTONT* 'arbitrary'. Childs presents his findings thematically after attempting to systematise all that he has found by observing signs of canonical shaping in each biblical book. He then attempts to move from that 'witness' to the subject matter to which it points. This is far from arbitrary.[418]

Thirdly, Barr has been wary of Childs' approach because it could be used to further the agenda of fundamentalist Christians. Importantly, Barr knows that Childs is not a fundamentalist,[419] but what worries him is that his approach is open to being hijacked by fundamentalists – who are a major concern to Barr and who have received considerable attention in his writings.[420]

> It is not at all Childs' own approach: but it will simply read into his scheme its own referential and extrinsic convictions. Childs has created a vacuum into which they naturally flow; and he has

416 Barr, *Concept*, 401, 412, 422; Barr, *Scripture*, 165.

417 Barr, *Concept*, 398.

418 Similarly, Xun's claim that Childs 'chooses the theological topics freely and creatively' is inaccurate (Xun, *Theological*, 195).

419 Barr, *Concept*, 437; Barr, *Scripture*, 148. Also, Barton writes, 'it is manifestly plain that Childs himself cannot be called a fundamentalist. But the structure of his arguments bears an interesting *analogy* to those used by fundamentalists' (Barton, *Reading*, 98).

420 Barr, *Fundamentalism*; Barr, *Escaping*.

> removed, to a considerable extent, the extrinsic critical effect of modern biblical study which was the main obstacle to these convictions.[421]

Barr was concerned that Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts disregards any earlier strata (as well as any associated scholarship on these strata) and opens the door to fundamentalists who wish to by-pass historical critical scholarship to read the Bible as final form Scripture given perfectly by God.[422] Barr's logic is sound, but unfortunately his initial premise is incorrect, and provides a fine example of why he is so regularly accused of misunderstanding Childs. This thesis has already demonstrated that Childs was not against Historical Criticism (§3.1.2). As a final point, Childs has not been readily welcomed by fundamentalists in the way that Barr predicted (nor, indeed, by evangelicals[423]), which is not surprising given the complexity of his approach and its ambiguity regarding divine inspiration (§2.3.2.2).[424]

Fourthly, further to the above, Barr is convinced that Childs' approach rejects the historical study of any forms of the biblical texts which predate the canonical texts. Indeed, Barr reckons that Childs is against Historical Criticism and is even a fierce opponent of the Enlightenment.[425] However, Chapman is correct when he writes that Barr's understanding 'is as obviously wrong as it is influential'.[426] As has been shown (§3.1.2), Childs is not against

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421 Barr, 'Introduction', 23.

422 Barr, *Concept*, 148.

423 Chapman, 'Inspiration', 171, 174; Carl F. H. Henry, 'Canonical Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 8 (1990), 76-108.

424 Consider Childs' response to the charge against him: 'The charge has frequently been made among Anglo-Saxon readers that my Introduction will lend support and comfort to the conservative/Fundamentalist element within the church. Indeed this accusation appears to play a major role in James Barr's strongly negative reaction. I suppose that if one has a fixation on Fundamentalism and considers it as the major threat to serious biblical scholarship, then any measure of comfort would automatically suffice to condemn a position. I would have thought a book should be judged on its own merits and not from its possible misuse. If some Fundamentalists find portions of the book agreeable, I can only rejoice that they are not completely without light. Actually the dynamics of a canonical approach to the Old Testament is sharply at odds with the Fundamentalist position. The role assigned to the history of tradition, the function of the community as tradents of the tradition, and the time-conditionality of the canonical witness, all move in a direction which is antithetical to conservatism. Indeed, the hard-line Fundamentalist might well find a canonical Introduction to be a greater threat to his position than the usual Historical Criticism because it cannot be all to quickly dismissed as unbelief' (Childs, 'Response', 58-9). Note that he also wrote earlier, 'we regard the Fundamentalist position as indefensible' (Childs, *BTC*, 141).

425 'Childs demonizes the Enlightenment: to him it seems to be pure evil, the latter-day Antichrist, the universal source of absolute ruin to all Christian thinking' (Barr, *Concept*, 432). See also Brett who writes that *IOTS* contains 'an outright polemic against diachronic approaches' (Brett, *Crisis*, 4).

426 Chapman, 'Historical', 65. It is obvious because every single study of each biblical book in both *IOTS* and *NTC* begins with historical critical considerations which enable one to better understand the shaping of the canonical

Historical Criticism (nor, indeed, the Enlightenment) but is frustrated with the way it is often used. He thinks that its focus on genetic questions as an end in itself neglects the study of the canonical forms of the biblical texts and he therefore wants to reorient Historical Criticism towards the study of *both* the canonical *and* earlier forms of the biblical texts.

In sum: Barr demonstrates both extraordinary insight and fallibility in his analysis of Childs canonical approach. The hostility he shows to Childs is striking, but it can be explained by his pastoral desires to protect Christians from the dangers of Fundamentalism (which to him were many). This, however, is not an excuse for improper academic protocol and conduct, and it is not right that his pastoral concerns did not extend to his fellow scholar. However, Barr's misrepresentations of Childs have inadvertently advanced the conversation by motivating scholars to formulate a fairer understanding of Childs' thought.

3.2.2.3 John Barton

Throughout his career, Barton has regularly provided a critical and insightful voice in response to Childs' developing canonical approach. His most relevant works include: two chapters devoted to Childs in *Reading the Old Testament*,[427] the book chapter 'Canonical Approaches Ancient and Modern'[428] which seeks to correct common misunderstandings about Childs' approach,[429] and indirectly his *The Spirit and the Letter*[430] which provides a detailed study into the history of the Bible's formation and therefore can be used to evaluate Childs' ideas. Though Barton is both an expert in and general supporter of James Barr,[431] he is not as critical of Childs as his former Oxford colleague, but he cannot be called a supporter of Childs' approach either.

texts. See also, 'He [Childs] never becomes an enemy of the Enlightenment, and he is not against the spirit of the Enlightenment' (Xun, *Canonical*, 113).

427 Barton, *Reading*, 77-88, 89-103.

428 Barton, 'Canonical'.

429 See the section, 'Misunderstandings of the Canonical Approach', in Barton, 'Canonical', 200-4.

430 Barton, *Spirit*.

431 Barton was the editor responsible for gathering all of James Barr's published articles in: John Barton (ed.), *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Driver incorrectly thinks that Barton should be categorised alongside those who seek to reconstruct Childs' canonical approach (e.g. Brett and Noble).[432] Rather, Barton seeks to bring clarity and understanding to Childs' thought in a manner that is often lacking in the secondary literature. He seeks to show the context in which the canonical approach works, i.e. as a form of exegesis which is informed by historical study and which moves into a kind of Literary Criticism and Structuralism. Importantly, however, Barton thinks that Childs' approach, as a *theological* enterprise, is a failure; hence he writes, 'The idea is coherent, even if we can't see why it should be normative'.[433]

3.2.2.4 Walter Moberly

> For me, pride of place in rethinking must be given to Brevard Childs, whose work, itself informed by Karl Barth, first enabled me to see that there might be fresh possibilities opening up.[434]

In a review of Moberly's *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*,[435] Barton writes that Moberly 'is probably the most distinguished representative in Britain of an approach akin to Childs' "canonical approach."'[436] There is significant truth in this. At points Moberly[437] has identified his own work explicitly as a 'canonical approach',[438] and he notes his indebtedness to Childs in a personal letter.[439] He also wrote an article to illuminate the methodology of Childs' canonical approach and to offer brief points of evaluation.[440] Following Childs' 2003 article, 'Critique of Recent

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[432] Driver, *Childs*, 44.

[433] Barton, *Reading*, 94.

[434] Moberly, 'Theological', 165.

[435] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[436] John Barton, 'Review of R. W. L. Moberly, The Bible, Theology, and Faith', *Biblical Interpretation*, 10/1 (2002), 89-91. See also Xun, *Canonical*, 159.

[437] My understanding of Moberly in this section was derived primarily from the man himself. I am extremely grateful for the interview which Moberly allowed me to conduct by telephone on Friday 24th May 2019 whilst he was on research leave. I am also grateful to Moberly for giving me copies of two letters which he wrote to Childs in response to 'Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation', as well as Childs' response. This correspondence was also made available to Driver (Driver, *Childs*, 168 n.39).

[438] Moberly, *Genesis*, 40, 130.

[439] 'The developing and sustaining of your arguments until they have won wide acceptance is a substantial achievement, and many scholars, including myself, are lastingly in your debt' (R. W. L. Moberly, *Letter to Childs*, 11th August 2003, 1).

[440] Moberly, 'Childs', 104-9.

Intertextual Canonical Interpretation',[441] Moberly lost the conviction that his was a canonical approach in the image of Childs. He wrote to Childs seeking clarification.

> […] important aspects of what I have made my own in rethinking the nature and use of conventional biblical scholarship I thought I had learned from you; and, unless you have changed your mind, your criticisms puzzle me and give me pause.[442]

Childs did little to address Moberly's concerns,[443] and thus it not surprising that in Moberly's latest works there is little to connect him with Childs' thought explicitly. However, it is clear that much of Moberly's work is implicitly influenced by Childs. This can be seen both in the language that Moberly employs,[444] and also in the methodology of his interpretative approach. Moberly regularly shows: an integration of diachronic and theological study, with the former directed toward illuminating the latter; a concern to understand how the HB has been shaped to be read as Scripture; a concern to focus on the subject matter to which the Bible points.[445]

3.2.2.5 Christopher Seitz

> This commentary is dedicated to Christopher R. Seitz, cherished friend, brilliant interpreter, defender of the faith.[446]

If there is one scholar who is seen globally as being the major advocate for Childs' canonical approach today it is Christopher Seitz.[447] Seitz has been the co-editor of two dedicated essay

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[441] Brevard S. Childs, 'Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 115/2 (2003), 173-84.

[442] Moberly, *Letter to Childs*, 11th August 2003, 1.

[443] In a later work, Moberly writes, 'Unfortunately, subsequent correspondence between us failed to clarify matters' (Moberly, 'Theological', 173 n.37).

[444] Note the use of Childsian terms: 'canonical significance' (Moberly, *Bible*, 72), 'canonical context' (Moberly, *Bible*, 80; Moberly, *Genesis*, 12, 157, 189), and 'canonical form' (Moberly, *Bible*, 115).

[445] These Childsian features can be seen in particular in Moberly's study of the verb חרם 'to devote to destruction' in Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut. 7:2) (R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 64-71). Moberly affirms the value of diachronic study for illuminating synchronic study and theological interpretation: 'The discussion will be a good example of the difference that judgments about the world behind the text can make to one's judgments about the world within the text (or in other terminology, it illustrates the enduring value of historical-critical insights for good exegesis' (Moberly, *Theology*, 64). Later he writes, 'My proposal is that such a metaphorizing move is already present within the text of Deuteronomy itself' (Moberly, *Theology*, 68), which is what Childs would refer to as canonical shaping (§4). Furthermore, Moberly makes extensive efforts to consider the subject matter of the relevant passages and their implications in the modern day (e.g. Moberly, *Theology*, 73-4).

[446] Childs, *Isaiah*, v.

[447] Nathan MacDonald writes that Seitz is 'the foremost proponent of the canonical approach today' (see his recommendation in the blurb of Seitz, *Character*).

collections[448] to Childs and presented a tribute at a meeting of the International Society of Biblical Literature following Childs' death.[449] Seitz sits alongside Brett (§3.2.1.1) and Noble (§3.2.1.2) as one who seeks to revise the canonical approach and take it forward. He has advocated for Childs' approach and developed his own reconstruction across several publications.[450] Seitz had considerable experience of working with Childs both as a student and colleague at Yale University.[451] Childs was notably fond of Seitz, as the above opening quotation shows, calling him a 'cherished friend'. Seitz is drawn upon regularly throughout this thesis as he often provides incisive perspectives on Childs' thought. This section focuses on his most concise portrayal of Childs' approach since doing so is useful to show how this thesis builds upon Seitz's views.

Helpfully,[452] Seitz's understanding and critique of Childs' canonical approach is found within one particular chapter of his book, *The Character of Christian Scripture*,[453] which is an update of an earlier essay.[454] In contrast to this thesis, Seitz claims that Childs' approach consists of 'five features' that have largely stayed the same since the publication of *BTC* in 1970. This thesis

448 Seitz and Richards, *Bible*; Seitz and Greene-McCreight, *Childs*.

449 Seitz, 'Tribute'.

450 Namely, Seitz, *Word*; Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Seitz, 'Canonical'; Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: A New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007); Seitz, *Character*. For a detailed study of Seitz's take on the canonical approach, see the unpublished Gregory E. T. Papazian, 'Reading the Old Testament as Christian scripture: A critical assessment of the canonical approach of Christopher R. Seitz', M.T.S. Thesis, Conrad Grebel University College, 2007.

451 Seitz completed a Master of Sacred Theology (1981), M.A. (1982), M.Phil. (1983), and Ph.D. (1986) at Yale University, and was Professor of OT there from 1987-1997. Childs was on the examination committee for Seitz's Ph.D. (Christopher R. Seitz, 'Theology in conflict: Reactions to the exile in the book of Jeremiah', Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 1986, iii).

452 Though it is helpful that the majority of Seitz's views are to be found in one place, they are by no means clear or accessible. Seitz's writing is often too complex and unclear, thus it is hard to grasp what his views actually are. Levenson shares a similar view, writing that, at times, Seitz's discussion is 'hard to follow' (Jon D. Levenson, 'Review of the Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible', *The Catholic Bible Quarterly*, 75/3 (2013), 596-7 (596)). Also problematic is that his style of publication is sometimes confusing (as in Seitz, *Character*; Seitz, *Word*), containing collections of essays rather than a sustained argument in a monograph.

453 See the section 'The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation', in Seitz, *Character*, 27-92.

454 Seitz, 'Canonical'.

has already shown that these features did not remain the same (§2.2), but let us consider Seitz's taxonomy further.

> Already in Childs' 1970 work, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, now over forty years old, one can see at least five features emerging that have proved durable and of sustained interest for a canonical approach:
>
> 1. a critiqued and recalibrated use of the historical-critical method;
>
> 2. a unique handling of the final form of the text that, as we shall see, eschews harmonization and the peril of "the disappearing redactor" on one side, but also judges the partial observations of historical criticism to be much less compelling than the whole represented by the final stabilization of the diverse sources and traditions in a coherent literary form;
>
> 3. passing yet pregnant observations on the status of the Hebrew and Greek text traditions;
>
> 4. sensitivity to the so-called premodern history of interpretation and even to what has been pejoratively called dogmatic reading, but with a critical evaluation of this history based upon insights from our own historical-critical season of reading and analysing texts; and
>
> 5. biblical-theological handling of the two Testaments, in which the Old retains its voice as Christian scripture and biblical theology is more than a sensitive appreciation of how the New handles the Old – a dimension that Childs otherwise handles with aplomb in a series of fresh exegetical illustrations in the final section of *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.[455]

Seitz's features provide a helpful overview of many parts of Childs' canonical approach and thus they are a good starting point for understanding. However, these features can be recategorised and built upon to establish a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Childs. Thus, let us consider the features Seitz identifies individually and assess how they might be reframed and supplemented.

Starting with the first feature, Seitz is correct that Childs' approach does contain a 'recalibrated' historical-critical method, which has already been considered (§3.1.2). However, Seitz does not explain that the reason why this is so is Childs' theory of canonical shaping. As Childs believes that the canonical forms of the biblical texts have been intentionally shaped for future generations, Historical Criticism (and, indeed, any other academic discipline) must focus primarily on illuminating those canonical texts. Thus, Childs' incorporation of Historical Criticism is better understood as a consequence of his theory of canonical shaping, and thus is

[455] Seitz, *Character*, 29-30.

better categorised under what this thesis calls the first main element of Childs' canonical approach (§4).

Regarding Seitz's second feature, that Childs' canonical approach includes 'a unique handling of the final form of the text', this is largely accurate but misses one subtle nuance. As has been shown (§3.1.4.1), Childs is not focused on the 'final' forms of the biblical texts but rather on the canonical texts; these are earlier textual strata that need to be uncovered. Though Seitz incorrectly identifies the canonical texts, he does rightly grasp the significance which Childs gives to them; i.e. they have 'superiority' during interpretation as the pinnacles of traditions that have been passed down for future generations.[456] This thesis categorises Seitz's second feature as Childs' second main element: his prioritisation of the canonical wordings.

Seitz's third feature is that the canonical approach makes 'passing yet pregnant observations on the status of the Hebrew and Greek text traditions'. Seitz is right when he makes this observation, but in a more comprehensive understanding of Childs' approach it should be categorised under Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5). Childs comments on the Hebrew and Greek texts *because* he wishes to define the specific texts that contain the pinnacle of canonical shaping. For the OT this is a form of the Masoretic text-type that became authoritative amongst the central Jewish authorities by the end of the first century CE at the latest (§5.2), and for the NT it is a collection of readings which the Church has sanctioned as authoritative (§5.3).

Seitz's fourth feature is Childs' 'sensitivity' to the interpretation of the Bible within the Church before the advent of Historical Criticism. Seitz is correct that this is an aspect of Childs' approach, though he overplays its importance in the canonical approach. Whilst Childs is interested in precritical interpreters (see §3.1.5), this interest is only ever minor, receiving very

[456] Seitz, *Character*, 49.

little attention (except in *Exodus*). Thus it is not correct to characterise it as a main element, hence it has not been framed as such in this thesis.

Seitz's fifth and final feature is Childs' focus on the juxtaposition of the OT and NT in the context of Biblical Theology. Seitz helpfully observes that Childs seeks to maintain the discrete witness of the OT and understand it in relation to the NT in such a way that its integrity is preserved. Again, turning to a larger understanding of Childs, this feature can be categorised as a component of Childs' theory of canonical shaping. As will be shown later (§4), Childs' theory of canonical shaping extends across multiple literary levels. One of these is the canon of Scripture, and thus his interest in the juxtaposition of the Testaments is part of a study of canonical shaping at the level of the canon (§4.3.3.3).

Though Seitz provides a helpful foundation for understanding Childs, in his list of features he misses that Childs seeks to use the Bible as a vehicle for knowing its subject matter (God). As has been shown (§2.3.1), this is the reason that Childs reads the Bible, the reason why he invented the canonical approach, and the goal to which the canonical approach is geared. Hence, 'The Search for the Bible's Subject Matter' (§6) has been included in this thesis as the final main element of Childs' canonical approach. In sum: from the material studied, Seitz's analysis of Childs is often perceptive and helpful, but the way it presents the main elements of Childs' approach can be improved.

3.2.3 Excursus: Childs and Protestantism

Is it accurate to suggest that Childs' approach is, in the context of Christianity,[457] only relevant to the Protestant denomination?[458] It is true that Childs was a Protestant (Presbyterian), and that his major influences were as well (Barth, Luther, Calvin). Similarly, he has drawn attention primarily from Protestant biblical scholars; indeed, all five of the major scholars identified in

[457] Importantly, this thesis does not explore whether Childs' approach is relevant to other religions. On which see the essay, 'Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology' in Levenson, *Criticism*, 33-61.

[458] Of note is that Levenson calls Childs' approach a 'rather Protestant formulation' (Levenson, *Criticism*, 81).

§3.2.2 are Protestants. However, this does not mean that Childs is only relevant to Protestants. This is because the topics Childs engages with are non-denominational; how to read the Bible, how to find unity amongst the Bible's diversity, how to use the Bible as a theological resource, how to distinguish divine revelation from human literature, etc, are all perennial issues and thus not the property of any one denomination.

Why is it, then, that these topics seem to be engaged with mostly by Protestants? There are two possible reasons: (i) because Protestants have a high doctrine of Scripture in relation to other denominations, and (ii) because the academic study of the Bible has been particularly well embraced within Protestantism. Regarding the former, in Protestantism the Bible is the primary source of theological authority. This is a result of the Reformation's elevation of the Bible above Tradition.[459] Thus, it is of paramount importance for Protestants to engage with the above topics deeply. In contrast, for example, the Catholic Church regards apostolic Tradition as a source of authority alongside Scripture.[460] Thus, whilst Scripture is important to Catholics, it is not as important as it is to Protestants since for Catholics it is supplemented with Tradition.[461] Regarding the latter reason, critical Biblical Studies has long been embraced by many (though not all[462]) Protestants, whereas it has not by many Christians of other denominations. Indeed, in my experience there are more Protestant biblical scholars working in academic Biblical Studies than there are Catholics or Greek orthodox, etc. This disparity is, in part, a consequence of past hostility towards Biblical Studies. For example, the Catholic Church was largely sceptical of critical Biblical Studies until 1943.[463]

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459 Stuhlmacher, *Historical*, 32.

460 See *CCC* §77-83.

461 Levenson observes that there are more Protestants engaged in Biblical Theology than Catholics because 'the Christian Bible bears a greater weight in Protestantism than in Catholicism' (Levenson, *Criticism*, 45).

462 One thinks of the Protestant fundamentalist-modernist controversy (the so-called 'Battle for the Bible') of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Noll, *Criticism*). Biblical scholarship continues to be an issue for Protestant evangelicals today (see Brown, 'Inspiration'; Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Christopher M. Hays and Christopher B. Ansberry (eds.), *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (London: SPCK, 2013)).

463 In 1893 Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* which was hostile towards the academic study of the Bible, warning that it could be damaging to Christian faith. However, the position of the Catholic

The dominance of Protestants within the academic debates on the above perennial topics means that descriptions and evaluations of Childs' work have largely, though not exclusively, taken place in a Protestant-leaning context.[464] However, this is not necessarily a problem, as the dominance of Protestant scholarship is not nefarious or conspiratorial, but rather is the inadvertent historical/sociological consequence of factors such as, for example, the Protestant doctrine of Scripture and attitudes towards critical Biblical Studies in the Catholic Church. Of course, major engagement with Childs from outside of Protestantism would be welcome, but it is not necessary *per se*. This is because what ultimately matters in scholarship is not one's group identity but rather one's competency as a scholar.

Church was altered in 1943 when Pope Pius XII published the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* as a 50-year commemoration of his predecessor's letter. This letter opened the gates for Catholics to embrace biblical scholarship to an extent not seen before. Importantly, I am not suggesting that the Catholic Church was not engaged in Biblical Studies before 1943, rather I am suggesting that it was hostile to *critical* Biblical Studies (i.e. the study of the Bible with a particular emphasis on semantics, genre, and neutrality – so Barton, *Nature*).

[464] This context is not an 'echo-chamber' as few Protestants have actually affirmed Childs' approach.

Part B. The Main Elements of the Canonical Approach

4 The Theory of Canonical Shaping

> […] there is innumerable evidence in this literature with which to prove that its tradents attempted to select, re-arrange, and interpret the material so that it could also authoritatively address future generations of the community […].[465]

> The canon […] represents a culminating event in a theological process of sifting and discernment.[466]

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the first of the main elements of Childs' canonical approach: the theory of canonical shaping. With regard to structure, it begins by providing an answer to the question, 'what is the theory of canonical shaping?' (§4.1). Following this, it identifies exactly what Childs means by 'the Bible', i.e. which books in which order (§4.2). Next it undertakes a detailed study of the 'signs' of canonical shaping that Childs finds across three literary levels of the Bible to support his theory (§4.3). The chapter then closes with a conclusion (§4.4).

4.1 What is the Theory of Canonical Shaping?

Childs' theory of canonical shaping[467] is a theory about how the Bible was formed and has implications for its interpretation in contemporary Christianity. It is a large and comprehensive theory, covering multiple stages of the Bible's formation, from the writing of the first compositional forms of the biblical texts to the eventual structuring of the Christian canon(s). Simply put, as the initial quotation suggests, Childs' theory of canonical shaping states that the Bible is a literary corpus which has been shaped to function as normative theological literature for future generations.[468]

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[465] 'gibt es zahllose Anzeichen in dieser Literatur, die belegen, daß ihre Tradenten auszuwählen, neu zu ordnen und das Material so zu interpretieren versuchten, daß es auch künftige Generationen der Gemeinde autoritativ ansprechen konnte' (Childs, 'Endform', 245).

[466] Moberly, 'Canon', 245-6.

[467] Also referred to as 'canonical intentionality' (Childs, *IOTS*, 79, 274, 300, 393, 486, 645; Childs, *BTONT*, 75; Xun, *Canonical*, 80; Brett, *Crisis*, 116; Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 46). Childs also uses the term 'canon-consciousness'/'Kanon-Bewußtsein' (Childs, 'Endform', 246; Childs, *BTONT*, 70; Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 30, 48; Seitz, *Character*, 40).

[468] In the words of others: 'the biblical tradents deliberately transformed their traditions into a new whole precisely in order to provide a foundation for the theological appropriation of that material' (Moberly, 'Childs,' 107. See also Moberly, 'Canon', 245); 'For the canonical approach […] the Bible is not a source book for the history of Israelite

> In my two previous Introductions to the Old Testament and to the New Testament, I have tried to describe the effect of the role of the canon on the formation of each of the Testaments. A major point which emerged was the insight that the lengthy process of the development of the literature leading up to the final stage of canonisation involved a profoundly hermeneutical activity on the part of the tradents […]. The material was transmitted through its various oral, literary, and redactional stages by many different groups toward a theological end. Because the traditions were received as religiously authoritative, they were transmitted in such a way as to maintain a normative function for subsequent generations of believers within a community of faith.[469]

With specific regard to the OT.

> I am suggesting that a religious reading of Israel's traditions arose early in its history and extended in different ways through the oral, literary, and redactional stages of the growth of the material until it reached a fixed form of relative stability. This religious interpretation – I would prefer to call it confessional – involved a peculiar construal which sought to give the material a shape which could be appropriated by successive generations within Israel.[470]

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religion but the product of a long evaluative process of selecting and ordering the most valuable traditions' (Brett, *Crisis*, 98).

[469] Childs, *BTONT*, 70. See also: 'I am including under the term [canon] not only the final stages of setting limits on the scope of the sacred writings, but also that process by which authoritative tradition was collected, ordered and transmitted in such a way as to enable it to function as sacred scriptures for a community of faith and practice and essential to the process is a hermeneutical function which structured occasional writings of [varied] historical and geographical background into such a form as to allow them to perform a particular role in the life of every successive generation of the faithful' (taken from the transcript of Brevard S. Childs, 'Stone Lectures, Lecture 1: The Present Impasse in the Study of the Bible', in, 'Theological Commons'); 'One of the main endeavours of my two Introductions was to describe the manner by which the hermeneutical concerns of the tradents left their mark on the literature. The material was shaped in order to provide means for its continuing appropriation by its subsequent hearers' (Childs, *BTONT*, 71).

[470] Childs, *IOTS*, 16. Childs made an almost identical comment in his review of Barr's *Holy Scripture* (Childs, 'Barr', 67). See also, 'The concept of canon implies that these writings have a function which is not exhausted by their original role in history, but they continue to function in the life of the church in each successive generation through the work of the Holy Spirit. By its peculiar shaping of the tradition, the canon provides the hermeneutical key for the later generation of Christians to appropriate the ancient testimony for itself' (Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 714); 'The decisive factor in shaping the tradition was the concern to render it in a form so that it could be correctly understood and rightly appropriated by the succeeding generations of God's people. This is precisely the role and function of canon. Scripture became the vehicle by which the original historical events were faithfully remembered, but also theologically interpreted to function as revelation for the generations yet unborn. The decisive hermeneutical role of canon was to guide the church in moving from the past to the present' (Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 721); 'The scope and character of Israel's sacred literature had been established by a long historical process of selecting, ordering, and reinterpreting of tradition which culminated in canonization, but toward the goal of structuring the religious life of that community' (Childs, 'Sensus', 91); 'I am using the term "canon" to refer to that historical process within ancient Israel – particularly in the post-exilic period – which entailed a collecting, selecting, and ordering of texts to serve a normative function as Sacred Scripture within the continuing religious community. In the transmission process, traditions which once arose in a particular milieu and were addressed to various historical situations were shaped in such a way as to serve as a normative expression of God's will to later generations of Israel who had not shared in those original historical events' (Childs, 'Exegetical', 67); 'Essential to understanding the growth of the canon is to see this interaction between a developing corpus of authoritative literature and the community which treasured it. The authoritative Word gave the community its form and content in obedience to the divine imperative, yet conversely the reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through a historical and theological process of selecting, collecting, and ordering. The formation of the canon was not a late extrinsic validation of a corpus of writings, but involved a series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the books' (Childs, *IOTS*, 58-9); 'Because this literature has had a special history as the religious literature of ancient Israel, its peculiar features must be handled in a way compatible with the material itself. A corpus of religious writings which has been transmitted within a community for over a thousand years cannot properly be compared to inert shreds [*sic*] which have lain in the ground for centuries. This observation is especially in order when one recognizes that Israel's developing religious understanding […] left its mark on the literature on the literature in a continuing process of reshaping and growth' (Childs, *IOTS*, 73. See also Childs,

And the NT.

> The shape which the canon has given the New Testament offers a peculiar construal of the Christian tradition which the early church provided. This canonical construal took place within a particular context which developed through the church's reception of these writings as authoritative and was to be used to shape the Christian life. A chief motivation lying behind the canonical process was in rendering the tradition in such a way as for its message of the gospel to be accessible to every succeeding generation of Christians.[471]

For a long time, biblical scholars have recognised that many, if not all, of the biblical texts are the complex products of a process of tradition shaping which took place across

'Exegetical', 78; Childs, *NTC*, 523. In *IOTS*, though Childs uses the word 'shreds', it seems this was a typographical error and that he actually meant 'sherds' (Barton, *Nature*, 5 n.4), which he later uses in *NTC*. See also Brett, *Crisis*, 178 n.9. See also, 'This is the literature that has not been discovered in holes in the ground by archaeology in modern times' (Sanders, *Torah*, xxxii)); 'The motivations behind the canonical process were diverse and seldom discussed in the biblical text itself. However, the one concern which is expressly mentioned is that a tradition from the past be transmitted in such a way that its authoritative claims be laid upon all successive generations of Israel. Such expressions of intent are found in the promulgation of the law (Deut. 31.9ff), in the fixing of rituals (Ex. 12.14), and in the provisions for transmitting the sacred story (Ex. 12.26ff). A study of the biblical text reveals that this concern to pass on the authoritative tradition did not consist in merely passively channelling material from one generation to another, but reflects an involvement which actively shaped both the oral and written traditions. A major hermeneutical move was effected in the process of forming an original law, prophetic oracles, or ancient narrative into a collection of scripture through which every subsequent generation was to be addressed' (Childs, *IOTS*, 78); 'a major literary and theological force was at work in shaping the present form of the Hebrew Bible. This force was exerted during most of the history of the literature's formation, but increasingly in the postexilic period exercised its influence in the collecting, selecting, and ordering of the biblical traditions in such a way as to allow the material to function as authoritative Scripture for the Jewish community. In the transmission process, tradition, which once arose in a particular milieu and addressed various historical situations, was shaped in such a way as to serve as a normative expression of God's will to later generations of Israel who had not shared in those original historical events. In sum, prophetic oracles which were directed to one generation were fashioned into Sacred Scripture by a canonical process to be used by another generation' (Childs, 'Prophetic', 47); 'The discipline of Old Testament theology derives from theological reflection on a received body of scripture whose formation was the result of a lengthy history of development. The process began in the early pre-exilic period of Israel's history and extended through the final structuring by the Jewish synagogue during the Hellenistic era. Central to its history was a hermeneutical activity which continued to shape the material theologically in order to render it accessible to future generations of believers' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 6. See also Childs, *IOTS*, 60); 'The final canonical literature reflects a long history of development in which the received tradition was selected, transmitted and shaped by hundreds of decisions. This process of construing its religious tradition involved a continual critical evaluation of historical options which were available to Israel and a transformation of its received tradition toward certain theological goals' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 11); 'The religious function of the biblical material was communicated in numerous ways on all the various levels of composition, but with a view to continuing to address the future generations with the reality of God – his presence, his saving activity, his will' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 23); 'The thesis of this essay […] is that the process of the canonization of the Hebrew Bible was closely related to the concern to render the sacred tradition in such a way as to serve future generations of Israel as Sacred Scripture' (Childs, 'Formula', 358).

[471] Childs, *NTC*, 39-40. See also, 'The modern reader thus finds in the biblical text signs which aid the reader in understanding how the canon sought to construe the material according to its understanding of the gospel. This observation is not to suggest that the New Testament contains a full-blown hermeneutic or one unified rule-of-faith. Certainly this is not the case. However, the canonical construal has left crucial indices within the text by means of which it sought to transmit its understanding of the gospel' (Childs, *NTC*, 40); 'A basic feature of the approach being outlined is the careful attention in discerning how the material is rendered into scripture in order to provide an access to its witness by successive generations of Christians who did not themselves experience at first hand Christ's ministry. They very phenomenon of a canon provides a basic warrant for inferring that the material of the New Testament was shaped toward engendering faith and did not lie inert as a deposit of uninterpreted data from a past age' (Childs, *NTC*, 51).

multiple generations. Childs reframes this as an intentional process designed to make the biblical texts function as normative Scripture for future generations. Childs recognises that canonical shaping was not the only factor which influenced the development of the Bible we have today, but he importantly affirms that it was the 'decisive' one.[472] Thus, Childs suggests that the Bible today is not an inert collection of disparate ancient texts, but is rather a shaped corpus of Scripture designed to function normatively within Christianity.[473]

For Childs, the process by which the Bible was formed exerts a pressure on readers seeking to engage with it as Scripture today. He refers to this pressure as 'exegetical[474] (or hermeneutical[475]) significance'. Simply put, if the Bible has been intentionally shaped to be read as Scripture, then it exerts a pressure on its readers to read it with an awareness of how it has been shaped, which, as will be shown later (§4.3), means reading with an awareness of signs of canonical shaping. When one reads the Bible in this way, one is reading in accordance with the intentions of those who were responsible for shaping the canonical form of its traditions, and thus, so Childs claims, one is reading the Bible in the most appropriate context for Theological Interpretation.[476] Brett rightly observes that Childs' 'approach can properly be called a hermeneutic of consent – consent to the decisions made in the process of canon formation'.[477]

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472 Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 721. See also, 'Although non-religious factors (political, social, economic) certainly entered into the canonical process, these were largely subordinated to the religious usage of the literature by a particular religious community for some authoritative role' (Childs, 'Exegetical', 68), quoted almost verbatim in Childs, *IOTS*, 61.

473 See also Childs, 'Exegetical', 78; Childs, *IOTS*, 73; Childs, *NTC*, 523; John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 1995), 137-8.

474 Childs, 'Exegetical'; Brevard S. Childs, 'The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era', in Craig G. Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, et al. (eds.)*, Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 33-57 (40).

475 Childs, 'Speech', 382.

476 Childs, *BTC*, 99.

477 Brett, *Crisis*, 98.

4.1.1 Actualisation

One particular problem that scholars were experiencing in Childs' day was how to bridge a perceived divide between the past of the Bible and the present modern world. For example, Stendahl draws a distinction between what the Bible 'meant' in the past and what it 'means' in the present,[478] whereas Barr speaks of the gap between the cultures of the ancient world in the Bible and that of the modern world.[479] The key question for those who wished to read the Bible as Scripture was how this historical chasm could be crossed in a process called 'actualisation'.[480] Childs enters this debate by criticising the work of scholars who focus their attention solely on the composition histories of the biblical texts (i.e. historical critics). He argues that their focus on topics other than the canonical shaping of the Bible had created the very problem which the topic of actualisation was attempting to solve by destroying or ignoring the texts of the Bible which contain an already-actualised form of normative tradition.[481] Hence he writes, 'When the canonical shape of the Bible is disregarded, there is little wonder that the hermeneutical task of appropriating the Word of God for today becomes hopelessly bogged down in confusion'.[482] As Childs thinks that the Bible is a corpus which has *already* been shaped to function theologically as Scripture for future generations, one should not employ an interpretative approach which ignores canonical shaping or which tries to interpret the Bible theologically by atomising the texts which stand at the end of the canonical process (§3.1.2).

> The implication of this understanding of canon is crucial for one's approach to the problem of the "actualization" of the biblical text. In the recent hermeneutical debate, the term actualization (*Vergegenwärtigung*) denoted that process by which an ancient historical text was rendered accessible to a modern religious usage. An axiom of much redactional criticism is that the layering of a biblical text derives chiefly from a need to "update" an original tradition. Although this description occasionally applies (Isa. 16.13f.), the chief point to be made by the canonical approach is that actualization is by no means limited to this one model. Rather, it is constitutive of the canon to seek

478 Stendahl, 'Biblical', 430.

479 See 'Cultural Relativism and the New Radicalism' in James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 35-52.

480 This topic has been referred to using various terms, such as 'evaluation', 'hermeneutics' (see also Childs, *BTC*, 80), and 'application'. Barr identifies this topic as a major concern of Biblical Theology (Barr, *Concept*, 15).

481 Barton, 'Canonical', 199-200.

482 Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 721.

> to transmit the tradition in such a way as to prevent its being moored in the past. Actualization derives from a hermeneutical concern which was present during the different stages of the book's canonization. It is built into the structure of the text itself and reveals an enormous richness of theological interpretation by which to render the text religiously accessible. The modern hermeneutical impasse which has found itself unable successfully to bridge the gap between the past and the present, has arisen in large measure from its disregard of the canonical shaping. The usual critical method of biblical exegesis is, first, to seek to restore an original historical setting by stripping away those very elements which constitute the canonical shape. Little wonder that once the biblical text has been securely anchored in the historical past by "decanonizing" it, the interpreter has difficulty applying it to the modern religious context.[483]

4.1.2 Canonical Shaping as a Rule of Faith

Within the secondary literature it has been noted that Childs' canonical approach is concerned with the rule of faith (Latin: *regula fidei*).[484] Xun provides an extensive study of the topic,[485]observing that the rule of faith and Childs' theory of canonical shaping are connected: Childs 'asserts that "the canon for the Christian faith and for the church" or "for the communities of faith" and *regula fidei* belong inseparably together'.[486] Historically speaking, the 'rule of faith' refers to a body of oral orthodox doctrinal tradition which was used in the early Church as a 'rule' (or 'canon') for denouncing heretical teachings.[487] Childs thinks that there is a parallel between the application of the rule of faith in the early Church and the process of canonical shaping during the formation of the biblical texts. As the rule of faith guided the establishment of orthodox doctrine, so the shaping of the canon guided the formation of the Bible for the benefit of future generations.[488] Childs writes, 'This shaping activity functioned

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[483] Childs, *IOTS*, 79 (this is almost an exact quotation of Childs, 'Exegetical', 79 and Childs, 'Prophetic', 49). See also, 'The hermeneutical move which seeks to bring the meaning of the text from the past to the present takes place on the basis of the literal sense of the text. Viewed from the context of the canon the literal and the figurative sense of the text are not in stark tension, but serve different functions as a unified text within the community of faith. The literal sense of the text is the indispensable key for the hermeneutical task of actualizing the tradition because in its shaping of the tradition it has critically rendered the material into a form suitable for future accommodation. If the literal sense of the text is destroyed in the search for some historical reality, the reconstruction actually eliminates the very elements in the shaping which makes actualization possible' (Childs, 'Sensus', 93). See also Childs, 'Formula', 363; Childs, *BTONT*, 70, 71.

[484] See Xun, *Canonical*, 79-92; Daniel R. Driver, 'Childs and the Canon Or Rule of Faith', in Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richards (eds.)*, The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 243-78. The role of the rule of faith in providing ruled readings within the canonical approach is discussed elsewhere (§6.2.3).

[485] Xun, *Canonical*, 79-92.

[486] Xun, *Canonical*, 79.

[487] Childs notes this heritage, particularly in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian against Marcion (Childs, *IOTS*, 42).

[488] Childs, 'Endform', 246. See also Xun, *Canonical*, 81.

much like a *regula fidei*. It was a negative criterion which set certain parameters within which the material functioned, but largely left to exegesis the positive role of interpretation within the larger construal'.[489] The canonical shaping of the Bible also exerts a pressure in the modern day as it contains signs of canonical shaping which prompt the reader to read it in a particular way. This is, as noted above (§4.1), the exegetical significance of canonical shaping.

Despite the above, Childs does not define the rule of faith as a main element of his canonical approach; hence why he refers to canonical shaping as 'like'[490] a rule of faith. Thus too much is often made of the concept. Rather, then, it is more accurate to say that Childs uses the rule of faith as an analogy to understand how the canon was formed and how it provides authoritative guidance for its own interpretation today.

4.2 Childs' Bible

Before considering the signs of canonical shaping that Childs finds in the Bible, this thesis must first define what exactly he means by 'the Bible'; i.e. which books (scope) in which order (structure)? Childs' preferred texts of these books will be addressed later (§5).

4.2.1 Childs' Old Testament

With regard to the scope of the OT, Childs' perspective develops over time. In *IOTS*, he makes clear that his preference is for the shorter OT ('I personally agree with Jerome' - below) followed today by Protestants, though he also makes clear that he would not disparage those who favour the longer OT followed today by Catholics.

> In order to maintain a common scripture with Judaism I have argued that the scope of the Hebrew canon has also a normative role for the Christian Old Testament. However, it would perhaps be possible to argue for the inclusion of a larger canon, such as the Apocrypha, on the grounds that these books, like the New Testament, testify to the promise of the New without destroying the common link with the Old. Although I personally agree with the tradition of Jerome in supporting the Christian use of the Hebrew canon, I would not disparage the claims of those Christians who follow Augustine in supporting a larger canon. However, the basic theological issue for its inclusion turns on the ability to maintain the crucial canonical relationship between Christian and Jew. Up to

[489] Childs, *BTONT*, 71.

[490] Childs, *BTONT*, 71.

> now at least I have not seen this canonical argument for the inclusion of a larger canon adequately developed.[491]

However, in *BTONT* Childs' view on the scope of the OT increases in complexity. Childs explains his stance in what Wagner rightly calls 'a dialectic between Word and Tradition'.[492]

> […] the basic theological issue at stake can be best formulated in terms of the church's ongoing *search* for the Christian Bible. The church struggles with the task of continually discerning the truth of God being revealed in scripture and at the same time she stands within a fully human, ecclesiastical tradition which remains the tradent of the Word. The hearing of God's Word is repeatedly confirmed by the Holy Spirit through its resonance with the church's christological rule-of-faith. At the same time the church confesses the inadequacy of its reception while rejoicing over the sheer wonder of the divine accommodation to limited human capacity.
>
> Part of the task of a Biblical Theology is to participate in the search for the Christian Bible. The enterprise is not one which will be resolved once-and-for-all, but one which appears to be constitutive for Christian faith. The dialectical poles, historically represented by the Protestant and Catholic positions, chart the arena between Word and Tradition which is reflected in the controversy over the extent of the Christian canon.[493]

Childs' arguments here are far from clear and thus it is no simple task to understand what he means by 'Word' and 'Tradition' and how these ideas relate to 'the search for the Christian Bible'. The issue turns on what Childs means by, 'The dialectical poles, historically represented by the Protestant and Catholic positions, chart the arena between Word and Tradition which is reflected in the controversy over the extent of the Christian canon'. Wagner provides one interpretation, arguing that Childs' dialectic between Word and Tradition in this context is the dialectic 'between the Old Testament in its most pristine, Hebrew, form and the church's early and widespread practice of receiving the Old Testament in its most expansive, Greek, form'.[494] I.e., Wagner interprets 'Word' as 'shorter OT' and 'Tradition' as 'longer OT'. There are, however, several problems with Wagner's interpretation. Firstly, Childs does not identify the shorter OT as 'Word' and the longer OT as 'Tradition' anywhere else in his works, nor does he

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491 Childs, *IOTS*, 666.

492 J. Ross Wagner, 'The Septuagint and "the Search for the Christian Bible"', in Markus N. A. Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (eds.)*, Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 17-28 (23). Wagner's article argues for the inclusion of the Septuagint in Childs' search for the Christian Bible.

493 Childs, *BTONT*, 67.

494 Wagner, 'Search', 23.

even discuss the OT canons using these terms. Thus, it seems odd that Childs would use these terms in this way here. Secondly, Wagner's interpretation does not fit with the understanding of Word and Tradition that Childs provides in the first paragraph quoted above. For example, when Childs writes, 'The hearing of God's Word', he is clearly not referring to the shorter OT, but rather to the revelation of God which he believes can be found through the Bible and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. This thesis proposes an alternative explanation to Wagner with the important caveat that what Childs actually means is unclear and therefore open to debate.

Childs' dialectic between Word and Tradition is a concept which extends across his works and is applied in various contexts. Indeed, it appears in his maxim of moving from witness (the Bible as a kind of Tradition) to subject matter (§6.1), his ideas regarding the extent of the OT canon (as above), and (as noted by Wagner[495]) his views on locating the canonical text of the NT (§5.3). So what does it mean? It is plausible that Childs' dialectic is an understanding of the relationship between the 'Word' of God and the Church's account of that Word, i.e 'Tradition'. In the above, Childs notes that the Church struggles to continually discern 'the truth of God' (later referred to as 'the Word') through the Bible at the same time as standing 'within a fully human, ecclesiastical tradition' that provides a detailed account of what that truth is.[496] Thus, for Childs, the Church exists in a tension between what it knows about God (Tradition) and the recognition that what it knows is not perfect or complete. Hence, with regard to the Bible, Childs writes, 'the complete canon of the Christian church as the rule-of-faith sets for the community of faith the proper theological context in which we stand, but it also remains continually the object of critical theological scrutiny subordinate to its subject matter who is Jesus Christ'.[497]

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[495] Wagner, 'Search', 24.

[496] Childs, *BTONT*, 67.

[497] Childs, *BTONT*, 67-8.

Childs then applies his dialectical thinking to the question of the scope of the OT. In the same way that the Church must continually struggle to know the Word of God from the starting point of established Church Tradition, so too the Church must also engage in a continual search for the Christian Bible from the starting point of the shorter and longer canons (which provide the boundaries of established Tradition in this context). This, therefore, is what Childs perhaps means when he claims that the shorter Protestant and longer Catholic canons provide the 'dialectical poles' which 'chart the arena between Word and Tradition'.[498] One's individual search for the Christian Bible thus does not begin *ex nihilo*, but rather within the established boundaries of the shorter and longer canons.[499] Importantly, Childs affirms that the search for the Christian Bible will never be completed 'once-and-for-all' and is actually 'constitutive for Christian faith'. [500]

Let us now consider Childs' view on the structure of the OT. The aim of *IOTS* was to study the canonical shaping of the HB, which included observing signs of canonical shaping at the literary level of the group, i.e. the Torah (§4.3.2.1), Prophets,[501] and Writings.[502] The structures of the various Christian OTs are, of course, different from that of the HB. Thus, the alternative structures of any of the Christian OTs reshape several signs of canonical shaping which Childs finds in the structure of the HB. So which is authoritative, the OT or the HB? Childs argues that, 'The order of the Hebrew canon has no historical or theological claims for

498 Childs, *BTONT*, 67.

499 It is surprising that Childs does not explain why the shorter Protestant and longer Catholic canons are his chosen poles. The answer is likely that these are the two options prescribed by the two largest Christian denominations. Whilst this might be pragmatic explanation, it does nothing to justify the authority of the shorter or longer canons. Notably, the Eastern Orthodox denomination has never prescribed a canon but rather, like Childs, oscillates between the Protestant and Catholic poles. This of course does not mean that the Orthodox Church has no Bible, but that it has never made a governing pronouncement in the manner of Protestantism and Catholicism (Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109, 130; Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, 'The Canon of Scripture in the Orthodox Church', in Vahan S. Hovhanessian (ed.)*, The Canon of the Bible and the Apocrypha in the Churches of the East* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2012), 1-6 (1)).

500 Childs, *BTONT*, 67.

501 See Childs, *IOTS*, 232-6, 305-10.

502 See Childs, *IOTS*, 501-3. For a recent study, see Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone (eds.)*, The Shape of the Writings*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, vol. 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

the Christian Bible';[503] i.e., *only* the structure of the Christian OT is relevant for Christian Theological Interpretation.[504] Yet, as there is no single agreed structure of the OT in Christianity, which structure does he mean by 'the Christian OT'? Though Childs never states so explicitly, the structure he follows is the structure accepted as authoritative in, for example, the Church of England and the Catholic Church today.[505]

Childs argues that this Christian structure was not created '*de novo*' but follows the Septuagint, which was the form of the Jewish Scriptures utilised by many early Christians. He writes, 'The Church did not create its own order *de novo*, but it chose from the available options the one which best reflected the new Christian understanding of the Jewish Scriptures'.[506] Let us consider the evidence for this claim. In Academia today the term 'Septuagint' (or LXX, both meaning 'seventy') is used to refer to a corpus of scriptural books and/or a Greek text of the biblical books; importantly it is not a single work.[507] The main sources for our understanding of the Septuagint in the early Church are the uncial/majuscule codices of early Christianity; namely Codex Vaticanus ('B', c. 4th century CE), Codex Sinaiticus ('S' or א, c. 4th century CE), and Codex Alexandrinus ('A', c. 5th century CE). Whilst these three codices attest a shared text that can be called 'the Septuagint' (though with variant readings), they do not support the idea that

503 Childs, *IOTS*, 667.

504 This is a highly important point and explains why this thesis focuses only on those signs of canonical shaping which can be found in the groups and testaments of the *Christian* Bible. There are, of course, signs of canonical shaping in the HB (see *IOTS*), many of which were preserved in the Old Testament (e.g. §4.3.2.1), yet those which were not preserved are not authoritative for Childs' Biblical Theology.

505 Gen., Exod., Lev., Num., Deut., Josh., Judg., Ruth, 1 Sam., 2 Sam., 1 Kgs, 2 Kgs, 1 Chr., 2 Chr., Ezra, Neh., Esther, Job, Pss., Prov., Eccles., S. of S., Isa., Jer., Lam., Ezek., Dan., Hos., Joel, Amos, Obad., Jonah, Mic., Nahum, Hab., Zeph., Hag., Zech., Mal. For the Church of England see *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England*, VI. For the Catholic Church see *CCC* §120. Importantly, the Catholic Church also includes the deuterocanonical books within its canon. According to *CCC* §120, these do not affect the order of the OT, rather they are inserted within the structure shared with Protestant churches including the Church of England.

506 'Die Kirche schuf ihre eigene Ordnung also nicht *de novo*, jedoch wählte sie aus den zur Verfügung stehenden Möglichkeiten diejenige aus, die am besten das neue christliche Verständnis der jüdischen Schriften widerspiegelte' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Die Beziehung von Altem und Neuem Testament aus kanonischer Sicht', in Christoph Dohmen and Thomas Söding (eds.)*, Eine Bibel - zwei Testamente: Positionen Biblischer Theologie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 29-34 (30)). See also Childs, IOTS, 667; Childs, *BTONT*, 75.

507 Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 66; Seitz, *Character*, 73.

the Septuagint as a corpus had a fixed structure.[508] For example,[509] in S and A the prophetic books precede the poetry and wisdom books (like the HB), but in B the order is reversed. Also, in B and A the Minor Prophets precede the Major Prophets, whereas in S the opposite is true. When it comes to the order of books, there is also diversity. For example: Daniel closes B but precedes 15/16[510] other books in A;[511] Psalms follows 1-2 Esdras (Ezra-Nehemiah) in B, Malachi in S, and 1-4 Maccabees in A.[512] Whilst these three uncial codices are not the only sources for the Septuagint, what they show is that in the fourth and fifth centuries CE the structure of the Septuagint was not fixed, though there were largely stable parts (see below).[513]

Other early sources which follow a non-rabbinic structure likely influenced by the Septuagint are Athanasius' 39th Easter Letter of 367 CE and Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.[514] Both sources articulate a similar list of books, though there are important differences between them. Athanasius rejects the apocryphal books from his primary list, whereas Augustine accepts them. In addition, Athanasius excludes Esther from the canon.[515] Also, the position of Job is significantly different, and the ordering of the pairs Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, and Ezekiel and Daniel, are inverted in Augustine compared with Athanasius. Notably, in both sources the Minor Prophets precede the Major Prophets, in contrast with the current Christian OT.

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508 Wagner, 'Search', 19.

509 The following comparisons are made based on the lists provided by Lee Martin McDonald, 'Appendix C: Lists and Catalogues of Old Testament Collections', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 585-90 (588).

510 Depending on whether one counts Psalm 151 as a distinct book from the Psalms.

511 Daniel is omitted from S, though this is likely accidental due to the decay of the codex as other books are also missing.

512 See also Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory, and the Problem of its Canon* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 57-8.

513 Simon Crisp, 'The Septuagint as Canon', *The Bible Translator*, 67/2 (2016), 137-50 (143); Hengel, *Septuagint*, 57; McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 114-6; Sanders, *Torah*, xxi.

514 'Augustine's acceptance of the whole Greek canon remained the official position of the Western Church until the Reformation' (John Barton, *Making the Christian Bible* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997), 80).

515 Notably, Esther is also not included in the list of Hebrew books produced in the late second century CE by Melito of Sardis (John J. Collins, 'The Penumbra of the Canon: What Do the Deuterocanonical Books Represent?', in John J. Collins, Craig A. Evans, and Lee Martin McDonald, *Ancient Jewish and Christian Scriptures: New Developments in Canon Controversy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 7-20 (8)).

Now, a few important conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey.[516] Firstly, there do seem to be general trends associated with what we know as the Septuagint as a corpus that distinguish it from the HB: namely, it had the prophetic books as its final group, included Daniel in the prophets, and placed Ruth, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles alongside other historical books – trends which are all followed in both the shorter and longer Christian OTs. Secondly, there was also considerable fluidity within this structure to the degree that it is incorrect to speak of the Septuagint as a fixed corpus in the early Church.[517] Ultimately, Childs' suggestion that Christians selected a structure for their OT which was dependent upon the Septuagint is partly valid, so long as one recognises that the structure of the Septuagint was only partially stable during the era of the early Church.

4.2.2 Childs' New Testament

Childs uncontroversially follows the scope and structure of the New Testament that is accepted today by all major Christian denominations.[518]

4.3 Signs of Canonical Shaping

> The search for the canonical shape of the text begins with a reading which looks for traces either of how the author intended the material to be understood, or of the effect which a particular rendering has on the literature.[519]

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516 For fuller studies of the Christian canon in the early Church see Barton, *Spirit*; Thomas Bodekal, *The Formation and Significance of the Christian Biblical Canon* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2 vols. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

517 See also Crisp, 'Septuagint', 150; Law, *Septuagint*, 86. Thus, as Sundberg rightly concludes, it is incorrect to speak of an 'Alexandrian canon' (Sundberg Jr., *Old Testament*, 130).

518 Matt., Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Eph,. Phil., Col., 1 Thess., 2 Thess., 1 Tim., 2 Tim., Titus, Philem., Heb., Jas., 1 Pet., 2 Pet., 1 Jn., 2 Jn., 3 Jn., Jude, Rev. This scope and structure is affirmed in the Cathoilc Church (*CCC* §120). Curiously, this scope and structure is assumed rather than prescribed in the Church of England: 'All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical' (*Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England*, VI). This exact scope (though not structure) is first attested in Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter (see Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 118-129). There was some fluidity in both scope and structure before (and after) this point, as demonstrated by the lists and manuscripts of the early Church (see Lee Martin McDonald, 'Appendix D: Lists and Catalogues of New Testament Collections', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.)*, The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 591-7). For example, Codex Sinaiticus also contains the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas.

519 Childs, *NTC*, 49.

In this section, this thesis explores the evidence that Childs presents in support of his theory of canonical shaping. Childs argues that canonical shaping can be discerned through the identification of 'signs'[520] within the biblical texts that provide hermeneutical guidance to the reader on how each text should be read, both individually and as part of the canon.[521] These signs will not necessarily fully reveal the correct meaning of a passage, but rather they 'chart the boundaries within which the exegetical task is to be carried out'.[522] They can be understood as 'indications' for how a text is to be read.[523] As the signs of canonical shaping appear at all literary levels, including that of the canon as a whole, Childs thinks that one can follow their hermeneutical guidance not only to understand the significance of an individual passage but also to understand the witness of the entire Bible. Hence, the hermeneutical guidance of the canon not only aids one in the exegesis of passages and books but also in the establishment of a Biblical Theology. Importantly, the discernment of these signs is not about searching for a 'canonical sense' of meaning, rather it is about understanding how the meanings of all the biblical texts taken together create a canonical witness on a given topic.

Childs' signs of canonical shaping can be found at three literary levels. The first is the level of the immediate discourse unit within which a passage is contained; this can be as small as a few verses or as large as an entire book. The second is the level of the 'group' in which a

520 Janowski, referring to similar features, refers to them as '*Leserlenkung*' (see Bernd Janowski, 'The Contrastive Unity of Scripture', trans. by Daniel R. Driver, in Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richards (eds.), *The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 37-62 (57)). Gignilliat refers to these signs as a 'hermeneutical imprint' left upon the biblical texts (Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 28).

521 Childs, *NTC*, 40.

522 Childs, *IOTS*, 83. See also Childs, 'Prophetic', 55; Childs, 'Barr', 69; Childs, *BTONT*, 71.

523 Childs, 'Barr', 69. Here Childs is writing in relation to *IOTS*, though the point still stands for his entire approach. In a 1997 letter to a Yale colleague, David Bartlett, Childs wrote, 'On the basis of the final form of the Scriptures, the interpreter strives to discern the "canonical shape" […]. By canonical shape I mean the attempt to discern those theological forces which were exerted in the shaping of the Scriptures in order to provide guidelines by which to aid its present and future readers toward its "proper" interpretation, that is to say, one which is faithful to its true subject matter (*res*)' (as quoted in Driver, *Childs*, 285). Sheppard, though preferring to speak of the canonical 'shape' of a book rather than signs of canonical shaping, provides an insightful comment: 'The shape of a biblical book and its canonical context within scripture provide an essential guide as to how the intents of various historical authors and editors pertain to the presentation of a biblical author and a biblical book' (Sheppard, 'Canonical', 864).

book is contained. The third and largest literary level is that of the Christian canon as a whole.[524] In this literary level, one is not focused on how the texts have been shaped, but on how the structure of the Christian Bible prompts a particular interpretation.

It is not possible here to note all of the 'signs' of canonical shaping, as the ways in which Childs thinks Scripture was shaped vary greatly. Indeed, regarding the OT, Childs writes, 'great freedom and remarkable diversity was employed in the process of rendering Israel's sacred traditions into Sacred Scripture'.[525] Moberly is correct when he suggests that Childs' canonical shaping can be understood as 'recontextualisation'; one looks for signs of how a text has been recontextualised from its original context (a point which will be returned to in the below).[526] However, canonical shaping also takes other forms,[527] as will now be demonstrated.

4.3.1 Canonical Shaping of Passages and Books

Some of the clearest examples of Childs' signs of canonical shaping within the context of a passage or book are given in a 1978 conference paper[528] and re-appear in an almost identical form in *IOTS*, published a year later. Though these examples are not exhaustive, they are particularly useful for grasping what Childs' 'signs' are and how they influenced his theory of

524 I have deliberately not referred to the level of Testament as a distinct literary context. This is because the Christian OT and NT were created within the same process that led to the formation of the Bible. It was not as if the OT was created before the NT. Though the Jewish Scriptures were authoritative for Christians since Christianity's inception, their canonisation as the OT was coterminous with that of the NT.

525 Childs, 'Exegetical', 77. See also, 'the process did not happen all at once; there was no one overarching hermeneutic to realise the goal; some attempts were more successful than others' (Childs, *IOTS*, 26); 'When one analyses different O.T. texts, it becomes immediately evident that no one uniform pattern can be discerned by which to explain the variety' (Childs, 'Response', 54); 'The religious function of the biblical material was communicated in numerous ways on all the various levels of composition' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 23); 'this process of rendering the material theologically involved countless different compositional techniques by means of which the tradition was actualised' (Childs, *BTONT*, 70).

526 Moberly, 'Childs', 106; R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 157. See also Levenson, *Criticism*, 123. One group within the Bible which Childs thinks has been particularly recontextualised is the Book of Psalms: 'within Israel the psalms have been loosened from a given cultic context and the words assigned a significance in themselves as sacred scripture. These words of promise could be used in a variety of new contexts. They could be reworked and rearranged in a different situation without losing their meaning' (Childs, *IOTS*, 515).

527 Seitz, *Convergences*, 77.

528 Childs, 'Exegetical'.

canonical shaping.[529] These examples are exclusively from the OT, but the signs are also attested in the NT.[530] When working at this literary level, Childs is undertaking what many would recognise as tracing the developments of traditions within the biblical texts (i.e. Tradition Criticism §3.1.3.3), focusing in particular on how they have been transformed in various ways to function more effectively as Scripture for future generations.

4.3.1.1 Excursus: Ancient Literary Conventions, Historical Criticism, and Childs

Before proceeding, it is important to comment upon the distinction between ancient literary conventions, Historical Criticism, and Childs' wish to incorporate and reorient the latter. As has been shown (§3.1.2), one of the problems Childs has with Historical Criticism is that it often deconstructs the forms of the biblical texts that have been shaped to function as Scripture. Thus, Historical Criticism often disregards the ancient literary conventions which have been employed to create the canonical texts. Childs wishes to reorient the discipline, accepting its diachronic interest in the composition histories of the biblical texts, but recalibrating that interest toward the illumination of the canonical texts in their received forms. Indeed, Childs thinks that understanding how the authors/editors of the canonical texts shaped their traditions through ancient literary conventions to better function as Scripture for future generations is key to understanding how the text is supposed to function as Scripture today. Thus, Childs' canonical approach moves beyond Historical Criticism as traditionally practiced in order to better appreciate the literary conventions at work during the canon's formation. In the below, examples are provided of how this aspect of Childs' approach works in practice.

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[529] Goldingay, who affirms aspects of Childs' theory of canonical shaping, uses many of these same examples in Goldingay, *Models*, 128-30.

[530] On which see Childs, *NTC*; Brevard S. Childs, *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

4.3.1.2 Isaiah 40-55

In his paper, the first sign Childs gives is: 'a collection of material has been detached from its original historical mooring and provided with a secondary, theological context'.[531] Childs uses Second-Isaiah from the Book of Isaiah as an example.

Since the source-critical work of Duhm at the close of the nineteenth century, it has been commonplace within Isaiah scholarship to distinguish the Book into three distinct compositions: First Isaiah (Isa. 1-39); Second Isaiah (Isa. 40-55); Third Isaiah (Isa. 56-66).[532] There are many reasons for making these distinctions,[533] but perhaps the greatest is that the supposed parts of the Book each seem to address different historical contexts. Chapters 1-39 narrate the story of Isaiah son of Amoz and his visions during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah (c. 783-742 BCE), Jotham (c. 742-735 BCE), Ahaz (c. 735-715 BCE), and Hezekiah (c. 715-686/7 BCE).[534] Thus, the narrative context of First Isaiah is the pre-exilic era, in which the prophet predicts Judah's impending doom (e.g. 5:24-30). However, chapters 40-55 – Second Isaiah – appear to address the Israelite community *during* the Babylonian exile of the southern kingdom c. 586-538 BCE.[535] For example, 40:2 states that Jerusalem's punishment is complete.[536]

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531 Childs, 'Exegetical', 70.

532 Childs, *Isaiah*, 1.

533 See Joseph Blenkinsop, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol 19 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 83-92; Samuel R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, The International Theological Series, vol. 1 (New York: Scribners, 1898), 230-3; John Goldingay and David F. Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, International Critical Commentary Series (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 1 n.2). Childs thinks that the reasons for seeing Second Isaiah as a distinct composition are 'incontrovertible' (Childs, 'Exegetical', 70).

534 See Isa. 1:1. See also 2 Kgs. 19:2-7, 20-34; 20:1-19. The dates of the kings of Judah are disputed; the above are taken from John Bright, *A History of Israel* (4th edn, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 493.

535 A similar point is true for Third/Trito-Isaiah (55-66), which seems to address a context after the exiles have returned to the Persian province of Yehud. For example, criticisms of Israel's rulers in Isa. 56:9-12 (see also Neh. 5), and the practice of false worship in Isa. 58, make particular sense in a post-exilic community which is struggling to re-constitute itself following the re-settlement of Yehud after Cyrus' decree (see Ezra 1) (see also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 19A (New Haven, CT: New Haven Press, 2002), 43).

536 It is feasible that 'Jerusalem' refers both literally to the city which was destroyed and metaphorically as a synecdoche for the Judean people.

> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and call to her that she has fulfilled her service, that her iniquity has been atoned, that she has received from the hand of YHWH double for all her sins.[537]

Thus, the entire Book cannot have been written by Isaiah son of Amoz as he would have been dead for at least one hundred years by the start of the exile.[538]

There are those among Isaiah scholars in the modern era who believe that the Book derives from a single author,[539] though they are in the minority. Importantly, Childs himself thinks that the Book has multiple authors, though he recognises that each part was not necessarily created independently of the others.[540] Rather, there appears to be complex inner-biblical interpretation (§3.1.6) at work across the individual parts as well as across the whole Book. Thus, for Childs, the key question is not how to understand each composition as a distinct literary unit, but rather to understand the literary conventions employed in the combining of these three units to form the canonical text of the Book we recognise as Isaiah today. Thus, Childs accepts the findings of Historical Criticism but seeks to move beyond them by using them as a means for better illuminating the literary conventions at work in the production of the final canonical text. He believes that the Book should be read holistically, but on a canonical rather than authorial basis.

Focussing on Second Isaiah, Childs finds several signs that the composition has been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations in a way which transcends its original sixth-century context. Childs writes that the 'original 6th century context was almost totally obliterated by those who transmitted the material'[541]; this can be seen through the absence of specific references in the text to its original context. Childs views the removal of these

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537 דַּבְּרוּ עַל לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כִּי מָלְאָה צְבָאָהּ כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ כִּי לָקְחָה מִיַּד יְהוָה כִּפְלַיִם בְּכָל חַטֹּאתֶיהָ.

538 If Hezekiah died in 686 BCE and Isaiah was his contemporary, and human life spans are c. 80 years, then Isaiah would have been dead a long time already by the exile in c. 586 BCE. Alternatively, one could hold the traditional view that Second Isaiah contains prophecies which were uttered by Isaiah long before their intended context came about (so J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993)).

539 E.g., Motyer, *Isaiah*.

540 Childs, *Isaiah*, 3.

541 Childs, 'Exegetical', 70.

references as an intentional redactional act designed to (i) ascribe the Second Isaiah traditions to the earlier eighth-century BCE Isaiah son of Amoz, and (ii) make those traditions applicable in any future age.

> By placing the message of Second Isaiah within the context of the 8th century prophet his message of promise has become a prophetic word not tied to a specific historical referent, but directed to the future. The process toward canonisation has thus sharply transformed the original prophetic tradition, allowing the message to function as Scripture for every successive generation of Israelites.[542]

One problem with Childs' claim is that Second Isaiah, though containing many unspecific passages, does contain several references which locate it in its original sixth-century historical context.[543] Namely, it makes several references to the coming of King Cyrus of Persia as YHWH's chosen instrument for His people's liberation.[544] Nevertheless, these references are rare in comparison to the volume found in First Isaiah, so Childs' point does have some merit. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Second Isaiah alongside First Isaiah prompts a reinterpretation of the later material as deriving from the same eight-century context. Thus, Childs' point about Second Isaiah' recontextualisation is justifiable.

4.3.1.3 Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

The second sign Childs gives is: 'the original historical setting of a tradition has been retained, but it has been placed by an editor within a framework which provided the material with an interpretative guideline'.[545] The example Childs provides for this sign is Eccles. 12:9-14.

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[542] Childs, 'Exegetical', 71. Childs makes a similar claim in the later *IOTS*: 'What then was the effect on these chapters of the loss of their original historical particularity? First, by placing the message of Second Isaiah within the context of the eighth-century prophet his message of promise became a prophetic word not tied to a specific historical referent, but directed to the future. A message which originally functioned in a specific exilic context in the middle of the sixth century has been detached from this historical situation to become fully eschatological. In its new context its message no longer can be understood as a specific commentary on the needs of exiled Israel, but its message relates to the redemptive plan of God for all of history' (Childs, *IOTS*, 326). Childs does not present a 'Second' point.. McDonald argues that this interpretation of Isaiah was in fact less helpful to his congregation than one which interpreted Second Isaiah in its original sixth-century setting (McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 305).

[543] I owe this criticism to a conversation with John Goldingay during his paper, 'Canonical Readings in Isaiah', at the OT/HB Seminar in the University of Oxford on Monday 28th January 2019. See also Brett, *Crisis*, 76.

[544] See Isa. 44:28; 45:1, and implicitly 45:13.

[545] Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

Within Ecclesiastes scholarship it is commonplace to regard Eccles. 12:9-14 as a kind of epilogue which has been added to the sayings of *Qohelet*.[546] Indeed, the Book is written in the first person from the perspective of *Qohelet*,[547] except for 1:1-2; 7:27; 12:9-14; thus the canonical form of the Book presents itself as the work of a later editor who sought to pass on the sayings of *Qohelet* for future generations. Importantly, this editor does not just transmit the *Qohelet* material but rather provides an 'interpretative guideline' (or what Fox calls a 'frame-narrative'[548]) on how that material is to be interpreted, hence why Childs calls 12:9-14 'an appendix serving as a rule-of-faith'.[549] It is interesting that, in its canonical form, the editor/s chose not to redact the *Qohelet* material,[550] suggesting that it must already have been authoritative at that time. Childs' approach recognises the historical-critical distinction between the *Qohelet* and editorial material, but rather than trying to locate each in their original historical contexts, Childs is instead interested in how literary conventions have been employed to create the canonical version of the Book.

Childs provides a compelling argument for how the epilogue functions as a framework for understanding the sayings of the sage. The words of *Qohelet* end with the pessimistic (or realistic), 'vanity of vanities, says the *Qohelet*, all is vanity' (12:8),[551] which coheres well with the

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[546] James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 189-90; C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 38.

[547] For a study of Solomonic authorship see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 37. For a study of the name/title '*Qohelet*' see Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 32-4.

[548] Michael V. Fox, 'Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 48 (1977), 83-106.

[549] Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

[550] 'the canonical shaping in this instance did not consist in a heavy reworking of the original sayings of the sage, but provided a new perspective for interpretation' (Childs, 'Exegetical', 71).

[551] הֶבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר הַקּוֹהֶלֶת הַכֹּל הָבֶל. The phrase הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים 'vanity of vanities' is a superlative using a construct chain. Inflected forms of the noun הֶבֶל occur 38 times in Ecclesiastes, which have led some to conclude that it is the *Leitmotiv* 'guiding theme' of the Book (K. Seybold, 'הֶבֶל; הָבַל', in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.)*, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, trans. by John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 313-20 (318)). הֶבֶל signifies 'breath' though also 'vapor, mist, smoke'; by metaphorical extension it can also carry the meaning of transitoriness and fleetingness (Seybold, 'הֶבֶל', 315) with the implication of futility. As Johnston notes: 'the basic sense of the root […] describes the immaterial, transient nature of one's breath and evanescent vapor […]. This yields the abstract negative, […] that which is unsubstantial, worthless, unprofitable, futile, transient and fleeting' (Gordon H. Johnston, 'הבל', in Willem A.

tone of the *Qohelet* material.[552] This saying provides an *inclusio* back to 1:2 and marks the closure of *Qohelet's* 'own' work. Yet to the editor, the Book is not just the 'pessimistic utterances of a discouraged old man', rather they are 'designed as part of Israel's wisdom'.[553] *Qohelet* is described as חָכָם 'wise' (Eccles. 12:9) and his material is part of the דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים 'sayings of the wise' (Eccles. 12:11). Furthermore, *Qohelet* is characterised as a teacher within the community who offers a critical perspective that is truthful (Eccles. 12:10).[554] The purpose of Israel's wisdom sayings, including *Qohelet's* own material, is then defined by the editor: they provide guidance (like goads and nails to livestock (Eccles. 12:11)) for the community from God (מֵרֹעֶה אֶחָד 'from the one shepherd' (Eccles. 12:11)).[555] Childs writes that, 'This characterisation thus legitimates the Book of Koheleth as divine wisdom and rules out any individualistic interpretation'.[556] The editor then issues the community with a warning about going beyond the canonical wisdom books (Eccles. 12:12) and concludes by providing 'a material guide, a practical rule-of-faith, from which to read the whole book: "fear God and keep his commandments."'"[557]

In sum, Childs recognises the diachronic complexity of the Book's composition in accordance with historical-critical scholarship, but yet goes beyond this to explore the way that the Book as a whole has been shaped by its editor to function as Scripture for future generations. This shaping activity is then seen by Childs as providing a hermeneutical guide for future generations on how to utilise Ecclesiastes as Scripture. Subsequently, both the *Qohelet* material

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VanGemeren, et al. (eds.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 1003-5 (1003)). הֶבֶל has regularly been translated into English as 'vanity' (NRSV, ESV, KJV), in the sense of the quality of being worthless of futile, not in the sense of excessive self-admiration. This meaning fits well with the tone of the Book. *Qohelet* thinks that God has determined all that happens in human experience (6:10). Also, he thinks there is no grand meaning to life; rather, one try to eat, drink, and enjoy oneself (8:15). It is these theological perspectives which Childs believes the canonical redactor of Ecclesiastes was trying to nuance.

552 See also 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 19, 23, 24-26, etc. So John E. McKenna, 'The Concept of Hebel in the Book of Ecclesiastes', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 45/1 (1992), 19-28 (23).

553 Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

554 Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

555 Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

556 Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

557 Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

and its canonical interpretation became the canonical form of the Book for those ancient communities who revered the Book as Scripture. Childs' argument here is compelling as it rightly recognises the common observations of historical-critical scholars, yet it reorients those observations to better illuminate the meaning and function of the canonical text.

4.3.1.4 Jeremiah

The third sign of canonical shaping that Childs provides is: 'a body of material has been edited in the light of a larger body of canonical literature'.[558] Childs presents the Book of Jeremiah as an example.[559]

One of the key scholarly questions about the Book of Jeremiah is how to explain the canonical form of the Book, which has clearly-distinguished poetry and prose sections.[560] Historical-critical scholarship has generally tended to view the poetic sections as older and more authentic that the prose sections;[561] indeed, Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard Jr. write that 'the poetic oracles in the Book of Jeremiah are essentially authentic'.[562] Childs, however, is not concerned with determining the chronology of the Book's composition, but is rather interested in explaining the combined literary effect of these two genres in the one canonical text. In his view, the editor of the Book has shaped its contents (i) by genre in accordance with the two

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[558] Childs, 'Exegetical', 71.

[559] Childs says very little on the complex textual problem of Jeremiah, namely how to relate the Masoretic and Septuagint text-types. The Septuagint is roughly 3,000 words shorter than the Masoretic and has a different structure (Würthwein and Fischer, *Text*, 103-4). Added to this complexity is the discovery of fragments of a Hebrew version of Jeremiah in Qumran (4QJer^{b} and 4QJer^{d}) which aligns with the Septuagint and therefore suggests that the Masoretic and Septuagint text-types derive from different initial literary editions (*Vorlagen*) (Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 7). For a detailed study see Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly, and Joel F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), xli-xlv; Tov, *Textual*, 286-94. The reason for Childs' silence is likely that he accepts a form of the Masoretic text-type as authoritative (§5.2).

[560] This is often further distinguished into poetic oracles (A), prose narratives (B), and prose sermons (C), on which see Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah*, xxxii. A helpful example of the different genres can be seen by comparing Jer. 6 (poetic oracle) and Jer. 36 (prose narrative).

[561] See the survey in J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

[562] Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah*, xxxiv.

'modes of preaching' during Jeremiah's ministry,[563] and (ii) theologically in accordance with the pre-existing Deuteronomistic History (DH) (Childs' 'larger body of canonical literature', as above). There are several reasons to think that Jeremiah has been shaped in accordance with the DH,[564] but the most explicit are the direct quotations of 2 Kgs 24:18-25:21 and 25:27-30 in Jer. 52:1-27 and 52:31-34.

What, then, are the 'theological and hermeneutical implications'[565] of the shaping of the Jeremiah material in these ways? Here we must turn to *IOTS*, which contains a later and revised form of the suggestions made in Childs' earlier paper.

The first implication that Childs observes is hermeneutical: 'by taking seriously the canonical shape of the book of Jeremiah a different stance emerges as to how one evaluates the different levels of tradition within the book'.[566] Childs' approach resists the historical-critical impulse to atomise the canonical text in order to find the historical Jeremiah (often focusing solely on the prophetic oracles). This would destroy the form of the text deemed canonical (§3.1.2) and thus destroy the actualised form of the Jeremiah traditions for future generations. Instead, the canonical approach 'strives to understand the full dimension of the interpreted testimony' of the canonical text.[567] Importantly, this is not to assume that the canonical text reflects the actual words spoken/written by Jeremiah, but it is to grant priority to the level of the Jeremiah traditions which has been established as Scripture. This is yet another example of Childs' desire to move beyond the (understandable) atomistic instinct of Historical Criticism in order to fully appreciate the ancient literary conventions employed in the Book's composition. Thus, the canonical approach 'does not seek to play off the various levels of tradition against

563 Childs, 'Exegetical', 72. Childs explains: 'the editors of the Book of Jeremiah have attributed to Jeremiah two different modes of preaching. The one in oral form extended from Josiah's reign through Jehoiakim's [the poetic material]. The other consisted of a written condensation of the oral threats in scroll form during the fourth year of Jehoiakim [the poetic material]' (Childs, 'Exegetical', 72, additions added).

564 See Childs, *IOTS*, 347-8.

565 Childs, *IOTS*, 353.

566 Childs, *IOTS*, 353.

567 Childs, *IOTS*, 353.

each other, but rather follows the leads within the composite as to how the parts relate theologically'.[568] Childs begins to explain this theological relationship in his second implication.

Secondly, then, Childs claims that the redaction of the Jeremiah material in accordance with the DH provides the Book's later communities with theological guidance on how to understand the relationship between the law and the prophets.

> Whereas critical scholarship has concentrated much of its effort in seeking to discover how the historical Jeremiah reacted to the Josianic reform in order to form a bridge to the book of Deuteronomy, the biblical tradition itself passed over the incident in complete silence. Rather, it placed Jeremiah within the tradition of preachers of the law and provided the later community with a prophetic interpretation of how the law properly functioned within the divine economy. To take this interpretation seriously rules out both an alleged conflict between the law and the prophets, and also a legalistic subordination of the latter into a minor role.[569]

Childs views the redaction of the Jeremiah traditions in accordance with the DH as an act which transforms the prophet so that, canonically, he now stands as part of a chain of prophets who, on the basis of the law, warned of the dangers of disobeying Israel's divinely-given statutes.[570] This creates a theological continuity between the Mosaic traditions found in the Torah and the traditions of both the Former and Later Prophets, thereby showing the Book's communities a paradigm for how to relate the two as parts of YHWH's consistent 'divine economy'. Importantly, as Childs notes in his earlier paper, the shapers of Jeremiah viewed the DH as 'an authentic interpretation of Jeremiah's message' and thus it seems they saw theological authenticity in their work.[571]

Childs' third implication is once again hermeneutical. The canonical approach seeks to engage with the Jeremiah traditions in a 'different model from that currently employed by the majority of critical scholars'.[572] To understand the theological function of the Book, Childs claims that one must go beyond using it solely as a 'referential source for historical

[568] Childs, *IOTS*, 353.

[569] Childs, *IOTS*, 353.

[570] These dangers are given, for example, in Deut. 28:15-68.

[571] Childs, 'Exegetical', 72.

[572] Childs, *IOTS*, 354.

reconstruction'.[573] As above, this is not to assume that the canonical text corresponds exactly with the past, but is to assign a particular priority to the canonical level of Jeremiah's traditions in order to understand how they have been passed on as Scripture. Thus, 'the canonical approach affirms that the witness of the book for the community of faith, Jewish and Christian, which confesses its authority, lies in the form which it received by the tradition in order to mediate the prophetic word for every future generation'.[574]

In sum: Childs accepts well-established diachronic scholarship on Jeremiah but yet seeks to go beyond it in order to better appreciate the literary conventions that have been employed in the creation of the canonical text. The issue with this turns, then, not on whether his understanding of the canonical text is justifiable (which it is, since it accords with common scholarly opinion), but rather on whether he is right to prioritise the canonical level of tradition. This is a matter that will be returned to later (§4.4, §5.4).

4.3.1.5 Ezekiel

The fourth sign Childs gives is: 'an original historical sequence of a prophet's message was subordinated to a new theological function by means of a radically theocentric focus in the canonical ordering of a book'.[575] By this, Childs means that certain original prophetic messages have been shaped through the redaction of earlier traditions so that in their canonical form they serve a new theological purpose. Childs provides the Book of Ezekiel as a case study, observing two textual phenomena that support his sign.

> The traditions of Ezekiel appear to lack the sharp contours of a definite geographical locality and audience. The prophet oscillates back and forth between Babylon and Jerusalem. Oracles from pre-exilic and post-exilic periods seem indiscriminately intertwined.[576]

[573] Childs, *IOTS*, 354.

[574] Childs, *IOTS*, 354.

[575] Childs, 'Exegetical', 72.

[576] Childs, 'Exegetical', 73. See also Childs, *IOTS*, 357-8.

Childs' first observation concerns the complex structure of the Book, which appears to be an *ad hoc* collection of heavenly visions,[577] oracles,[578] and prophetic actions[579] experienced by the priest Ezekiel across his life in Babylon during the exile. This is not to say that the Book is entirely without structure, however. Notably, the Book closes with a description of the new temple, new Jerusalem, and, indeed, new Israel, including regulations for proper conduct in the restored land;[580] thus the Book appears to have been shaped to end on a hopeful, future-oriented, note. Childs' comment about the lack of 'a definite geographical locality and audience' likely refers to several particular features of the Book. Ezekiel 'travels' via heavenly visions back and forth between Babylon and Jerusalem,[581] and the Book contains oracles and prophetic actions that are variously directed towards Israel (sometimes the people in general,[582] other times the exiles in particular[583]), Jerusalem,[584] and foreign nations.[585] Childs claims that the canonical text contains oracles originating from both the pre and post-exilic eras. This aligns with the narrative context of the Book in which portions are chronologically set before (e.g. Ezek. 4) and after (e.g. 33:21) the deportation of King Jehoiachin and the elite of the land in c. 597 BCE and the destruction of Jerusalem c. 587 BCE.[586]

Childs' second observation is that many of the oracles in Ezekiel are addressed to an unspecified audience.

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577 E.g. the vision of the chariot (Ezek. 1); the vision of the scroll (Ezek. 2:1-3:11); various visions of Jerusalem (Ezek. 8:1-11:13); the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37); the vision of the new Temple and Israel (40-48).

578 E.g. Ezek. 6; 7; 13; 14; 15.

579 E.g. the brick (Ezek. 4); the sword (Ezek. 5); baggage (12:1-16); bread and water (12:17-28); the boiling pot (Ezek. 24:1-14); Ezekiel's dead wife (Ezek. 24:15-27).

580 Ezek. 40-48.

581 Ezekiel is 'in' Jerusalem in, e.g., Ezek. 8-11; 40-48.

582 E.g. וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לְאַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל 'And you, son of man, thus says YHWH my lord to the land of Israel' (Ezek. 7:1).

583 E.g. בֶּן־אָדָם דַּבֵּר אֶת־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 'son of man, speak to the elders of Israel' (Ezek. 20:3).

584 E.g. בֶּן־אָדָם הוֹדַע אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶת־תּוֹעֲבֹתֶיהָ 'son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations' (Ezek 16:2).

585 E.g. against Ammon (25:1-7); against Moab (25:8-11); against Edom (25:12-14).

586 See 2 Kgs 24:10-17 and 2 Chr. 36:9-10. Dates taken from Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 2.

> Thus, even when his oracles are fixed within a chronological framework, these temporal moorings are immediately transcended when the prophet describes the plan of God for Israel in terms completely freed from temporal limitation. For example, in chs. 12, 16, and 20, in the period before the fall of Jerusalem when Ezekiel is being instructed by the word of God concerning the impending destruction of the nation, the message of judgment inevitably includes a word of God's ultimate will for Israel in the future which is salvation. Or again, when the prophet proclaims his message to the people, the historical addressee takes on such a highly theological profile that the concrete features of time and place fade into abstraction. Thus, in ch. 14 Ezekiel begins by addressing "certain of the elders of Israel" who sat before his house. But as the oracle proceeds, the address suddenly incorporates all of Israel […]. The specific groups of exiles lose their features of historical particularity and are caught up into larger theological categories of disobedient or redeemed Israel.[587]

This ambiguity, for Childs, is evidence of canonical shaping within the Book which actualises it for future generations (§4.1.1). For Childs, the complex structure of Ezekiel, which is difficult to assign a detailed chronological framework, coupled with the lack of a specific audience, is evidence that the Book has been shaped to address Israel in any future context. Whilst there are of course parts of Ezekiel that are addressed to a non-specific audience,[588] there are many others which do have a specific referent (Jerusalem, the leaders of Israel, foreign nations, etc).[589] However, these referents are not as specific as in other prophetic books. For example, in Isaiah, the prophet speaks to named kings and individuals;[590] such episodes are entirely lacking in Ezekiel. Indeed, Childs writes, 'Ezekiel's message never takes on the particularity of the usual prophetic activity in which specific issues and groups are addressed in invective and threat'.[591]

Again, Childs follows the generally-accepted historical-critical consensus regarding the composition of the Book but reframes the diachronic findings in order to consider how the canonical form has been designed according to ancient literary conventions to better function as Scripture. Thus, both his understanding of the Book's formation and its signs of canonical shaping are justifiable.

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587 Childs, *IOTS*, 361-2. See also Childs, 'Exegetical', 73.

588 E.g. Ezek. 19.

589 See above examples.

590 E.g. see Isaiah's interaction with King Ahaz in Isa. 7 and King Hezekiah in Isa. 37. Notably, shown above, these specificities are largely absent from Second and Third Isaiah.

591 Childs, *IOTS*, 362.

4.3.1.6 Genesis 1:1-2:3; 2:4-3:24

The fifth sign Childs gives is: 'the shaping process altered the semantic level on which a passage originally functioned by assigning it a less-than-literal role within the canonical context'.[592] One example Childs gives of this is the juxtaposition of Gen. 1:1-2:3 with Gen. 2:4-3:24.

Despite disagreement regarding the extent, features, and dating of the Pentateuchal source documents,[593] many major biblical scholars today still affirm that Gen. 1-3 is composed of two distinct creation accounts that have been juxtaposed in the canonical text.[594] Childs writes, 'the striking differences between these chapters affecting language, style, and theology which the literary critics of the 19th century first pointed out have been completely sustained'.[595] These two accounts are traditionally ascribed to the Priestly ('P', Gen. 1-2:3) and Yahwist ('J', Gen. 2:4-3:24) sources.[596] Historical critics have, for a long time, sought to understand each account's original content and function within ancient Israel and the wider ancient Near East. Indeed, Childs' own early scholarship consisted of a tradition-historical study of how ancient Near Eastern myths were intentionally transformed by Genesis' authors/editors into the canonical creation accounts.[597] The problem with studying these texts in this way, as with the other examples already studied, is that it neglects the intentionally shaped canonical form of the Genesis traditions that have been passed on as Scripture (§3.1.2). Thus, Childs' concern in his

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592 Childs, 'Exegetical', 73.

593 Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 54-6; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Milton Keynes: Word, 1991), xxxiv; Gordon Wenham, 'Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm', in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.), *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 116-44 (118-19).

594 E.g. Barton, *History*, 43, 47-9; David M. Carr, *Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 196, 217.

595 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74.

596 Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (2nd edn, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 8. For a detailed examination of Gen. 1 as a 'priestly' text, see Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010). For a helpful introduction to the sources of the Pentateuch and reasons for their identification, see Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*; R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 53 (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1987).

597 See Childs, *Myth*, 31-49.

later, more-developed, canonical approach is to move beyond historical-critical atomisation to reflect on *why* the canonical form of Genesis' early chapters looks as it does.

To begin, Childs reflects on the significance of the two creation accounts' juxtaposition, which stands in marked contrast with the Flood story in Gen. 6-9 where it appears the P and J sources have been merged. What Childs seeks to understand, then, is the exegetical significance of this juxtaposition. He begins by commenting on the presence of the *toledot* formula in Gen. 2:4 which is a significant sign of canonical shaping.[598] The *toledot* formula[599] occurs eleven times throughout Genesis and each time provides a kind of title for the material that follows;[600] thus Childs' views Gen. 2:4 'as a superscription to the Yahwist account'.[601] Each instance of the *toledot* formula typically introduces the story of a son/s whose father was the subject of the previous section. Childs thinks that the title in Gen. 2:4 has been intentionally positioned to link the J account to the previous P account. He writes, 'What now follows in ii 4ff. proceeds from the creation in the analogy of a son from his father'.[602] Thus, where in other parts of Genesis the *toledot* formula introduces the human descendants of a particular figure, here the formula functions, by analogy, as an introduction to the descendants of the Heavens and the Earth. Indeed, the second account unfolds 'the history of mankind as the intended offspring of the generations of the heavens and the earth'.[603] For Childs, the *toledot* formula here provides an exegetical and theological key for unlocking the relationship between the first and second accounts. Where the first account describes the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, the

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598 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74.

599 There are eleven instances of the formula, 'these are the descendants (*toledot*) of x', with slight variations. The word *toledot* is variously spelt as תּוֹלְדוֹת (Gen. 2:4), תּוֹלְדֹת (Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:19), תֹּלְדֹת (Gen. 25:12) and תֹּלְדוֹת (Gen. 36:1, 9; 37:2). It is a feminine plural noun with the meaning 'descendants' and occurs each time in the construct state, followed by a proper noun ('descendants of Adam' (Gen. 5:1), 'descendants of Noah' (Gen. 6:9), etc.) or, on one occasion, by common nouns ('descendants of the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 2:4)).

600 Seitz, *Convergences*, 23.

601 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74.

602 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74; Childs, *IOTS*, 150.

603 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74. See also, 'if this formula is always as a heading, we have here the editor introducing the first block of narratives about the primeval history of mankind: the stories of Adam and his sons' (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Milton Keynes: Word, 1991), 49).

second describes the unfolding history of humankind that proceeds from those initial creation events. Put succinctly: Gen. 1:1-2:3 is about 'creation' and 2:4-3:24 is about that creation's 'offspring'.[604] Importantly, then, one should not characterise the P and J accounts as being synoptic parallels; rather they each have distinct functions within the Book's canonical form.[605] The exegetical significance Childs finds here is compelling since it makes good sense of the placement of the *toledot* formula between the two accounts.

Childs finds further exegetical significance in the accounts' juxtaposition. As above, he argues that the shaping of the two accounts 'altered the semantic level' on which the J account originally functioned 'by assigning it a less-than-literal role within the canonical context'.[606] He later expands this idea.

> When the sequence of events in ch. ii differs from ch. i, the structure of the newly formed composition guides the reader to accommodate the friction by recognizing a literary device somewhat akin to poetic paraphrase by which to illuminate the relationship between creation and offspring. However, by this move the semantic level of ch. ii is altered by assigning to the chapter a degree of figurative interpretation once-removed from the literal sense of the original language.[607]

Even if one accepts Childs' idea that the second J account is performing a different function to the first P account, the reader is still presented with several well-known challenges. For example, both accounts describe God's creative actions in different ways. The first P account, through structure and repetition, provides a poetic account in which אֱלֹהִים constructs the cosmos over a seven-day week that culminates in the creation of human beings. The second J account, however, is a narrative that begins with the creation of one man who is placed in a garden by יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, and tells the story of how that man's isolation was solved through the creation of animals and a woman, as well as the story of their subsequent expulsion from the garden. Of

604 Childs, *IOTS*, 150.

605 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74. See also 'We should not speak of a second, parallel story of creation. Rather, this is a more intense reflection upon the implications of creation for the destiny of humanity' (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 40); Childs, *IOTS*, 150.

606 Childs, 'Exegetical', 73.

607 Childs, 'Exegetical', 74.

course, these are very simplistic summaries, but they serve to demonstrate that the reader (both ancient[608] and modern) of Genesis, even with Childs' canonical interpretation, is still presented with the question of how to reconcile the two accounts. Here Childs' second idea comes into play. In his view, the structure of these two accounts (i.e. their juxtaposition with an intervening title) guides the reader to recognise 'a literary device somewhat akin to poetic paraphrase'. This device alters the 'semantic level' of the J account 'by assigning a degree of figurative interpretation'. Unfortunately Childs does not provide any further detail in either his paper or later *IOTS* on what exactly this means. This is problematic as it is not clear in what way Childs thinks that the semantic level of the J account is altered. It is peculiar that Childs encourages the reader to resolve the interpretative issue by moving to a kind of figural interpretation as this is not encouraged by the text itself. Yet, it is consistent with the approach to figural interpretation that Childs would develop later in his career (§6.2.3).

In sum, Childs is right to find signs of canonical shaping in the juxtaposition of the two accounts but the exegetical significance he derives from those signs is only partly justified.

4.3.1.7 Daniel 7-12

The sixth and final sign Childs gives is: 'prophetic proclamation has been given a radically new eschatological interpretation by shifting the referent within the original oracles'.[609] One example Childs gives of this is the Book of Daniel.

Within historical-critical scholarship it is now commonplace to view chapters 1-6 and 7-12 as two distinct literary strata within the Book of Daniel.[610] At the level of the canonical text, chapters 1-6 are a narrative about Daniel/Belteshazzar, a young man of the Jewish nobility

608 E.g., Ephrem the Syrian viewed this as an issue to explain in the fourth-century CE (see Andrew Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1-11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 48-9).

609 Childs, 'Exegetical', 75.

610 See the survey in John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 1993), 26-33.

(Dan. 1:3) who was given special treatment by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in exile and subsequently played an important role in the royal court under both the Babylonian ruler, his son Belshazzar, and his Persian successor, Darius. Chapters 7-12 add additional details to dreams Daniel had during the events narrated in chapters 1-6.[611]

> In terms of its structure the book falls into two clearly distinct parts. The first six chapters present stories about Daniel and his friends in a style in which the third person narrative dominates. In the last six chapters the visions of Daniel are offered, chiefly in a first person style. Yet these two parts of the book are clearly related to each other. The stories about Daniel in the first part of the book describe him as one granted "understanding in all visions and dreams" (1.17), which are then recounted in the second part of the book.[612]

Childs thinks that chapters 7-12, though cloaked in apocalyptic symbolism, were intended by their original author to refer to the events of the Maccabean age. If one decodes Daniel's symbolic language, one therefore finds in chapters 7-12 a description of the developments leading up to the end of the rule of the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus' persecution of the Jews played a substantial role in the Maccabean Revolt[613] and he is perhaps the 'little horn' of Dan. 8:9.[614] The religious purpose of these chapters was, so Childs claims, to provide a vision of the downfall of Judah's great tyrant as part of a great eschatological 'convulsion' signifying the end of the age, thereby proving hope and comfort to those in the midst of hardship.[615]

> The visions called the community of faith to obedience and challenged it to hold on because the end of time which Daniel foresaw would shortly come. Because it was written in the form of a *vaticinium ex eventu*, the effect of this message would have been electrifying. Daniel had prophesised about the rise and fall of the earlier three kingdoms and these events had occurred. Now his vision of the last days was being fulfilled before their very eyes. The "little horn" had appeared; the persecution had reached its height; the end was imminent. Therefore "blessed is he who waits." The visions of chs. 7-12 were probably accompanied by the stories of Daniel and his friends to illustrate obedience under a similar persecution for the sake of one's faith.[616]

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611 See Dan. 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1.

612 Childs, *IOTS*, 614.

613 Childs, 'Exegetical', 76-7.

614 Childs, *IOTS*, 617.

615 Childs, *IOTS*, 615. See also Carol A. Newsom, *Daniel*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 27.

616 Childs, *IOTS*, 615-6.

However, Childs thinks that the canonisation of the Book of Daniel as Scripture has recontextualised chapters 7-12 so their symbolic referent is no longer the impending dramatic closure of the Maccabean age but rather the unrealised eschatological age that is yet to come.[617] This reinterpretation of these chapters emerged within Judaism and Christianity by at least the first-century CE, as Matt. 24 and Mark 13 demonstrate.[618] Reinterpretations of Dan. 7-12 likely emerged because the great convulsions at the end of the Maccabean age did not occur in the way Daniel predicted. As Daniel was Sacred Scripture, new interpretations arose which allowed it to function as truthful Scripture by changing the interpretation of the chapters; something which was relatively straightforward to achieve given the inherently mystical and symbolic language of the text.[619] One of these interpretations opened the text up to a future unidentified age, though this was not the only reinterpretation.[620] In their new context, then, the references in chapters 7-12 to Antiochus were thus understood typologically; 'Antiochus had simply become a representative of the ultimate enemy, but he himself was not the fulfilment of the vision'.[621] Chapters 7-12 thus became unfulfilled predictions relevant to all future generations who viewed the text as truthful Scripture.[622] This is a paradigmatic example of Childs' canonical shaping: the transformation of normative traditions to function effectively as Scripture for future generations.

Intriguingly, Childs' recontextualised interpretation of chapters 7-12 is not prompted by a sign of canonical shaping in the text itself (in contrast to Second Isaiah or Jeremiah[623]). Indeed, Childs writes, 'the form in which the message originally functioned in the Maccabean

617 Childs, 'Exegetical', 77. See also Newsom, *Daniel*, 28.

618 For Daniel as a prophet in early Judaism see 4Q174.

619 Childs, *IOTS*, 620.

620 2 Esdras re-interpreted Daniel's visions as primarily being about the downfall of the later Roman Empire (Childs, 'Exegetical', 77).

621 Childs, 'Exegetical', 77.

622 Childs, 'Exegetical', 77.

623 Childs, *IOTS*, 619.

crisis and the form within its canonical context appear to be essentially the same'.[624] Rather the recontextualisation of Dan. 7-12 is an external hermeneutical act promoted by its canonisation as Scripture in juxtaposition with other texts that re-interpret it in this new way.[625]

In sum, Childs follows the standard historical-critical consensus regarding the composition of Daniel and ascribes an interpretation to the Book which emerged later within Jewish/Christian communities. In this sense, Childs' canonical understanding of Dan. 7-12 is not novel but is rather a reformulated interpretation already extant within Jewish/Christian communities. Ultimately, Childs is correct that chapters 7-12 were reinterpreted by later Jewish/Christian communities in order to better utilise them as Scripture. However, he does not consider why the decisions of these later communities are authoritative for the Church today (this matter will be returned to later - §4.4). Furthermore, Childs' willingness to prioritise the decisions of later interpreters over those who were responsible for shaping the canonical text creates a tension: he wants to grant authority to those authors/editors responsible for the canonical text of Daniel, yet he grants final authority to those later canonical texts which reinterpret it. This reveals that there is a hierarchy of canonical shaping in Childs' thought and that he employs what this thesis calls the criterion of 'developmental priority' (§6.3.1) when determining the interpretation of a text that is authoritative for the Church today.

4.3.1.8 The Pervasiveness of a Canonical Intentionality

Let us now consider a possible problem with Childs' theory of canonical shaping at the level of the passage/book. As Noble has argued, there may be occasions in which the canonical texts contain traditions which were *not* shaped in accordance with his theory of canonical shaping.

> In *some* cases, then, it seems that Childs can present a good *prima facie* case for the theological value of studying the text in its final form. What is far less clear, however, is whether there are sufficient grounds for his elevation of the priority of the final form into a *general hermeneutical principle* that governs the interpretation of every text. In fact, there is a major problem at this point. Childs himself

[624] Childs, *IOTS*, 618-9.

[625] In Christianity, this reinterpretation is also encouraged by the Book's relocation to the Major Prophets (see §4.3.3.1).

> accepts, in significant measure, the standard critical reconstructions of the traditions behind the text (particularly as regards literary sources); but when the same reconstructions also show that the dominant influences in the formation of these traditions, and hence in the shaping of the final text, were such factors as political infighting, poor historiographical methodology, misunderstandings of the material, or sheer antiquarianism, it is far from clear why priority should still be accorded to the canonical form. On the contrary, in circumstances such as this it would seem far more reasonable for someone like Childs, who is particularly concerned to hear the text's *theological* testimony, to go back behind the canonical text in the hope of recovering a layer of tradition for which theological motivations *were* the dominant concerns in its shaping.[626]

However, there is a substantial issue with Noble's argument: he does not provide a single example to justify his claim. As Childs' theory of canonical shaping is so broad and thus inclusive (i.e. almost any redaction can be classed as canonical shaping), there are no immediately obvious examples to bolster Noble's argument (though this does not mean one does not exist). Regardless of the lack of evidence to support Noble, Childs does pre-emptively respond to his challenge. Childs' solution to this problem is to suggest that any redactional activity motivated by a non-theological agenda is subordinated by the use of the biblical texts as Scripture. In Childs' words, 'Although non-religious factors (political, social, and economic) certainly entered into the canonical process, these were subordinated to the religious use of the literature by its function within the community'.[627] Let us unpick what Childs means. Childs is arguing that any non-theological agendas involved in the composition of the biblical texts are now irrelevant as they have been replaced by an agenda from the community[628] to use these texts as Scripture. However, this argument is problematic for Childs as it undermines his theory of canonical shaping, suggesting that a canonical intentionality was not as pervasive in the canonical process as he initially claimed.

4.3.2 Canonical Shaping of Groups

In addition to the biblical texts undergoing canonical shaping in the contexts of passages and books, Childs suggests that they have undergone shaping at the higher literary level of the

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[626] Noble, *Canonical*, 47-8. See also Melugin, 'Canon', 50. Also consider Barr, who writes: 'Going to the opposite extreme from traditional scholarship, Childs never considers that the canonizers might have been incompetent, or merely silly, or thoroughly misunderstood what the text was about' (Barr, 'Introduction', 18).

[627] Childs, *IOTS*, 61. See also 79 and 665, as well as Childs, 'Exegetical', 68; Childs, 'Response', 206-7.

[628] Which 'community' Childs means is unclear.

group.[629] These groups are part of the structure of the HB, the OT, the NT, and the Christian Bible as a whole. However, it is the latter which has ultimate importance when it comes to interpretation in a Christian context according to Childs (§4.2.1).[630] What Childs means when he suggests that a biblical text has been shaped in the context of a group, and how this led him to affirm that canonical shaping extends to higher literary levels, will be demonstrated below, beginning with the OT (§4.3.2.1) and then progressing to the NT (§4.3.2.2).

4.3.2.1 Groups in the Old Testament: the Pentateuch as a Case Study

As the foundation for both the OT and the HB, the Pentateuch/Torah[631] provides a useful case study for signs of canonical shaping at the group level. Thus, this section explores the signs of canonical shaping in the Pentateuch which aided Childs in the development of his theory of canonical shaping. Childs' comments on this topic are found mostly within a 1972 article[632] and *IOTS*.

To begin, Childs was dissatisfied with the obsession amongst his academic peers to identify the various sources within the Pentateuch. This source-critical study sought to interpret the identified individual sources[633] within their original *Sitze im Leben*, in contrast to their

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629 What Goldingay calls 'complexes of books' (Goldingay, *Models*, 132). Regarding the OT, Childs writes, 'The canonical process involved the shaping of the tradition not only into independent books, but also into larger canonical units, such as the Torah, Prophets and Writings' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 13).

630 Thus this thesis does not consider canonical shaping in the groups of the HB, though this is a valid avenue of future research. Childs' *IOTS* does consider this topic, though it is ultimately of little importance to his Christian Biblical Theology.

631 The term Pentateuch is an English translation of the Greek πεντάτευχος 'the work comprising five scrolls' and has been used since early Christian times.

632 Childs, 'Scripture of the Church'.

633 The classic formulation of these sources is the documentary hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). He identified four sources: J, E, D, and P. 'J' stands for the Yahwist source ('J' comes the German word for the divine name: *Jahwe*) associated generally with the divine name Yahweh, E for the Elohist source associated generally with the divine name Elohim, 'D' for the Deuteronomist source associated primarily with the book of Deuteronomy, and 'P' for the priestly source. The chronological order of these sources is expressed by JEDP, with J being the oldest and P the youngest sources. Wellhausen's motivation for his source-critical activity was to establish the religious history of Israel (for a more detailed study, see Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 9-12) (Julius Wellhausen, *Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1878)). According to Wenham, a Wellhausen-like consensus was prevalent amongst pentateuchal scholars until 1970s (Gordon Wenham, 'Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm', in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.)*, The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 116-44 (118).

canonical contexts. Though Childs was dissatisfied with this approach, he was not against it in principle (§3.1.2). Indeed, he writes, 'any attempt to offer a different approach to the study of the Pentateuch which does not take into account the achievements of historical critical scholarship over the last two hundred years is naïve and arrogant'.[634] Instead, his contention is with the notion that this is the *only* or *best* way to read the Pentateuch. Childs took issue with Historical Criticism's sole focus on the atomisation of the Pentateuch into its sources, thus he sought to re-orient the discipline so that it would focus on studying how those sources had been shaped into the canonical text which contains signs of canonical shaping.[635]

When examining the canonical shaping of the Pentateuch, Childs observes two phenomena. Firstly, the five books have been shaped to stand as 'separate entities', and secondly, they have conversely been shaped to function as part of a single group.[636]

With regard to their individuality, Childs notes several literary features which distinguish each book from the others. For example, Genesis and Exodus are distinct because of their content, as they narrate sequential periods of history without overlap. The former tells of the so-called 'primeval history' (Gen. 1-11) of humankind, as understood from the perspective of someone living in the ancient Near East, as well as the so-called 'patriarchal history' (Gen. 12-50) of Israel as God establishes a chosen family through the descendants of Abraham. The latter, that is Exodus, however, begins some 400 years after the last patriarch (Joseph) and narrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt and the giving of the law at Sinai[637] as part of YHWH's new claim over the people. Further evidence that Genesis and Exodus are distinct

634 Childs, *IOTS*, 127.

635 Arnold writes the following regarding canonical approaches to pentateuchal criticism: 'While most scholars who have adopted this approach would not necessarily reject the JEDP analysis, they seek to explore the theological message of the received form of the canon, not only the individual sources or literary traditions behind the text' (Bill T. Arnold, 'Pentateuchal Criticism, History Of', in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 622-31 (629)).

636 Childs, *IOTS*, 129.

637 Or 'Horeb' (e.g. Exod. 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; Deut. 1:2, 6, 19; 4:10, 15; 5:2; 1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr. 5:10; Ps. 106:19; Mal. 4:4), see also. Sir. 48:7 which addresses the confusion by using the two options as synonyms.

literary works can be seen in the repeated telling of Joseph's death in Gen. 50:26 and Exod. 1:6.[638] Then, though Leviticus has chronological crossovers with Exodus' legal portions, it is a distinct work because of its different articulation of and addition to the Sinai laws revealed in Exodus. Childs quotes Milgrom, 'it (Leviticus) is thematically an independent entity. In Exodus, the P code describes the construction of the cultic implements […], whereas Leviticus converts this static picture into scenes from the living cult.'[639] Then, Leviticus contains discourse markers such as a 'clear summary' at its end,[640] which distinguishes it from Numbers. Numbers, then, is distinct from Leviticus as indicated by the presence of a 'precise date formula' at its beginning[641] and a summary at its end.[642] In addition, Childs notes that, 'in distinction from Leviticus, the book of Numbers focuses on the laws of the camp when on the march, thus the military order of the tribes, the census of the fighting force, and the laws related to the Levites, which are found only in Numbers'.[643] The Book of Deuteronomy is then distinct from Numbers, despite having a crossover in geography of the plains of Moab,[644] because of its 'clear introduction and conclusion'.[645] Thus, the main indications that the pentateuchal books are distinct from each other comes from the different content of each book as well as the presence of discourse

638 'It would make no sense to repeat an unrepeatable event like Joseph's death within six verses of a continuous narrative' (Konrad Schmid, 'Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel', *Biblica*, 93/2 (2012), 187-208 (188)).

639 Childs, *IOTS*, 129.

640 אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַר סִינָי 'These are the commandments which YHWH commanded to Moses for the Israelites on the mountain of Sinai' (Lev. 27:34).

641 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם 'And YHWH spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert in the tent of meeting on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out from the land of Egypt' (Num. 1:1).

642 Childs, *IOTS*, 129. Numbers concludes with the following, which has strong parallels with Leviticus suggesting common tradentship: אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַרְבֹת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ 'These are the commandments and the instructions which YHWH commanded by the hand of Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho' (Num. 36:13).

643 Childs, *IOTS*, 129.

644 See Num 33:50; Deut. 1:1.

645 Childs, *IOTS*, 129-30. With regard to an introduction, the text says: אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן 'These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan' (Deut. 1:1). With regard to a conclusion, the text is different from Leviticus and Numbers in that it summarises the life and deeds of Moses, rather than the content of the Book. For example, וְלֹא קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה 'And there has not arisen a prophet again in Israel like Moses' (Deut. 34:10).

markers which mark the beginning and/or end of each book in discontinuity with that which comes before/after.

Conversely, Childs also argues that there are literary signs within the pentateuchal books which suggest that each has undergone canonical shaping to become part of the group we now know as the Pentateuch. Firstly, the positioning of Genesis at the start of the Pentateuch establishes the Book as 'the introduction to the story of Israel which begins in Exodus'.[646] Genesis narrates the founding of the special affinity between YHWH and a chosen family (i.e. that of Abraham); by the time of the exodus event the family had become a nation (i.e. Israel), but the divine affinity remained. Secondly, a narrative connection is made between Genesis and Exodus through the revelation of YHWH at the burning bush to Moses.[647] He reveals Himself not as an unknown deity, but as the God who was known from patriarchal history;[648] a history which was provided to the reader in the Book of Genesis. Thus, Exodus requires Genesis as its literary backdrop, suggesting that the two were designed to be read together. Thirdly, a connection is made between Exodus and Leviticus through the latter's assumption of the Sinai event in Exodus. Indeed, many of the ordinances in Leviticus are said to derive from that event (e.g. Lev. 7:37-38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34).[649] As with Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus would not make complete sense if Exodus was not assumed as its literary backdrop. Fourthly, Numbers then is connected to both Exodus and Leviticus as it begins in the context of Sinai and the giving of the law. From 10:11, Numbers carries the narrative forwards as it describes Israel's departure from Sinai and the subsequent events which occur in the wilderness. Fifthly, Childs suggests that Deuteronomy is annexed to the four previous books as a commentary which looks back on what has come before as well as forward to what lies ahead in the form of an explanatory

646 Childs, *IOTS*, 130.

647 Exod. 3.

648 אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exod. 3:6).

649 Childs, *IOTS*, 184.

and exhortatory sermon told primarily from Moses' first-person perspective.[650] Indeed, Deuteronomy itself claims this role for Moses.[651] Childs explains this in more detail.

> To the new generation who was about to cross into the land Moses interprets the Sinai covenant. He does not offer a new law, but by a means of a rehearsal of the history of Israel since Sinai, he seeks to inculcate obedience to the divine law which had once and for all constituted the nation (5.22). Moses explains the law book by recapitulating what has happened as well as applying the divine law to the new situation in which the people would shortly enter. It is, therefore, built into the canonical function of Deuteronomy that a new application of old tradition is being offered, but a tradition which had already assumed a normative, written form. The homiletical style which belongs to the present shape of the book is an essential part of the explanation of the law. The new interpretation seeks to actualize the traditions of the past for the new generation in such a way as to evoke a response of the will in a fresh commitment to the covenant. The present form of the book of Deuteronomy reflects a dominant editorial concern to shape the material for its use by future generations of Israel.[652]

Thus, Childs thinks that Deuteronomy is an integral part of the Pentateuch, drawing the corpus together and providing normative guidance on how to understand Genesis-Numbers as an actualised form of Mosaic tradition.[653]

Childs believes that the Pentateuch provides the reader with normative guidance on how to understand Mosaic tradition. He defines this guidance as follows, 'The fundamental

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[650] Childs, *IOTS*, 130, 211. Childs ascribes the description of Deuteronomy as a sermon to von Rad. Najman has undertaken a detailed analysis of the way in which Deuteronomy 're-presents' the Exodus covenant code (Deut. 12-26; Exod. 20:22-23:33). She makes the good point that Deuteronomy's re-presentation provides a normative Mosaic model for any future re-presentation of the Torah. Also, in a manner which has significant parallels to Childs, Najman writes that the re-presentation of the Torah in Deuteronomy (which supplements, rather than replaces the Exodus covenant code) now addresses the 'readers and listeners of the text at any time' (Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 39). However, unlike Childs, Najman does not claim that this expansive re-presentation was part of an overall canonical intention, though it did have a substantial impact upon the redaction of other canonical (and non-canonical) texts; notably those ascribed to the Deuteronomistic History.

It is important to note that Childs' conception of groups in the OT/HB does not include a form of what has, following Martin Noth, been called the 'Deuteronomistic History'. The idea of the Deuteronomistic History is generally that Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets of the HB (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings) were once part of a single work which drew together earlier material and framed it in line with the theological values affirmed in Deuteronomy. Carr suggests that some of these values are, 'the importance of faithfulness to Yahweh alone, the belief that Yahweh will punish unfaithfulness, the importance of pure worship and sacrifice in only one place, and hostility toward foreigners and/or foreign influence' (Carr, *Introduction*, 143). Childs affirms that the Deuteronomistic History was likely once a real corpus, but it has been subordinated to the canonical form of the OT. Thus, whilst Deuteronomy may still have elements which show how it functioned as the introduction and theological paradigm for the books of the Deuteronomistic History, it now also functions as the final book of the Pentateuch which provides normative guidance on the interpretation of the Sinai event, amongst other things (Childs, *IOTS*, 233). For a current, detailed introduction to the Deuteronomistic History, see John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: The Deuteronomistic History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018).

[651] בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בֵּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר 'Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law, saying' (Deut. 1:5).

[652] Childs, *IOTS*, 212.

[653] Childs, 'Scripture of the Church', 721.

theological understanding of God's redemptive work through law and grace, promise and fulfilment, election and obedience was once and for all established'.[654] Thus, the Pentateuch is not just an *ad hoc* collection of books, but is rather the foundational document of Israel that itself serves as a normative guide to the community. Importantly, part of what Childs is suggesting here is that the Pentateuch is already one step removed from the Mosaic tradition which was (so tradition states) given by divine revelation at Sinai. Rather than being the actual Mosaic tradition itself, it instead serves as a Theological Interpretation of that tradition for the benefit of the Israelite community.[655] As Childs thinks that the work of the canonical shapers has priority, it is their interpretation of Mosaic tradition which is normative for those undertaking theological reflection today.

This thesis affirms that the current text of the Pentateuch is a result of multiple editors attempting to weave together a continuous narrative using several sources which were received as authoritative during the era in which the first major literary edition of the Pentateuch was composed. As this would have required a stable intellectual context, it is sensible to suggest that one was not available before the monarchical period at the earliest and continued well into the post-exilic era.[656] In evaluating Childs' claims about the canonical shaping of the Pentateuch as a group within both the HB and the OT, he is correct that the Pentateuch shows signs of compositional and redactional activity at the group level as the texts of the individual books bear clear signs that they were shaped so that they could each play a part in the larger group.[657]

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654 Childs, *IOTS*, 131-2. See also Blenksinopp, *Pentateuch*, 51, who makes a very similar claim.

655 This line of argument has been made recently by Benjamin D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). Sommer presents a 'participatory theory' of revelation in the context of modern Judaism, focusing on the Pentateuch. He argues that the Pentateuch itself is not revelation but was written as a human response to the revelatory acts of God in history; thus, human beings participated in the shaping of that revelation for subsequent generations.

656 Indeed, there are those who see the initial chapters of Genesis as figuratively representing the history of Israel until the post-exilic era (Carlos R. Bovell, 'Genesis 3:21: The History of Israel in a Nutshell?', *The Expository Times*, 115/11 (2004), 361-6; Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012)).

657 Blenkinsopp takes this idea further, writing, 'There is therefore little doubt that [the] Pentateuch and Former Prophets may be and at some stage of the tradition were intended to be read as one consecutive history' (Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 35).

Indeed, it is not as if five individual books have simply been juxtaposed, as with the Gospels which will be considered next.

4.3.2.2 Groups in the New Testament: the Gospels as a Case Study

Next for consideration are Childs' suggestions of how canonical shaping applies to groups within the NT, using the Gospels as a case study. In Childs' mind, there is a substantial difference between the canonical shaping of the Pentateuch and the canonical shaping of the Gospels. With regard to the former, as stated above, the canonical shaping of the Pentateuch affected the actual text of the Pentateuchal books. The Gospels also underwent a kind of shaping, but it did not affect the texts of the four books. Rather, the canonical shaping they underwent consisted of their being juxtaposed within the NT.[658]

Of course, none of this is to deny that the Gospels were composed in direct dependence upon each other. A number of explanations have been suggested for this dependence. The consensus explanation is the theory of Markan priority.[659] The idea is that Mark was the first written Gospel, hence why it had 'priority'. Matthew and Luke then used, added to, and altered Mark (or Mark's sources) to their own ends. The sayings material which then is found only in Matthew and Luke is explained by the idea that Matthew and Luke used the source 'Q',[660] which was not used by Mark. This source was a collection of Jesus' sayings, rather than a narrative; extraordinarily, the discovery of fragments of the Gospel of Thomas amongst the Oxyrhynchus Papyri and the Nag Hammadi 'library' confirmed that such documents did exist in the early Church.[661] The Gospel of John is then thought to be the last Gospel that was composed because

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658 Childs, *NTC*, 162.

659 Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?: A Symbolic Reading* (2nd edn, London: SPCK, 2005), 13.

660 From the German for 'source' (*Quelle*).

661 P. Oxy 1, the earliest of the three Greek papyri found in Oxyrhynchus, has been dated to 200 CE (Bart Ehrman, and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 308). This of course makes it considerably later than the hypothetical Q, but it does prove that the genre of a sayings gospel did exist. There is substantial debate as to whether the Gospel of Thomas itself dates back either to the time of the canonical Gospels, or perhaps even earlier (see Robert Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What did Jesus really Say?* (New York: Polebridge, 1985); Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge:

of its unique and complex theological perspectives.[662] John knew the Synoptics, but instead prioritised its own source/s and theology. The theory of Markan priority is by no means the only solution to the dependence of the Gospels,[663] but what is clear is that the Gospels are interdependent to a large degree.

Another major difference between the Pentateuch and the Gospels is that the Gospels contain four different historical accounts of the same events (the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus). The Books of the Pentateuch, however, narrate different historical events (though there are crossovers, as above §4.3.2.1). As the Gospels present four different accounts about the life of the same person, they thus present Christians with a problem of how to discern history (i.e. what really happened). This is particularly problematic when different accounts are provided for theologically important events such as the resurrection.[664] The difficulty in establishing history (what really happened) from the four Gospel accounts is well known. Indeed, Childs writes, 'Both the importance and difficulty of understanding the resurrection accounts of the four Gospels are obvious to anyone who has studied the New Testament'.[665] Ehrman presents the problem eloquently.

> Read through the accounts and ask yourself some basic questions: Who was the first person to go to the tomb? Was it Mary Magdalene by herself (John)? or Mary along with another Mary (Matthew)? or Mary along with another Mary and Salome (Mark)? or Mary, Mary, Joanna, and a number of other women (Luke)? Was the stone already rolled away when they arrived at the tomb (Mark, Luke, and John), or explicitly not (Matthew)? Whom did they see there? An angel (Matthew), a man (Mark), or two men (Luke)? Did they immediately go and tell some of the disciples what they had seen (John), or not (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)? What did the person or people at the tomb tell the women to do? To tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (Matthew and Mark)? Or to remember what Jesus had told them earlier when *he* had been in Galilee (Luke)? Did the women then go tell the disciples what they were told to tell them (Matthew and Luke), or not (Mark)? Did the disciples see Jesus (Matthew, Luke, and John), or not (Mark)? Where did they see him? – only

Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012)).

662 E.g. John 3:31-36; 5:19-29.

663 For an overview of recent positions, see Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer (eds.), *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

664 Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20-21.

665 Childs, *NTC*, 201.

> in Galilee (Matthew), or only in Jerusalem (Luke)? There are other discrepancies, but this is enough to get the point across.[666]

Historically speaking, two main strategies have been devised to address the discrepancies found in the Gospels, including the resurrection accounts, which each come under the rubric of 'harmonisation'.[667] The first strategy is to *change the text* by producing a single Gospel account (a Gospel harmony) which combines and harmonises the four Gospels in such a way that the discrepancies are removed. The principal example of this is Tatian's *Diatessaron* which was produced c. 150 CE and had substantial influence upon the Syrian Church up until the fifth century CE.[668] The second strategy, on the other hand, is to *change one's interpretation* of the texts in such a way that the discrepancies are removed. Thus, one could argue that those interpretations of the Gospels which conclude that there are discrepancies are in fact *incorrect* interpretations of the texts. The principal example of this position is Augustine's treatise, *On the Unity of the Gospels*, whereas the least sophisticated (and most amusing) example is Osiander's *Harmony of the Gospels* of 1537. Osiander 'solved' the discrepancies by suggesting that what appear to be the same event described in different ways are in fact always different events. Thus, as both Childs and Barton note, Jesus healed a blind man near Jericho four times, healed the servants of two different centurions, cleansed the Temple three times, and received two crowns of thorns.[669] Osiander was not entirely novel and actually was following Augustine's logic,[670] but to an absurd extent. Thus, the use of figural interpretation has often provided Christians with a means for finding theological value despite apparent discrepancies. Childs is well aware of both of these attempts at Gospel harmonisation and considers each to be flawed. In addition, he also considers those who blame the discrepancies on the Gospels being independent human

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666 Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), 134.

667 For a good introduction to the topic see Barton, *Nature*, 13-26.

668 McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 152.

669 Childs, *NTC*, 147; Barton, *Nature*, 17.

670 Barton, *Nature*, 15.

documents with no real unity whatsoever to be equally flawed. So, what is his solution to the problem of the four Gospels, focusing particularly on the resurrection accounts?

As Childs prioritises the canonical text (§5), as well as the canon (scope and structure) received as authoritative by Christianity, he is restricted by the fact that the Christian Bible contains four Gospels, rather than one. To Childs, however, this is not a problem to be solved but is a sign of canonical shaping that has exegetical significance. Indeed, the reason why harmonies are flawed in Childs' perspective is because they erringly assume that the Gospels' plurality reflects a deficiency in the canonical process.[671] Rather, in Childs' view the juxtaposition of four Gospels with differing perspectives is intentional and has exegetical significance.

> The theological implications of the canonical shaping are highly significant. The unity of the one Gospel lies within its fourfold witness, but each new generation of readers is challenged to discern that unity. Nowhere is it presupposed that the one correct interpretation lies hidden, waiting the day to be finally uncovered. Rather, the richness of the witness to the gospel is such that each new reading challenges its hearers to reflect theologically on its testimony to the one Lord.[672]

Thus, Childs views the juxtaposition of the four Gospels as a canonical sign with exegetical significance which prompts every generation of interpreters to seek out their unity. This significance is emphasised, in Childs' mind, through the addition of titles 'which introduce the books as witnesses to the one Gospel'.[673] Morgan makes a similar observation:

> As the second century superscriptions remind us, none of the Gospels is *the* Gospel. They are all fallible human witnesses. Their theological subject-matter lies beyond the text and beyond anything the historian can draw from these sources. The biggest danger of the so-called quest of the historical Jesus is the suggestion that the historian's conclusions might provide not simply one critical norm amongst others but the foundation and substance of Christian faith. This critical reduction to a single norm, like Tatian's solution to the plurality of the Gospels, would be in danger of making *the* Gospel into a new law. The variety of witnesses (which include the other New Testament writers) to the one Lord is one way of ensuring that this Lord transcends not only these witnesses but also all subsequent Christian theological and ethical positions and decisions. That need not lead to resignation or scepticism. There is no evading the demands of the moment upon one's concrete

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671 'The basic error of the traditional harmony was the assumption that the canonical process had been deficient in leaving the Gospels in their plural form rather than completing the process by fusing them into a fixed, authoritative interpretation. Because this development did not take place within the canonical process, but in fact was flatly rejected, the plural form remains constitutive of the canonical shape. Conversely, the basic error of the historical critical position was the assumption that the canonical shape was of no exegetical significance and that valid interpretation depended on a critical reconstruction which re-aligned the Gospels in the original sequence. Consequently both from the right and left the canonical shaping of the fourfold Gospel collection has been disregarded which is one of the major reasons for the present impasse in New Testament scholarship' (Childs, *NTC*, 156).

672 Childs, *NTC*, 156.

673 Childs, *NTC*, 155.

> obedience. But any act of theological interpretation is a venture and a risk. One might be mistaken and therefore must remain open to the manifold witness of the tradition and the understanding of others within the community.[674]

What does Childs mean by the 'unity' of the Gospels? Childs writes that, 'The unity of the one Gospel lies within its fourfold witness',[675] yet he elsewhere writes that the unity of the Gospels is to be found in the subject matter to which they point (see §4.3.3.3.1). It is not clear what the relationship is between these two claims in Childs' mind. However, that Childs does believe there is some kind of unity to be found within the Gospels is demonstrated by a section devoted to 'A Canonical Harmony of the Gospels' in *NTC* which contains a chapter specifically on the resurrection.[676] Childs writes the following conclusion.

> The Gospel accounts of the resurrection testify to a variety of different experiences of the risen Christ by means of a variety of literary forms. Their testimony is not restricted to one moment in historical time. By recognizing the eschatological dimension of the resurrection, they bear testimony to its continuing reality which extended far beyond Easter morning and was experienced by the Christian community. Thus, Luke's witness to the risen Christ speaks of Jesus who was (and is) known in the eucharist, in the 'breaking of bread' (24.35). Mark's longer ending testifies to the enthroned Lord who continues to work with his disciples through signs. Matthew bears witness to the exalted Christ who commissions his disciples for ministry and whose presence is with them to the close of the age. John focuses on the faith of those who have not themselves seen the earthly Jesus, but who partake of his eternal life through the testimony of others. In all the Gospels the Christ, whose resurrection brings into being a new eschatological age, can never be grasped simply by a noetic process, but is experienced by the church in the faithful exercise of Christian discipleship. Obviously an exegetical method which derives meaning from the New Testament only when it conforms to the ordinary conventions of human behaviour has difficulty fitting the Gospel accounts into such categories. However, in spite of the remarkable variety of ways by which the risen Christ is actualized by the Christian church, one can still discern a canonical harmony within the corpus of the four Gospels.[677]

In his conclusion, the unity Childs finds in the resurrection accounts is that they (i) all express a desire to extend the significance of the resurrection beyond the event itself, and (ii) suggest the 'new eschatological age' ushered in by the resurrection 'can never be grasped simply by a noetic process'. It is notable, then, that Childs' 'canonical harmony' says nothing on the historical accuracy of the resurrection accounts. As Paul states so powerfully in 1 Cor. 15, the

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[674] Robert Morgan, 'The Hermeneutical Significance of Four Gospels', *Interpretation*, 33/4 (1979), 376-88 (387-8). See also Barton, *Spirit*, 152-3.

[675] Childs, *NTC*, 156.

[676] Childs, *NTC*, 199-209.

[677] Childs, *NTC*, 209.

good news depends on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.[678] Childs even knows this to be so, and elsewhere is insistent that the Christian message requires the historicity of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[679]

Childs is correct that the four Gospels preserved in the current Christian Bible have not been redacted to present a harmonised portrait of Jesus Christ. Yet, is he correct that the juxtaposition of the four Gospels is a canonical sign which prompts every generation of interpreters to seek out their unity? Clearly the Gospels can be read as having exegetical significance in the manner Childs affirms, but it is not clear that they *should* be read in this way. Indeed, there is no explicit evidence from the Gospels themselves that they are intended to be read in the manner Childs suggests.

In contrast to Childs, it is also possible to explain why many early Christian communities, and then the later Church, grouped the four Gospels together within the larger corpus of Christian Scripture without referring to canonical shaping. From at least the second century CE, proto-orthodox communities accepted the four Gospels as authoritative.[680] Furthermore, there are extant codices containing the four juxtaposed Gospels from the early third century CE.[681] It is possible, then, that many early Christian communities grouped the four Gospels because of their similarities in content and genre. Each Gospel provides a narrative account of Jesus' life; thus it is reasonable that communities wished to gather these accounts together. This pragmatic decision may have established a norm that then informed those who later established the structure of the Christian canon, yet this cannot be demonstrated from the available evidence.

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678 Barr helpfully comments, 'there is no question that Jesus "canonically" rose from the dead, but it is the extrinsic resurrection that matters for faith' (Barr, 'Introduction', 21). See also Noble, *Canonical*, 59.

679 Childs, *NTC*, 545. See also Noble, *Canonical*, 84.

680 So Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.11.8, written c. 180 CE. Scholars disagree as to whether Irenaeus was attempting to establish a new opinion or whether he was articulating an older perspective (Gallagher and Meade, *Canon*, 32).

681 The earliest certain four-Gospel codex is P^{45}, dated to the early third century CE (Gallagher and Meade, *Canon*, 34; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 54).

4.3.3 Canonical Shaping of the Christian Canon

So far this thesis has considered Childs' claims for canonical shaping at the level of books and passages (§4.3.1) and groups (§4.3.2). It has shown how signs of canonical shaping at these levels prompted him to develop his theory of canonical shaping and demonstrated how their exegetical significance might be acknowledged. This section considers the presence of canonical shaping at the highest literary level: the Christian canon. What is explicitly being considered is whether Childs provides evidence for a canonical intentionality influencing the scope (i.e. which books) and structure (i.e. which order) of the Christian canon.

4.3.3.1 The Structure of the Old Testament

In *IOTS*, Childs makes many comments on the canonical shaping of the structure of the HB; however, these are not relevant for this study as only the structure of the Christian OT is authoritative for Childs' Biblical Theology (§4.2.1). Thus, the following signs of canonical shaping can only be found in the structure of the Christian OT.

Firstly, the OT closes with Malachi, rather than 1 & 2 Chronicles (so the HB).[682] The use of Jewish Scripture by the NT authors regularly takes the form of prophecy-fulfilment,[683] thus by placing the prophecy group immediately before the NT in the Christian canon the very structure of the Bible emphasises the prophetic interpretation of the OT by the NT.[684] It thus may be no mere coincidence that Malachi precedes Matthew in the Christian canon. Malachi closes with the expectation that the prophet Elijah will return in preparation for the coming day of the LORD (Mal. 3:1-7; 4:5); Matthew's Gospel understands John the Baptist to be the returned Elijah who prepares the way for Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13, see also John 1:6-8).

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[682] Seitz notes that this positioning of Malachi 'is a modern convention without widespread attestation in the history of interpretation' (Seitz, *Character*, 72). This does not matter to Childs, however, as he prioritises the structure of the shorter/longer OT (§4.2.1).

[683] E.g. Matt. 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 17-18; 3:3; 4:14-16.

[684] Childs, 'Beziehung', 30. See also Sanders, *Torah*, 11.

Secondly, Childs suggests that the 'regrouping' of the historical books before the prophetic books was undertaken to indicate that the old covenant with Israel now continues in a prophetic word (i.e. in the Prophets) rather than in a chosen nation.[685] Childs writes, 'The effect was to designate the old covenant with Israel as a historical period in the past which retained its revelatory value, but to see the ongoing continuity in the prophetic word rather than in the historical continuity of the nation Israel'.[686] It is not entirely clear what Childs is suggesting here, for the current OT does not re-group *all* of the historical books before the prophetic books – many were already there. Rather, what it does is take Ruth, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther (and Tobit, Judith, Esther's additions, and 1-2 Maccabees in a Catholic context) and insert them amongst Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings. What is correct, though, is that the OT (as above) places the prophetic books at the end of the OT.

Thirdly, Childs notes the relocation of Daniel to the prophecy group alongside the major figures of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Childs writes, 'Clearly a different theological interpretation was offered by the Christians assigning the book of Daniel to the prophets'.[687] Unfortunately, Childs does not comment on *what* that new interpretation is.[688] The location of the Book of Daniel alongside Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel makes considerable sense when read as Jewish Scripture. The Book is chronologically situated during the events which span the Babylonian exile, just like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. In addition, the Book is stylistically much like the others in that it contains both prose and poetic prophecy (§4.3.1). Thus, the Book seems prophet-like to a sufficient enough degree that it is understandable to juxtapose it with the major prophets. That the figure Daniel was viewed as a prophet by early Christians is primarily indicated by references within the NT (§4.3.1).

685 Childs, *BTONT*, 75.

686 Childs, *BTONT*, 75.

687 Childs, *IOTS*, 667.

688 According to Sanders, Christians included Daniel among the Prophets 'because it was principally read as foretelling the "Son of Man"', i.e. Jesus Christ (Sanders, *Torah*, 11).

However, despite the presence of the above canonical signs, Childs warns against overestimating their significance at the literary level of the Bible. Indeed, he suggests that they may actually derive from 'fortuitous elements' as opposed to 'conscious theological intentionality'.[689] Childs is correct and one should therefore be wary of speculating on signs of canonical shaping when they are not clear. In addition, it is also possible to explain the structure of the OT in an alternative and more traditional manner. This explanation is that the OT has a quadripartite structure based solely on genre: law,[690] history,[691] poetry & wisdom,[692] and prophecy.[693] Whilst these genre-based categories cannot sustain closer inspection,[694] they do play an important role in the way that the OT is understood in by many in Christianity today.[695] Genres indicate to a reader the way in which a text should be read, thus by assigning the books of the OT to a particular genre a value judgment is made which has exegetical implications. Law is to be read as a collection of instructions and doctrines, history is to be read as an account of the past, poetry and wisdom are to be used for praise and instruction, and prophecy is to be used for an expectation of the future which ultimately points to Christ. Curiously, Childs makes no comment on these points. Importantly, however, these four groups are later explanations of the OT's structure, they do not derive from the biblical texts themselves.

689 Childs, *BTONT*, 75.

690 Gen., Exod., Lev., Num., Deut.

691 Josh., Judg., Ruth, 1 Sam., 2 Sam., 1 Kgs, 2 Kgs, 1 Chr., 2 Chr., Ezra, Neh., Esther.

692 Job, Pss., Prov., Eccles., S. of S.

693 Isa., Jer., Lam., Ezek., Dan., Hos., Joel, Amos, Obad., Jonah, Mic., Nahum, Hab., Zeph., Hag., Zech., Mal.

694 E.g., though the Pentateuch does contain laws, it also contains historiography (e.g. the story of Abraham in Genesis) and poetry (e.g. the song of Moses in Deut. 32). Similarly, whilst Isaiah does contain prophecy, it also contains historiography (e.g. Hezekiah's consultation with Isaiah during Sennacherib's invasion in Isa. 37).

695 This quadripartite structure is followed in several popular-level Christian resources: *Exploring the Old Testament* series, 4 vols (London: SPCK, 2002-7); Mary J. Evans, *Old Testament Introduction*, Essential Bible Reference (Oxford: Candle Books, 2001), 3; Martin H. Manser (ed.), *Collins Bible Companion* (London: Collins, 2009), 58.

4.3.3.2 The Structure of the New Testament

Childs also finds signs of canonical shaping in the structure of the NT. Childs recognises the classic groupings: Gospels,[696] Acts, Pauline Corpus,[697] Catholic Epistles,[698] and Revelation.[699] The purpose of this section, then, is to focus on Childs' claims regarding the structure of these groups within the NT as a whole and how this structure may have been intentional.

The Gospels stand at the opening of the NT. Of note in particular is that Luke has been incorporated within the Gospels and separated from the Book of Acts; it is readily accepted by many scholars that the two originally comprised a single work.[700] The canonical significance of this change, in Childs' perspective, is that Luke is now to be interpreted in light of the other Gospels, and that Acts now serves in a context related to the Pauline Corpus.[701] The author of Luke-Acts made the claim to Theophilus that he wrote his book 'so that you may know certainty about the things which you were instructed'.[702] However, Childs rightly highlights that Luke's original claim to provide certainty has been relativised by his book's juxtaposition alongside *three others* which tell the same story in different ways.[703] Thus, whilst Luke-Acts may have functioned this way for Theophilus, it does not do so for a reader with the current NT. Strangely, Childs does not comment on the obvious fact that the Gospels stand at the start of the NT. If one were to speculate on a canonical explanation, it could be that they were placed there because of

696 Matt., Mark, Luke, John.

697 Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 1 Thess., 2 Thess., Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim., 2 Tim., Titus), Philem., Heb.

698 Jas., 1 Pet., 2 Pet., 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude.

699 Childs, *NTC*, 57, 213, 243, 431, 499.

700 'The Acts of the Apostles clearly presents itself as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke (see Acts 1:1-5), and is so accepted by almost all scholars' (John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989, xxxiii).

701 Childs, *NTC*, 152-3.

702 ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (Luke 1:4).

703 Childs, *NTC*, 153.

their theological importance,[704] yet it could also be that they are there because they were the first Christian texts to be recognised as Scripture.

The Book of Acts, then, from a canonical perspective functions in reference to the Pauline Corpus which it immediately precedes in the current NT. The fact that Acts and the Pauline Corpus have *both* been preserved as canonical Scripture is an indication to Childs that they are to be read together in a manner which transcends their original independent functions. Thus, Acts provides a chronological and geographical framework for Paul's ministry that is difficult to construct from the Pauline Corpus alone.[705] This is, according to Childs, the 'traditional' understanding of Acts in Christianity,[706] though he recognises that the framework presented conflicts with tensions discovered through modern critical analysis.[707] Importantly, Acts' position just before the Pauline corpus is not stable in the early Church; for example, in Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Alexandrinus, Acts actually precedes the *Catholic* Epistles. Childs recognises this and argues that, 'The canonical significance of Acts lies elsewhere, regardless of its order within the New Testament collection'.[708] For Childs, then, the canonical significance of Acts comes from its canonisation as Scripture within a corpus that also includes the Pauline corpus, not from its position within the structure of that corpus.

With regard to the Pauline Corpus, Childs observes that it 'now contains whole letters or at least portions of letters which do not stem directly from the historical Paul'.[709] He questions

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704 So Wall, who writes, 'the fourfold Gospel is placed first in the New Testament to underscore the importance of the story of Jesus' earthly ministry as the subtext for all the writings that follow in the New Testament' (Robert W. Wall, 'The Significance of a Canonical Perspective of the Church's Scripture', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 528-40 (526)).

705 Childs, *NTC*, 239. See also Wall who writes, 'By calling this composition *The Acts of the Apostles*, the church uses it to introduce the apostolic Letters that follow and, in doing so, enhances its performance as scripture' (Wall, 'Significance', 536).

706 Childs, *NTC*, 239.

707 Childs, *NTC*, 239. One of the tensions Childs identifies is the well-known 'marked conflict' between the chronology of Acts 15 and Gal. 2 (Childs, *NTC*, 229). Gal. 2 recounts Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, whereas Acts 15 recounts the same event as Paul's third visit. For an introduction see Robert H. Stein, 'Relationship of Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15:1-35: Two Neglected Arguments', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 17/4 (1974), 239-42.

708 Childs, *NTC*, 239.

709 Childs, *NTC*, 427.

the authorship of six of 'Paul's' fourteen letters: Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).[710] Yet, the authorship of these letters is not a problem for the canonical approach since it is not bound by the historicity of a biblical tradition and instead concerns itself with how that tradition has been shaped to function as Scripture. Thus, to Childs, the significance of the Pauline and non-Pauline books in a single Pauline Corpus is that they create a profile of Paul which transcends that of the historical figure.[711] It is thus the 'canonical Paul'[712] who becomes the focus for theological reflection in the later stages of the canonical approach. It is important to note that Childs incorporates Hebrews within the Pauline Corpus, not because he thinks the Book is to be assigned to the canonical Paul, but because its witness to the Gospel has been shaped to be read in concert with the canonical Paul.[713] It also has a direct link because the writer of Hebrews was a co-worker of Timothy (Heb. 13:23) and so from a canonical perspective the letter claims to be contemporary with the Pauline texts.[714]

Childs finds very little canonical significance in the structure of the Catholic Epistles beyond their title. He writes, 'Its usage has no great theological significance other than to reflect the Church's growing concern that the NT letters be understood as universal ('Catholic'), even when, in their original form, they often carry a specific addressee'.[715] The term is useful since it differentiates the group from the Gospels and the Pauline Corpus, though it has no major exegetical significance.[716]

Final consideration must now be given to the Book of Revelation, which is distinct from the other groups of the NT and stands at its end. Whilst Childs finds considerable signs of

[710] Childs, *NTC*, 427.
[711] Childs, *NTC*, 426-7.
[712] Childs, *NTC*, 427.
[713] Childs, *NTC*, 418.
[714] Childs, *NTC*, 417-8.
[715] Childs, *NTC*, 495.
[716] Childs, *NTC*, 495.

canonical shaping within the Book itself of existing theological traditions,[717] he does not make any specific comment about how Revelation contributes to the structure of the NT. It seems obvious that a canonically-minded interpreter would suggest that Revelation is in final position in the NT because of its eschatological content. While Genesis narrates the beginning of all things and stands at the beginning of the canon, Revelation narrates the end of the age and hence may have been placed where it is to emphasise this interpretation.

There are, however, alternative explanations to all of the above to account for the significance of the structure of the NT as it exists today. Importantly, what follows is not a comprehensive list of alternative explanations.

Firstly, the structure of the NT may reflect early Christian views on the apostolic authorship of the scriptural books. It seems more than coincidental that those books which Eusebius, in the fourth century CE, counted as disputed included James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation – six of the eight *final* books in the NT.[718] Thus, could the order of the NT reflect an authoritative hierarchy which moves from those books which are most (Gospels) to least (Revelation) likely to be apostolic in origin? It seems that Luther thought so, for he sought to relegate Hebrews and James to between 3 John and Jude *because* he believed that they were not authored by apostles, though they were still Scripture.[719]

Secondly, as Bovon argues, the structure of the NT may reflect a theological structure of 'Gospel' and 'Apostle' which pervaded the early Christian mindset.

> […] I would like to illustrate a theological structure that proved decisive for early Christian faith, that of Gospel and Apostle. An analysis of several New Testament passages reveals the contours of this structure, its importance and universality. Once detected and understood, this structure may explain the formation of a two-part canon in the second century without assigning priority to the role of outside forces in shaping it. […]. A "New Testament" containing Gospels and Epistles is the logical outgrowth and materialization of a revelation that articulates an event and the proclamation that follows, i.e., Jesus and his disciples. Thus the need for a New Testament and its

[717] Namely, Childs thinks that Revelation is a Christocentric reworking of Daniel (see Childs, *NTC*, 508-17).

[718] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25.1-7.

[719] On Hebrews, 'In the first place, the fact that Hebrews is not an epistle of St. Paul, or of any other apostle' (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, trans. by Theodore E. Bachmann, vol. 35 (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House and Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1960), 394). On James, 'to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle' (Luther, *Works*, 395-6).

> two-part configuration is inscribed in the very nature of the Christian faith, from the beginnings of Christianity.[720]

In Bovon's understanding, the event of Jesus Christ and its subsequent outworking in the lives of the Apostles provided a framework within early Christianity that was so pervasive that it actually influenced the structure of the NT (though 'imperceptibly'[721]). Bovon claims the bi-partite structure of the NT as Gospels and Epistles is due to this influence. As evidence for his theory, Bovon lists numerous examples in the NT, the Church Fathers, and non-canonical books which comment on the relationship between Christ and the Apostles. Whilst it is obvious that the topic of the relationship between Christ and the Apostles is attested in many contexts across the early Church, there are two main problems with Bovon's schema. Firstly, the fact that this was an important topic in the early Church is not evidence to suggest that it influenced the formation of the NT; the former does not logically lead to the latter. Evidence for Bovon's schema needs to be found in early Christian literature which argues that the NT needs to be understood in this way. Bovon does not provide this evidence. Secondly, there are other ways to explain the structure of the NT (as this section seeks to demonstrate), which Bovon does not consider.

It is clear that the NT has a structure with several groups. The Gospels stand as a distinct group because of their genre and content; they are each ancient narratives about Jesus Christ.[722] The Pauline Corpus (including the Pastoral Epistles) then stands as a group because of its author ('Paul') and its genre (letters). The Catholic Epistles are a group because of their non-Pauline authors and genre (letters). This schema leaves several rough edges. Acts has been split from Luke and is neither a Gospel nor a Pauline epistle, thus it hangs between the two groups. Hebrews could either be included in the Pauline Corpus or the Catholic Epistles, depending on

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[720] François Bovon, 'The Canonical Structure of Gospel and Apostle', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 516-27 (516).

[721] Bovon, 'Canonical', 524.

[722] For the idea that the Gospels are ancient biographies, see Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (2nd edn, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

one's view of its authorship. Revelation can be counted as a letter, but its form is so different that it is distinct from the Catholic Epistles. It is logical that Revelation closes the NT as it defines the eschatological *future* of the kingdom of God. The juxtaposition of Jude and Revelation seems intentional because both contain apocalyptic material (Jude by its references to 1 Enoch[723] and Revelation through John's heavenly visions). However, it is one thing to comment on the structure of the NT and another entirely to comment on the *significance* of that structure for interpretation. The exegetical significance of the structure of the NT is very weak and speculative at best; indeed, there is no clear evidence from the structure of the NT itself that it is designed to be read in any particular way. Rather, the structure of the NT appears to have more to do with the logical categorisation of the literature.

4.3.3.3 The Juxtaposition of the Old and New Testaments

A further place where Childs' finds signs of canonical shaping is in the juxtaposition of the OT and NT in the Christian Bible.

As a first sign, more exegetically significant than the structure of the OT in comparison to the HB, in Childs' mind, is the absence of Christian activity upon the OT.[724] Indeed, Christians did not redact the text of the OT books to Christianise them, nor did they add a commentary to those books, nor did they seek to integrate the OT with the NT, rather the OT was maintained as a distinct corpus in the Christian Bible.[725]

> The decisive point is that the Christian church recognized the integrity of the Old Testament for its own faith within its canon of authoritative scripture. It neither incorporated the Old Testament within the framework of the New nor altered its shape significantly.[726]

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[723] See Jude 6, 14-16.

[724] It is notable, however, that there is Christian redactional activity upon the apocryphal 2 Esdras, on which see Theodore A. Bergren, 'Christian Influence on the Transmission History of 4, 5, and 6 Ezra', in James C. VanderKam and William Alder (eds.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 102-27.

[725] Childs, 'Beziehung', 30; Brevard S. Childs, 'The Nature of the Christian Bible: One Book, Two Testaments', in Ephraim Radner and George Sumner (eds.), *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1998), 115-25 (116); Childs, *BTONT*, 75. See also Seitz, *Figured*, 42; Seitz, *Character*, 19.

[726] Childs, *OTTCC*, 7.

In addition, as Christians utilised a structure for their OT which was in part derived from that of the *Jewish* Septuagint, it should not be said that Christians re-shaped the structure of the Jewish Scriptures. In fact, they resisted doing so and simply accepted the semi-stable structure of the Septuagint because its form cohered with their understanding of Jesus as someone who was predicted by the prophets (§4.2.1).

Childs finds draws three implications from the absence of Christian redactional activity upon the OT: (A) The 'canonical continuity' between the OT and NT should not be understood as the NT being a midrashic[727] extension of the Jewish Scriptures, i.e. the NT is not *just* a creative interpretation/commentary of the OT,[728] with the hermeneutical implication that it therefore should not be read as such.[729] (B) Childs suggests that the preservation of the OT texts means that there is not a canonical warrant to interpret the OT as *negative* and the NT as *positive* (targeting 'Bultmann and his school').[730] Here Childs is possibly thinking that if the NT *was* a redacted form of the OT then there *would* have been a warrant. (C) The preservation of the OT as a distinct corpus in early Christianity is evidence that it has a witness in its own right. Indeed, the value of this witness was such that the Jewish Scriptures were considered to be a closed corpus that could not be altered. As Childs writes, 'The theological implication which should be drawn from the canonical process is that the collection of Jewish Scripture was considered as a closed unit and a new and different collection followed, which ultimately developed into the New Testament'.[731] Thus, any canonical approach to Biblical Theology must reckon with the integrity of the OT (and indeed the NT) as a complete corpus in-and-of itself. Indeed: 'the

727 For Childs' view on the definition of *midrash*, see Childs, 'Retrospective', 370.

728 Though, of course, it does contain parts which are creative interpretations/commentary on Jewish Scripture that could be called midrashic (Noble, *Canonical*, 68).

729 Brevard S. Childs, 'Biblische Theologie und christlicher Kanon', in Ingo Baldermann and Ernst Dassman (eds.), *Zum Problem des biblischen Kanons*, Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie, vol. 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1988), 13-27 (22); Childs, *BTONT*, 76, 211.

730 Childs, *BTONT*, 76-7.

731 'Die theologische Folgerung, die aus dem kanonischen Prozeß gezogen weden muß, ist die, daß die Sammlung der jüdischen Schriften als geschlossene Einheit angesehen wurde und eine neue und andersartige Sammlung folgte, die sich schließlich zum Neuen Testament entwickelte' (Childs, 'Beziehung', 30).

two Covenants are in no sense to be identified or harmonized. The character of both Testaments as independent witnesses must be maintained'.[732]

Whilst Childs' points are valid, there is an alternative reason why there is an absence of Christian activity upon the OT. Jewish Scripture played a pivotal role within Christianity from its inception for the obvious reason that its founders were Jews who held a high view of scriptural authority (e.g. 2 Tim. 3:16).[733] Thus, amongst Jewish Christians there was no question as to whether or not the Jewish Scriptures were *still* Scripture in light of Jesus of Nazareth.[734] Rather the question was *how* to understand them in light of the proclamation that Jesus was lord. As the NT demonstrates, many early Christians utilised a figural reading strategy (which was commonplace at the time[735]) that allowed them to re-interpret the Jewish Scriptures in a manner which supported their theological conviction that they already were about Jesus.[736] What all this means, therefore, is that Jewish Christians did not feel the need to redact Jewish Scripture, add a commentary, or merge the OT with the NT because they believed that its books were *already* authoritative Scripture that witnessed (either directly or prophetically) to Jesus Christ. Childs holds this same belief, thus it is unfortunate that he did not advocate for it.[737] To follow Childs' logic, then: the absence of Christian activity upon the OT may be a sign of canonical shaping which prompts one to interpret it as fundamentally about Jesus.

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[732] Childs, 'Interpretation', 441. See also, 'The task of Old Testament theology is, therefore, not to Christianize the Old Testament by identifying it with the New Testament witness, but to hear its own theological testimony to the God of Israel whom the church confesses also to worship. Although Christians confess that God who revealed himself to Israel is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, it is still necessary to hear Israel's witness in order to understand who the Father of Jesus Christ is' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 9); 'The two Testaments are neither to be fused nor separated' (Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 11).

[733] See also Sanders, *Torah*, 5.

[734] Marcion is not an exception as he was not of Jewish heritage and thus felt able to reject all Jewish traditions and Scripture.

[735] Barton, *Spirit*, 71.

[736] Barton, *Spirit*, 75.

[737] To be fair to Childs, he does briefly write that, 'In the early church the question was not whether the Jewish scriptures were still canonical, but whether the claims of Jesus Christ could be sustained on the basis of scripture' (Childs, *IOTS*, 41-2). Hence why 'The controversy of the Christian church with the Jewish synagogue turned on the *interpretation* of a common scripture' (Childs, *IOTS*, 664).

A second sign of canonical shaping is that, though they were composed as two distinct corpora, the OT and NT are presented as two parts of one whole in the Christian Bible.

> […] the confession of the canon as a context is a claim that the juxtaposition of the two Testaments in a particular order and form creates a context that is different from either of the two Testaments alone. Moreover, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A theological context has been formed that makes use of both Testaments, but results in something new.[738]

Thus, the fact that the Bible is presented as a whole consisting of two parts is an exegetical sign to Childs which prompts one to interpret the Bible in a *holistic* manner and not as an *ad hoc* collection of disparate literature.[739] Though one *can* focus on only the discrete witness of the OT or the NT individually, Christianity has received both as its Scripture and thus one must reckon with the totality of the corpus and not just its individual parts. Hence why Childs maintains the core notion of the BTM that the Bible is fundamentally united (§3.1.1.1).[740]

As one progresses through the Bible's ever-expanding literary contexts, Childs' signs of canonical shaping become increasingly vague. As was noted when examining passages and books (§4.3.1), it is possible to see tangible evidence of the way in which texts have been shaped to function as Scripture. However, in the largest literary contexts of Testaments and the Bible this shaping is far less clear. Of course, it is possible to find all kinds of structures and implications within the OT, NT, and Bible as a whole. Problems arise, however, when one attempts to prescribe one particular framework as 'correct'. The fact is that the biblical texts provide no explicit guidance on how to understand the structure of the Bible as a whole;[741] a point which could be taken as a sign of canonical shaping which instructs one to reject the

738 Childs, *BTC*, 109.

739 Childs laments that 'the role of the canon in creating and maintaining the unity of the Bible was seldom discussed' in twentieth century approaches which sought to find unity in the Bible as a whole (Childs, *BTC*, 39)

740 'Biblical Theology is by definition theological reflection on both the Old and New Testament. It assumes that the Christian Bible consists of a theological unity formed by the canonical union of the two testaments' (Childs, *BTONT*, 55); 'Christian theology confesses the unity of the Old and New Testaments, the witness to the one purpose of God' (Childs, 'Interpretation', 433); 'Yet as a Christian interpreter, I confess with the church that the Old and New Testaments, in their distinct canonical forms, together form a theological whole' (Childs, *Isaiah*, 4-5).

741 See also, 'canons are not particularly hermeneutical in their character. One of the deepest assumptions of modern canonical criticism is that canons give hermeneutical guidance and are intended to do so. This, however, is not their function' (Barr, *Scripture*, 67).

application of any over-arching structure to the Bible. Thus, the major weakness with Childs' theory of canonical shaping at this literary level is that it lacks evidence.[742] It must be noted, however, that Childs was aware of this and hence warned against over-estimating the presence of these signs.

After researching a swathe of Patristic literature to discern how Scripture was understood in the early Church, Barton finds areas of similarity and dissimilarity between Childs' canonical approach and the interpretative approaches of that era. With regard to the former, he finds a shared insistence that there is an internal coherence to the Bible and that its various books can be read together.[743] However, Barton does not find sufficient evidence that the structure of the Christian scriptures had significance for their interpretation, and thus this aspect of the canonical approach does not have a historical precedent in this era. This is significant because it is the historical era in which the Bible we know today was largely finalised and therefore suggests that a canonical consciousness regarding the Bible's structure was not present in those responsible for largely finalising the Christian canon.

> On the whole, then, we should conclude that the canonical *status* of books did make a considerable difference to their interpretation. They belonged in an official collection, and so were assumed not to contradict each other but to be mutually illuminating. But their canonical *order* is only a minor theme, where indeed it matters at all. We may if we wish make exegetical capital out of the fact that (for example) the Prophets precede the Writings in the Hebrew Bible but follow them in the Christian Bible, or that Romans stands at the head of the Pauline corpus, or that John is presented in the canon as the last Gospel; but there is not much evidence that people in antiquity anticipated such thoughts. Normally it becomes necessary to fall back, not on empirical evidence of ancient exegesis, but on a close reading of the texts which tries to show what any careful reader would be bound to get (and, so the argument runs, is bound to have got) out of them. Sometimes these intuitions are very appealing – as for example the idea that the Psalter has been edited so that it begins with the Law and the Messiah as the two themes the reader should look out for; or as with Sanders' theory about the shape of the Pentateuch. But it is hardly ever possible to feel confident that ancient readers would have seen things in this way, especially as our actual historical evidence so often shows us atomistic interpretation of verses and passages, not to mention (in Christian writers) incorrect attribution of texts and conflation of material from more than one book. On the whole I believe canonical and synchronic readings need to be justified in their own right, as modern methods of exegesis, and not give hostages to fortune by claiming ancient precedent.[744]

[742] There may well be other valid ways of reading the entire canon which focus on aspects other than canonical shaping, but this thesis focuses solely on Childs' approach.

[743] Barton, *Spirit*, 161.

[744] Barton, *Spirit*, 155-6.

A further important point to make, which is also noted by Barton, is that the structure of their Scriptures was not of major importance to many Christians in the early Church because their texts were not accessible in a single collection. Barton writes, 'It is in fact easy for a modern reader, used to carefully produced books in codex form, to exaggerate the importance of the order of texts to the ancient reader'.[745] In the initial three centuries of the Church at least, Christians did not have a single corpus of Scripture in a form which resembles the contemporary Bible. By the second century CE they did have access to scriptural books in codex format, i.e. multiple sheets of papyrus (a marsh-based plant) or parchment (animal skin) that were sewn together. Indeed, the volume of manuscripts extant today from this era suggests a strong preference for the codex within the early Church,[746] which makes logical sense.[747] However, at this time there was no universal agreement on which books should constitute the Christian Scriptures and thus there was regional variation.[748] Importantly, this regional variation should not be overstated as there was general agreement as to the scriptural status of many books, yet the lack of universal agreement, coupled with a lack of resources, meant that churches did not have a single codex containing all of their Scriptures.[749] Rather they would have had local

745 Barton, *Spirit*, 150.

746 'Whereas among surviving Greek manuscripts of pagan texts, whether literary or scientific writings, only 14 of 871 items dated to the second century A.D. are in the form of a codex, all the surviving Christian biblical papyri of the same period are in codex format (11 in number). Of the approximately 172 biblical manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts written before A.D. 400 or not long thereafter, it appears that 158 come from codices and only 14 from rolls' (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 13).

747 'Christians found that this form has a number of advantages over the roll: (1) it permitted all four Gospels or all the Epistles of Paul to be bound into one book, a format that was impossible so long as the roll was used; (2) it facilitated the consultation of proof texts; and (3) it was better adapted to receiving writing on both sides of the page, thus keeping the cost of production down' (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 12-3).

748 As demonstrated in part by the various canon lists of the early Church (see Gallagher and Meade, *Canon*; McDonald, 'Appendix C' and 'Appendix D').

749 Kraft argues that the invention of the codex played a key role in the creation of the Christian canon (Robert A. Kraft, 'The Codex and Canon Consciousness', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 229-33 (230, 233)). This is undoubtedly correct, for the codex provided the technology to make a fixed corpus of scriptural books a practical reality. However, its influence should not be overstated, for the emergence of a canonical consciousness can be explained by other factors (e.g. temporal distance from the apostles (see Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 6), a response to influences such as heretical groups, and the practical necessity of having a standardised corpus in an imperial religion).

collections of texts, such as a codex of the Gospels or the Pauline letters, and a scroll of Isaiah.[750] The first mega codices[751] containing an extensive collection of Christian Scripture were produced c. 331 CE by Eusebius under the instruction of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine wanted to support the churches of the new imperial religion and thus commissioned 50 copies of the Scriptures to be produced.[752] Such an undertaking was huge in terms of time, skill, and financial cost – something far beyond the means of the pre-imperial Church. Hence, these larger manuscripts only came into existence following the Emperor's backing. Now, what all of this demonstrates is that in the pre-mega codex era the structure of both the OT and NT was of minimal importance to Christians *because* these corpora did not yet exist in a fixed theoretical or physical form. Thus, further to the above Patristic evidence noted by Barton, the canonical significance which Childs finds in the structure of the Christian Bible is not derived from the consciousness of the early Church before 331 CE (Constantine's commission to Eusebius).

In sum: the lack of concern for the structure of the scriptures in Patristic literature, coupled with the fact that Christians would not have had access to a collection of scriptures similar to the modern Bible until the creation of mega codices in the fourth century CE, and the fact that Christians construed the structure of their canon in a variety of different ways at this time, suggests that there was not a universal normative structure for the Scriptures in the early Church. Thus, any exegetical significance of a proposed normative structure is a phenomenon which does not derive from the early Church. Furthermore, even if one can

750 'In the second century it was still very much a local decision whether to assign authority to Jewish scriptures; to accept individual Christian letters, gospels, and revelations as authoritative; to use Marcion's canon, Tatian's gospel, or nothing at all; and to read or not from any of these works in public worship services. Communal decisions were often informed by communication with other communities; the pressure to find common ground with other small, like-minded groups also played a role in decisions' (Michael L. Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 254).

751 This term comes from Kraft, 'Codex', 231.

752 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 4.36. On which, see Timothy David Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Theodore C. Skeat, 'The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus, and Constantine', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 50/2 (1999), 583-625; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 15-6.

propose a structure for the current canon, its exegetical significance will only ever be vague and debatable because the canon's structure can be construed in various ways.[753] One reason why the canon emerged in Christianity was because of a desire to define and restrict those books which were to be considered Scripture in response to an array of internal and external factors (e.g. the 'new prophecy' of the Montanists, Marcion's reduced corpus, the popularity of gnostic books, and Constantine's commission (§4.3.3.3)[754]). Thus, the only explicit exegetical significance of the canon is found in its scope and not its structure; it has a beginning and an end and thus demarcates a corpus which contains all of the books that alone are to be read as Scripture.

4.3.3.3.1 The Unity of the Bible

Let us now consider Childs' views on how unity can be found amidst the Bible's substantial diversity, which is a key question within the discipline of Biblical Theology (and its sub-disciplines OT and NT Theology). Historically, many keys have been produced to unlock the unity of the Bible. One thinks of theological frameworks such as 'promise and fulfilment', 'law and gospel', 'progressive revelation', or historical frameworks such as a history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) or the American BTM's emphasis on the acts of God in history.[755] Furthermore, there are of course figural reading strategies which were particularly popular in the medieval period that find unity by searching for it at a level beyond that of the plain sense (i.e. allegory and typology).[756] Childs takes major issue with all of these past strategies, for the simple reason that they all, to varying extents, disregard the signs of canonical shaping which are present in

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[753] Speaking of the HB, Barton writes, 'the *order* in which the biblical books are arranged […] is equally devoid of importance. Again, once the canon was firmly established in its present form, significance could easily be found in the order of the books, but I think this has usually been a matter of making a virtue of necessity' (Barton, *Oracles*, 82). See also Collins, 'Penumbra', 18.

[754] For studies of these factors see Everett Ferguson, 'Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon', in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 295-320; McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 170-90.

[755] See also Childs, 'Beziehung', 30.

[756] See also Childs, 'Beziehung', 30.

the discrete witnesses of each Testament.[757] The challenge for Childs, then, is how to preserve the diversity of the 'discrete witnesses' of the OT and NT whilst as the same time finding a unity which he believes is there by virtue of the Bible being received by Christianity as a whole corpus.[758]

Childs' solution for unlocking the unity of the Bible amidst its diversity, which includes finding unity in the two Testaments, is to focus on the 'subject matter' to which both Testaments point. Thus, Childs argues that it is the subject matter of the Bible which provides its fundamental unity.[759] Though the Bible testifies to God in different ways, it is His unity (as affirmed by Christian orthodoxy) which allows the material to be drawn together.[760] Whilst this claim is coherent with Childs' belief that the Bible is a vehicle to God (§2.3.1), it is surprising that he chooses to define the Bible's unity in this way. This is because it seems more obvious for him to claim that the Bible is a unity because that is how it has been shaped to be read. Childs would affirm this, but he has not written it anywhere. The exegetical significance of the Bible's unity is that it is to be read as such. Whilst one must maintain the discrete witnesses of

757 Hence about Biblical Theology Childs writes, 'One of the major criticisms of the traditional approaches to the subject […] lies in their failure to take seriously those peculiar canonical features of the Christian Bible' (Childs, *BTONT*, 91). See also Childs, 'Beziehung', 30-1.

758 Childs writes, 'a major task of Biblical Theology is to reflect on the whole Christian Bible with its two very different voices, both of which the church confesses bear witness to Jesus Christ. There is no one overarching hermeneutical theory by which to resolve the tension between the testimony of the Old Testament in its own right and that of the New Testament with its transformed Old Testament. Yet the challenge of Biblical Theology is to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ' (Childs, *BTONT*, 78-9). See also Childs, 'Beziehung', 31-2.

759 'The Old Testament is interpreted by the New, and the New is understood through the Old, but the unity of its witness is grounded in the One Lord' (Childs, *IOTS*, 671); 'the unity of the Gospels lies in the resurrected one of whom all the voices speak' (Childs, *NTC*, 207); 'The basic theological argument developed in this Biblical Theology is that the unity of the two testaments is primarily a theological one. Attempts to focus on merely formal elements of religious continuity or discontinuity appear to me inadequate. Rather what binds the testaments indissolubly together is their witness to the selfsame reality, to the subject matter, which undergirds both collections' (Childs, *BTONT*, 721).

760 Childs, *BTONT*, 85-7. See also, 'Both testaments bear witness for the one God in different ways, to different times, by different peoples, and yet both are understood in light of the living God himself' ('Beide Testamente legen Zeugnis für den einen Gott ab, auf verschiedene Weise, zu verschiedenen Zeiten, bei verschiedenen Völkern, und doch werden beide im Lichte des lebendigen Gottes selbst verstanden') (Childs, 'Beziehung', 33).

each Testament, one is ultimately searching for the unity between the Testaments in the way that they refer to the same subject matter.[761]

4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to evaluate the first of the main elements of Childs' canonical approach: the theory of canonical shaping. It began (§4.1) by introducing the theory which, briefly stated, is the idea that the Bible, at each of its literary levels, has been shaped to function effectively as Scripture for future generations. This comes with exegetical significance: it is to be read with a particular awareness of signs of canonical shaping. It then proceeded to consider the identity of Childs' Bible (§4.2), before considering the evidence Childs finds within it to support his theory of canonical shaping (§4.3), focusing on three literary contexts within the Bible: passages and books (§4.3.1), groups (§4.3.2), and the Christian canon (§4.3.3) as a whole.

Regarding passages and books (§4.3.1), it found that Childs provides strong exegetical evidence to suggest that many passages within the Bible have been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations. However, it then, following Noble, explored the criticism that the biblical texts may not always have been shaped with this agenda (§4.3.1.8) and thus showed how a canonical intentionality may not have been as pervasive as Childs claims.

Regarding groups (§4.3.2), this thesis found that there does seem to be some intentionality behind the various groups of the Bible, notably the Pentateuch and the Gospels. However, this intentionality is often vague and thus has little exegetical significance for how the biblical texts are to be read.

Regarding signs of canonical shaping at the level of the Testament/canon (§4.3.3), this thesis found that the current Protestant and Catholic OTs inherited a structure in part from the Septuagint which contains certain features that advance a Christological agenda. It also observed that it is often stated today that the Christian OT has a quadripartite structure with groups based

[761] See also Xun, *Canonical*, 106.

on genre. Yet, as the exegetical significance of the structure of the OT can be construed in a variety of ways, there is not a single normative structure that has clear exegetical significance for Christianity today. It also explored the idea that the NT's structure is based on genre and other factors, such as early Christian views of authorship or a Gospel-Apostle dichotomy. It concluded that the Gospels are gathered together because of their genre and content; they are each ancient biographies of Jesus Christ. The Pauline Corpus, then, stands as a distinct group because of its author (Paul) and genre (letters). Similarly, the Catholic Epistles are a group because of their non-Pauline authors and genre (letters). Revelation, then, closes the NT as the eschatological future of the kingdom of God. The exegetical significance of this structure is, however, very little. Indeed, there is no explicitly clear sign of canonical shaping in the structure of the NT itself that it is designed to be read in a particular way. Instead this thesis argued that the NT's structure has more to do with categorisation than interpretation. The lack of exegetical significance also extends to the juxtaposition of the OT and NT. It is clear that this juxtaposition was undertaken with the desire that both would be read as Scripture but it is unclear whether there are any specific exegetical implications. This thesis also found that there does not appear to have been a normative structure for the Scriptures in the early Church, in part because these Scriptures were not accessible in a single collection until the fourth century CE. Thus, the canonical significance which Childs finds in the structure of the Christian Bible is not derived from the consciousness of the pre-fourth-century Church.

What does all of this mean for Childs' theory of canonical shaping? Firstly, it means that the Bible has, at each of its literary levels, been intentionally shaped at many points; thus, there is some validity to Childs' theory. However, it is not necessarily the case that this shaping has *always* been undertaken with a desire to make the biblical texts function more effectively as Scripture for future generations, and so it is dubious to use the adjective 'canonical'. Childs takes a fact (that the biblical texts have been intentionally shaped) and extends the idea beyond that which is demonstrable (that this shaping was always part of a canonical design). Secondly,

it means that, though canonical shaping is a partially observable phenomenon, it is not necessarily instructive for the Church today. It is one thing to claim that the Bible has been shaped to be read in a particular way, it is an entirely different thing to claim that this way is authoritative; which is the step that Childs takes. The lack of agreement regarding the structure of the canon in Christianity, as well as the vagueness of any hermeneutical implications at the higher literary levels provides good evidence for rejecting Childs' claim that the process of canonical shaping has normative implications for the interpretation of the Bible in the Church today. For all of these reasons, therefore, Childs' first main element is inadequate in an approach to Theological Interpretation.

5 The Prioritisation of the Canonical Texts

The aim of this next chapter is to evaluate the second main element of Childs' canonical approach: the prioritisation of the canonical texts.[762] With regard to structure, this chapter begins by providing an answer to the question, 'what is the prioritisation of the canonical texts?' (§5.1). Following this, it examines the nature of the canonical texts of the OT (§5.2) and NT (§5.3). Next it consider Childs' arguments for the prioritisation of the canonical texts (§5.4). The chapter closes with a conclusion (§5.5).

5.1 What is the Prioritisation of the Canonical Texts?

As has been shown (§4.1), Childs' theory of canonical shaping states that the Bible is a literary corpus which has been shaped to function as normative theological literature for future generations. In his view, the pinnacle of this shaping activity is found in the canonical texts of the OT and NT, and these texts are therefore given priority during interpretation. Indeed, any earlier (or later) texts are subordinated to the forms deemed canonical. Technically, the prioritisation of the canonical texts is a component of Childs' theory of canonical shaping, but it is such an extensive area of research and of such importance that it is helpful to separate it as a main element of Childs' approach. A precedent for doing so can be found in the comparison of Childs' canonical approach with Sanders' canonical criticism; Sanders largely affirms Childs' theory of canonical shaping but rejects his prioritisation of the canonical texts (§3.2.2.1), thereby showing how they are distinct ideas. The prioritisation of the canonical texts is an element within Childs' approach which seeks to identify and grant authority to the canonical texts of the OT and NT as the base text for interpretation.

[762] What Seitz refers to as 'The "superiority" of the final form' (Seitz, *Character*, 49). Gignilliat writes, 'the final form of the biblical text is the privileged form' (Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 25).
Childs' use of the term 'canonical text' is likely influenced by Peter Ackroyd, 'Original Text and Canonical Text', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 32/3 (1977), 166-73 (169-71), which he notes in Childs, *IOTS*, 84.

Childs argues that his theory of canonical shaping includes both the composition *and* transmission phases of the biblical texts' formation.

> In both phases the formation of the literature as sacred scripture involved its ongoing use within a religious community in contrast to a purely scholarly endeavour. Again, both phases involved a process which exerted critical judgments respecting the preservation and transmission of the literature.[763]

> Clearly there is an important parallel between tradition-historical developments of the canonical literature of the New Testament and the tradition-historical development of the canonical text. Indeed the line between them is quite fluid at times. Both processes involve the reception of normative tradition which includes an interpretation of the material along with the activity of its transmission. […] The point to be made is that textual criticism of the New Testament is part of the larger canonical process and must be seen in that light if the peculiar dynamic of its history is to be understood. Just as the growth of the literature of the New Testament as the normative writings of a religious community cannot be compared to inert sherds lying dormant for centuries, so also the peculiar features of the canonical textual process resist identification with the model of classical studies in the search simply for an original, uninterpreted text.[764]

Thus, if the process of transmission included not just copying but actually 'interpretation',[765] then a canonical approach to Textual Criticism must attempt to understand how the biblical texts were shaped in the transmission phase to better function as Scripture for future generations. This is precisely what Childs thinks has been missing from Textual Criticism.

Thus, Childs rejects a form of Textual Criticism which has as its only goal the search for the *Urtext* (i.e. the earliest literary form which stood at the end of the composition phase) of a biblical book because the *Urtext* is not what was preserved by those who considered the biblical books to be Scripture. What Childs seeks instead is a later form of the biblical books which was shaped by generations of Jews and Christians to function more effectively as Scripture. Furthermore, Childs also rejects an approach to Textual Criticism which seeks only the texts that stand at the 'end' of the transmission phase. The canonical texts which Childs seeks are therefore artefacts which lie between the two poles of original and final texts, and Childs realises how difficult a task it is to locate them; for example, writing about the canonical text of the NT he says:

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763 Childs, *IOTS*, 95.

764 Childs, *NTC*, 523.

765 Childs, *NTC*, 523.

> Is there any means of locating a text which is by definition different from the original author's autograph and at the same time is not to be identified with an uncritical text represented by the last stages of a stabilized *koine* tradition? No one should be deceived as to the difficulties involved in escaping the horns of this dilemma.[766]

5.2 The Canonical Text of the Old Testament

This section analyses what Childs identifies as the canonical text of the OT.[767] Childs' comments on this topic are almost exclusively found within the section, 'Text and Canon', in *IOTS*.[768]

5.2.1 Identifying the Canonical Text of the Old Testament

> The term canonical text denotes that official Hebrew text of the Jewish community which had reached a point of stabilization in the first century AD, thus all but ending its long history of fluidity. From that period on, the one form of the Hebrew text of the Bible became the normative and authoritative expression of Israel's sacred scripture. Stabilization marked the point which separated the text's history into two sharply distinguished periods: a pre-stabilization period marked by a wider toleration of divergent text types, and a post-stabilization period characterised by only minor variations of the one official text.[769]

Childs identifies the canonical text of the OT[770] as a Hebrew consonantal text which was stabilised by the first century CE at the latest and which became the 'normative and authoritative expression of Israel's sacred scripture'. As a scholar with historical-critical training, Childs is well aware that there were multiple texts of the Jewish Scriptures in use at this time. Thus, he rightly asks the question, 'is it even possible to speak of a canonical OT text in the light of the multiplicity of textual traditions – proto-Masoretic, Old Greek, Samaritan, to name but a few'.[771] Childs thinks it is, and goes on to specify that the Masoretic text-type is the *vehicle* for recovering the canonical text. Importantly, the Masoretic text-type is not the canonical text itself.[772] This is

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766 Childs, *NTC*, 527-8.

767 My strategy for how to engage with Childs on this topic is heavily influenced by David Richard Herbison, 'Reconstructing the text of the church: The "canonical text" and the goal of new testament textual criticism', M.A. Dissertation, Trinity Western University, 2015.

768 Childs, *IOTS*, 84-106.

769 Childs, *IOTS*, 100. Sanders affirms this same point, arguing that the cause of the change was the introduction of the concept of verbal inspiration: 'This marked the birth of the masoretic phenomenon that eventually guarded, protected, and counted every word of the text. Prior to the great divide, it was the message conveyed that was thought to have been inspired. After it, each word was considered "inspired."' (Sanders, *Torah*, xxv).

770 Is this term anachronistic? It is a shorthand way of referring to 'the text of the Old Testament books which should be considered canonical', and therefore is acceptable.

771 Childs, *IOTS*, 89.

772 Childs, *IOTS*, 97, 101, 106. Correctly observed by Driver, *Childs*, 185; Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische*, 193; Xun, *Canonical*, 60.

a key aspect of Childs' thought that some have failed to recognise.[773] What Childs means by this is that the text found in the extant manuscripts of the Masoretic text-type can be used by textual critics to recover the canonical text of the OT, which is a form of the Masoretic text-type that is not extant today.[774] The canonical text was, in Childs' mind, sanctioned by the central Jewish authorities by the close of the first century CE at the latest and therefore ended the pre-stabilisation period. Importantly, the canonical text is a Hebrew, not a Greek, text.[775] In addition, this stabilised/prioritised canonical text was not, according to Childs, chosen via 'scholarly textual judgments' on the 'best' or the 'most original' text, but rather on the basis of 'broad sociological factors and internal religious conflicts',[776] though what these are is not defined.

The aim of Childs' canonical approach to OT Textual Criticism is, therefore, to establish 'the best Masoretic text which is closest to the original text of the first century',[777] i.e. to the canonical text. It is notable that Childs does not seek to recover the *Urtext* that lies behind the canonical text in the period before its stabilisation. Here he differs from those who seek to find the earliest text of the biblical books either out of curiosity or because of the belief that these 'original autographs' were given by divine inspiration. Yet, Childs is also not interested in tracing the literary development and complex strata of the canonical text as an end in itself, as is encouraged by the inclusive emphasis of the 'new philology' movement.[778]

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773 The following erringly claim that the canonical text is the Masoretic text-type: Brett, *Crisis*, 62 (later Brett corrects his mistake in Brett, *Crisis*, 111); McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 303.

774 Childs, *IOTS*, 100.

775 Childs follows (in practice) the scope of the Hebrew canon and the Hebrew text, yet he follows the structure of the Greek canon. Barton makes a similar observation about Protestants generally, 'Protestant Bibles are a hybrid, having the Hebrew books in the Greek order. Paradoxically, the Protestant attempt to restore the primitive and authoritative Bible succeeded in producing a Bible which no Christian had ever known until that moment' (Barton, *Making*, 81).

776 Childs, *IOTS*, 103.

777 Childs, *IOTS*, 101.

778 Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (eds.), *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017). Porter and Pitts compare these two positions, describing the former as the 'traditional model' and the latter as the 'sociohistorical model' (Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 1, 4).

How, then, does one go about finding the canonical text? The extent of Childs' guidance is that it 'involves weighing the evidence for the best tradition of vocalization using the familiar historical and logical criteria'.[779] What exactly Childs means by this is unclear and the problem is exacerbated by the lack of agreed criteria within Textual Criticism.[780] Of course, there are generally accepted principles of how to determine earlier readings,[781] but Childs does not proffer his opinion on what these are.

Within the initial centuries of early Christianity, Christians primarily engaged with the Jewish Scriptures through the Greek Septuagint. This is known because the Septuagint provides the textual basis for the majority of the quotations/allusions to the Jewish Scriptures in the NT; as Law writes, 'the Old Testament in modern Bibles is a translation from the Hebrew Bible, but the writers of the New Testament used almost exclusively the Greek Septuagint'.[782] In light of the extensive use of the Septuagint in the early Church, should not the Septuagint be the canonical text of the OT? Childs recognises the issue.

> Did not Greek-speaking Jewish Christians continue to use the Septuagint as an authoritative text, as the New Testament and early Church fathers appear to demonstrate? Why should decisions within the Jewish community, some of which extended chronologically after the rise of Christianity, be deemed normative in any sense for Christians?[783]

In response to his own questions, Childs argues that Christians in the early Church did not decide to use the Septuagint on the grounds that it was a better text than its Hebrew equivalent (in contrast with the Samaritan attitude toward their version of the Pentateuch).[784] Indeed, the issue of which text should have authority only arose in the second-third century CE, as addressed by Origen's (born c. 185 CE) *Hexapla*.[785] Rather, the use of the Septuagint in the early

779 Childs, *IOTS*, 101.

780 Tov, *Textual*, 270.

781 For example, *lectio difficilior probabilior* ('the more difficult reading is the more probable') and *lectio brevior potior* ('the shorter reading is preferable') (Würthwein and Fischer, *Text*, 193-4).

782 Law, *Septuagint*, 85.

783 Childs, *IOTS*, 99.

784 Childs, *IOTS*, 99, 664.

785 Childs, *IOTS*, 99.

Church appears to have been a practical choice that was driven not out of a desire to use a particular text-type but by the fact that the Septuagint was regularly used by Jews at the time (of course, the first Christians were also Jewish).[786] Following the Hellenisation of Palestine under Alexander the Great (c. 356-323 BCE) and the Seleucids, Greek became the *lingua franca* of the region and remained so during the NT's composition.[787] Though Childs does not make this point, it was also entirely practical for the early Christians to use a text-type which was written in a language of their generally Greek-speaking audience, especially when some authors (notably Paul) saw their mission as spreading the Gospel message to both Jews and (non-Hebrew-speaking) Gentiles.[788] Of course, the NT authors could have included their own translations from a Hebrew text-type, but it would have been far easier to use an established translation. Also, not all of the NT authors may have been able to read Hebrew or have had access to Hebrew manuscripts.

In sum: this thesis agrees with Childs that there are not convincing reasons to grant the Septuagint priority as the canonical text of Christianity today. However, unlike Childs, it does not think there are reasons for prioritising his Hebrew canonical text *either*, or indeed any text at all; this point will be returned to later (§5.4).

5.2.2 Evidence for Existence

There are good historical reasons for thinking that the canonical text of the OT was a historical reality. From the examination of medieval Hebrew manuscripts, scholars have known for a long time that there is a Masoretic text-type attested by manuscripts which show strong levels of dependence. This text-type contains the text which today is authoritative within Judaism and it seems to have played a normative role in Judaism for a long time. Tov notes that quotations from the Jewish Scriptures within the *Talmud* and the *Midrashim* all utilise the Masoretic text-

786 Childs, *IOTS*, 99.

787 Childs, *IOTS*, 664.

788 Ulrich, 'Pluriformity', 28.

type, and that the *Targumim* use it as their textual basis for translation.[789] This suggests that the authority and dominance of the Masoretic text-type dates back at least as far as Late Antiquity (c. 135-700 CE).[790] With the discoveries of many biblical scrolls in the Judean Desert, scholars have been able to go back ever further in their estimations of the age and authority of the Masoretic text-type. Archaeological discoveries at *Qumran*, *Masada*, and the *Bar Kochba* sites[791] attest the existence of the Masoretic text-type during the Second Temple period (c. 516 BCE-70 CE[792]) and therefore may provide evidential support for the canonical text. The biblical manuscripts discovered at Qumran which attest the Masoretic text-type have been assigned composition dates between c. 225 BCE – 68 CE,[793] though scholars disagree on exactly how to categorise them based on their relationship to the text-types known today. In one of his more recent works,[794] Tov concludes that out of the 210-212 biblical manuscripts discovered at *Qumran*, only 121 can be analysed, and these 121 can be categorised into four groups. He concludes that: 55 (45%) are Masoretic, including a 'few' where there is equal similarity to the Masoretic text-type as there is to the Samarian Pentateuch; 6 (5%) are from the Septuagint; 5

789 Emanuel Tov, 'The Significance of the Texts from the Judean Desert for the History of the Text of the Hebrew Bible: A New Synthesis', in Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson (eds.)*, Qumran between the Old and New Testaments*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 290 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 277-309 (300).

790 Between the *Bar Kochba* revolt against Roman occupation and the first century of Islamic rule in Palestine (Eval Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn, and Fergus Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity: 135-700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1).

791 These titles are used by scholars to refer to three geographical areas within the Judean Desert. 'Qumran' designates eleven caves within close proximity to a building complex on the north-west edge of the Dead Sea in modern day Israel. 'Masada' refers to a fortress palace towards the south-west of the Dead Sea, which served various functions, such as being a palace for the Herodian family, a Roman garrison, a stronghold for Jewish rebels, and a Byzantine monastery. The 'Bar Kochba sites' are primarily caves that were used as hiding places by the Jewish resistance during the Bar Kochba war (132-3/6 CE). For an overview of all of the discoveries see Emanuel Tov, *The Texts from the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, vol. 39 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

792 From the construction of the second Temple in the sixth century BCE to its destruction by the Roman Empire.

793 Armin Lange, 'The Textual Plurality of Jewish Scriptures in the Second Temple Period in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls', in Nora David and Armin Lange (eds.)*, Qumran and the Bible: Studying the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, vol. 57 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 43-96 (60-61). For debates on the oldest texts discovered in addition to Lange, see F. M. Cross, 'The Oldest Manuscripts from Qumran', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 74/3 (1955), 147-72; Tov, *Bible*, 99;

794 A diachronic analysis of Tov shows that his statistics have changed over time (Lange, 'Plurality', 49).

(4%) are from the Samaritan Pentateuch; and 55 (45%) are 'non-aligned'.[795] Unfortunately, Tov does not offer the criteria by which he judged a manuscript to be part of the Masoretic text-type, though his judgments are likely based on a manuscript's resemblance to the Leningrad Codex. In contrast to Tov, Lange argues that out of 126 examinable texts, only 27 (21%) are Masoretic,[796] which is substantially less than Tov's count. The main reason for this difference comes from Lange's analysis of the Pentateuchal manuscripts; he concludes that only 10% are Masoretic, in contrast to Tov's 48%.[797] Regardless of whose statistics are correct, what is important for this thesis is that both major scholars agree that the Masoretic text-type *is* attested in the era of the canonical text. Importantly, though, it is but one text amongst many and thus there was no single authoritative text in the *Qumran* community.

In addition to the manuscripts discovered at *Qumran* are those discovered in *Masada* and the *Bar Kochba* sites. Interestingly, Tov observes that, 'the Masoretic family was the only text found at *Masada*, *Nahal Hever*, and *Murabba'at'*.[798] He claims that these manuscripts are nearly identical to the Leningrad Codex, whereas the measurable biblical texts at *Qumran* are 'merely close'.[799] Importantly, the *Masada* and *Bar Kochba* texts should not be considered entirely contemporary with each other; as Tov notes, the *Masada* manuscripts have a composition date c. 50 BCE-30 CE, but the *Bar Kochba* texts are c. 20 BCE-115 CE. Thus the *Masada* texts are contemporary with *Qumran*, but the *Bar Kochba* are texts somewhat younger than the *Masada* texts.[800] Tov assumes that the *Masada* and *Bar Kochba* sites were occupied by those under the rule of the central authorities in Jerusalem[801] and uses the discoveries to bolster his theory that

795 Tov, *Bible*, 108.
796 Lange, 'Plurality', 54-6.
797 Tov, *Bible*, 108.
798 Tov, 'Significance', 299.
799 Tov, *Bible*, 178-9.
800 Tov, *Bible*, 179.
801 Tov, *Bible*, 299.

there was an authoritative master manuscript/text in the Temple which was used to make copies for distribution.[802]

The Judean Desert discoveries point towards the existence of the Masoretic text-type in the second Temple period. In addition, they strongly suggest that it was not the authoritative text of *all* Jewish sects by the first century CE, though it clearly had influence across the region (if the volume of extant Masoretic manuscripts is an indication of importance). Importantly, however, the Judean Desert manuscripts are often so fragmentary that it is impossible to properly categorise all of them into a particular group.[803] Thus, the situation is not entirely clear.

How, then, did the Masoretic text-type progress from being the authoritative text of centralised Judaism to becoming the Hebrew text *par excellence*? As is well known, Judaism underwent a monumental upheaval following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE by the Roman Empire, at that time ruled by the Emperor Vespasian (ruled 69-79 CE). Of course, a major event was the destruction of Herod's Temple and thus the infrastructure of the central authorities, though groupings of various sects (notably the Pharisees and Sadducees) remained. Further violence some sixty years after this act of destruction swept across Judea in response to the revolt led by *Bar Kochba* ('son of the star'), which was crushed by the Romans in 132-135 CE. Suppression under the superpower was reinforced and Jews were forbidden from living in Jerusalem. Thus, many Jews emigrated to other areas and Galilee in particular became a centre for the remnants of the central authorities because of the patronage of the rich and influential Gamaliel family. There the sects which survived the *Bar Kochba* rebellion merged for the cause of a common 'Rabbinic' identity, establishing a new monolithic Judaism.[804] This new identity included both a high view of Jewish Scripture and a high view of the oral law for interpreting

[802] Tov, Bible, 30-1. For the several ancient sources which claim that some of the Jewish Scriptures were stored in the Jerusalem Temple, see Lange, 'Plurality', 64.

[803] See the manuscript photographs at, 'The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library', *Israel Antiquities Authority*, https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive, accessed 23 Aug 2019.

[804] Satlow, *Bible*, 257-9.

it; thus, as Satlow notes, one can see a merging of both Sadduceeic (high view of Scripture) and Pharisaic (high view of oral law) values.[805] It is therefore feasible that the Masoretic text-type came to dominate Judaism as a consequence of the establishment and domination of Rabbinic Judaism. After the destruction of Herod's Temple, it is logical that only the Masoretic text-type remained as a viable choice for the surviving authorities. The Septuagint no longer held respect because it was adopted by the heretical Christian sect, the Samaritan Pentateuch was used by the disliked Samaritans, and the distinct Qumran scroll texts were so securely hidden within the Dead Sea caves that they would remain undiscovered for almost two millennia.[806] Thus, the Rabbinic Judaism established in Galilee under Gamaliel had but one candidate for its official text, which was the text that it already recognised as authoritative (if *Masada* and the *Bar Kochba* sites are connected to the central authorities). Thus, as Rabbinic Judaism came to be the dominant sect within second century CE Judaism so too did its preferred text. The sect's theological views on the authority of that text then guaranteed that it would be properly copied for years to come, ensuring the stability of the already stable Masoretic text-type. The decision to venerate the Masoretic text-type at this time was thus likely based on the continuation of tradition, rather than on the recognition that it was a more-accurate/original/older/better text,[807] though it may of course have been originally chosen because it met these criteria, yet one can only speculate on such matters. Thus, there are good reasons to assume the existence of a stable form of the Masoretic text-type by the close of the first century CE[808] and this can feasibly be referred to as the canonical text of the OT.

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805 Satlow, *Bible*, 259.

806 Tov, *Bible*, 174, 179; Würthwein and Fischer, *Text*, 16.

807 See also Tov, *Bible*, 26.

808 Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. by John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

5.3 The Canonical Text of the New Testament

It is now time to consider what Childs identifies as the canonical text of the NT. Childs' views on the topic can be found primarily in a section entitled, 'The Hermeneutical Problem of New Testament Text Criticism' in *NTC*.[809] A large amount of what Childs articulates in *NTC* is identical in principle to that which he articulates in *IOTS*, demonstrating Childs' consistency. Let us now consider Childs' views.

5.3.1 A Canonical Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism

As explored above (§4), Childs thinks that the biblical texts have been intentionally shaped to function as Scripture for future generations. This leads him to search for signs of how these texts have been shaped (§4.3) and thus to interpret them in accordance with those signs. Now, Childs' theory of canonical shaping covers both the composition and transmission phases (§3.1.4.1) of the NT texts' formation.

> Clearly there is an important parallel between tradition-historical developments of the canonical literature of the New Testament and the tradition-historical development of the canonical text. Indeed the line between them is quite fluid at times. Both processes involve the reception of normative tradition which includes an interpretation of the material along with the activity of its transmission.[810]

When engaging in NT Textual Criticism, then, Childs advocates for an approach which has a particular concern for how the NT books have been shaped in the transmission phase to function more effectively as Scripture. Indeed, he seeks to find those readings which for him constitute the 'canonical text of the NT'.

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[809] Childs, *NTC*, 518-30.

[810] Childs, *NTC*, 523. See also, 'The point to be made is that textual criticism of the New Testament is part of the larger canonical process and must be seen in that light if the peculiar dynamic of its history is to be understood. Just as the growth of the literature of the New Testament as the normative writings of a religious community cannot be compared to inert sherds lying dormant for centuries, so also the peculiar features of the canonical textual process resist identification with the model of classical studies in the search simply for an original, uninterpreted text' (Childs, *NTC*, 523); 'the element of theological interpretation is not only constitutive of the church's scriptures in general, but has also entered into the textual dimension of the tradition as well' (Childs, *NTC*, 529).

Importantly, then, Childs' canonical approach to NT Textual Criticism is not a search for the original autographs/*Urtexte* of the NT books, since these do not contain signs of canonical shaping. Indeed, the original texts are located at the start of the transmission phase (i.e. the end of the composition phase) and do not include any later redactions. Hence, Childs distances himself from the classical approach associated with major figures such as Westcott and Hort; this model 'is inadequate for establishing the church's received and authoritative text'.[811] At the other end of the spectrum, Childs' approach is also not a search for 'the outer parameter' of 'actual ecclesiastical textual traditions' found in the Majority text-type[812] which, for Childs, constitutes a reasonable end of the transmission phase. Childs argues against the uncritical acceptance of the *Textus Receptus* – the Majority text-type's chief printed representative (§5.3.2) – as it contains elements of corruption and conflation/harmonisation that for him are not authoritative.[813]

If Childs does not seek the NT texts which stand at the beginning or the end of the transmission phase, what then does he seek? Childs argues that 'the goal of text criticism, which is commensurate with its canonical role, is to recover that New Testament text which best reflects the true apostolic witness found in the church's scripture'.[814] What Childs means here is illuminated when one considers his theory of canonical shaping: Childs seeks to recover those readings of the NT books which he thinks the Church has intentionally shaped to function as Scripture for future generations. As Letis phrases it, 'Look for the reading that became hermeneutically sanctioned, or canonized'.[815] Importantly, in contrast to his ideas regarding the search for the canonical text of the OT, Childs this time is not searching for a text that would

811 Childs, *NTC*, 527.

812 Childs, *NTC*, 528. Childs refers to the Majority text-type as the 'Byzantine tradition' (Childs, *NTC*, 527) and the '*koine* text' (Childs, *NTC*, 530). It is also referred to in scholarship as the 'Received text' and the 'Ecclesiastical text'.

813 Childs, *NTC*, 527.

814 Childs, *NTC*, 527.

815 Letis, 'Canonical', 153. Letis identifies this as the second guideline for determining a 'canonical' reading, with the first being, 'Abandon the notion of an original text' (Letis, 'Canonical', 152).

have been extant in a single manuscript.[816] Rather, he is searching for a collection of canonical readings that never existed together in any known manuscript but which, for him, constitute the canonical text of the NT.

Childs's search for this 'best received text' has a methodology consisting of two stages.[817] With regard to the first:

> Because the text-critical goal has been defined as recovering the best received text, one begins by a self-positioning within the framework of actual ecclesiastical textual traditions, the outer parameter of which has usually been set by the Byzantine (*koine*) text. […] The use of the *textus receptus* as providing the initial context for textual analysis serves to describe a full range of textual possibilities which actually functioned in the church. It offers an inclusive, if often distorted, textual tradition against which to test more and less pure textual readings.[818]

Childs believes that the search for the canonical text of the NT should begin from the broad range of 'actual ecclesiastical textual traditions'. He believes that the 'outer parameter' of these traditions is the Majority text-type; Childs writes that the Majority text-type 'expoused [*sic*] an inclusive principle. It sought to include the widest possible number of variant traditions actually in use by Christian communities through conflation and harmonization'.[819] Thus the *Textus Receptus*, as the primary representative of this text-type, is the focus for the first inclusive stage of text-critical analysis.

With regard to the second stage:

> Working within the initial context of the *textus receptus*, the text critic enters into a process of searching for the best received, that is, canonical text. One strives critically to discern from within the common tradition that text which best reflects the church's judgment as to its truth. The polarity is not between a neutral or an interpreted text, but between the qualities of received or interpreted texts. Moreover, the criteria by which these judgments are made are precisely those which critical scholarship has developed over the last two hundred years. One evaluates a variety of factors which includes the age of a text, the quality of its text type, the geographical breadth of its witness, the inner relationship of variants, and the inner consistency of style and content.[820]

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816 'the Christian church did not develop an official, ecclesiastical position regarding one particular text which was analogous to the role of the Masoretic tradition within rabbinic Judaism' (Childs, *NTC*, 526).

817 Childs, *NTC*, 528.

818 Childs, *NTC*, 528.

819 Childs, *NTC*, 527.

820 Childs, *NTC*, 528.

The second stage of Childs' approach to NT Textual Criticism involves critical engagement with the *Textus Receptus* as one's 'initial context'[821] to locate 'that text which best reflects the church's judgment as to its truth'. Here, again, one must assume his theory of canonical shaping: beginning with the *Textus Receptus*, one seeks to find those readings which have been shaped to function as Scripture for future generations.

> […] as the literary analysis seeks to discern within the corpus of scripture indices of how the tradents rendered the material in order for it to function kerygmatically for successive generations, so the text critic describes, analyses, and evaluates the competing textual traditions in an effort to discern the truest textual rendering.[822]

Thus, this second stage involves a dialectic in which one moves from the broad 'outer' range of the Church's textual tradition (exemplified by the *Textus Receptus*) to the narrow 'inner' range of readings which have been shaped to function as Scripture and thus for Childs constitute the canonical text of the NT. Childs writes, 'the canonical model of textual criticism proposes a continuing search of discerning the best received text which moves from the outer parameters of the common church tradition found in the *textus receptus* to the inner judgment respecting its purity'.[823] For Childs, this is a 'continuing search'; indeed he writes, 'the task of the church's understanding of its scriptures in all its various dimensions remains an ongoing responsibility for each new generation of believers'.[824]

Though Childs does not provide any examples of his approach to NT Textual Criticism in practice, it is possible to reflect on how such an example would look. Thus, the following provides an example of Childs' approach in relation to the well-known problem of Luke 23:34a.[825]

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[821] See also, 'the textual analysis begins within the parameters established by the *textus receptus*' (Childs, *NTC*, 530).

[822] Childs, *NTC*, 530.

[823] Childs, *NTC*, 529. Note the parallel to Childs' search for the Christian Bible where he writes, 'This movement from the outer parameters of tradition to the inner parameters of Word is constitutive of the theological task' (Childs, *BTONT*, 68). See also Wagner, 'Search', 24.

[824] Childs, *NTC*, 530. See also, 'Childs admits that the canonical text is not a simple object existing in time and space, but each generation must reenvision what is the canonical text that it receives from the past according to its own capacity to recognize the form and function as Scripture' (Sheppard, 'Childs', 580).

[825] I have not been able to locate any comments from Childs on this verse.

Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they do."[826]

The problem with this prayer concerns its originality, meaning whether it was part of what Metzger calls 'the original Gospel of Luke'[827] (i.e. the literary edition of Luke which stood at the end of the composition phase and became the basis for transmission[828]). Extensive studies have been undertaken on the topic,[829] so only some brief comments shall be offered. As above, Childs argues that a canonical approach to NT Textual Criticism should begin from the *Textus Receptus*. The prayer is included in the 1550 edition of Stephanus, though with a few minor spelling variants which do not affect meaning.

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγεν· πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἴδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν (*NA28*)

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγε, Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἴδασι τί ποιοῦσι (*Textus Receptus*)

Working from this initial inclusive standpoint, Childs then encourages one to locate the reading which constitutes the 'best received text'.[830] Here one encounters a conundrum: there is an abundance of evidence which demonstrates that there were differing views in the Church regarding the prayer's originality. For example, the prayer is not attested in early manuscripts of Luke such as P75 (c. 175-225 CE) and the mid-fourth century Codex Vaticanus (B), but it is attested in the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus (S) and the fifth-century Codex Bezae (D) (though as an addition).[831] In fact, both S and D show signs of internal disagreement among

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[826] ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγεν· πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἴδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν (Luke 23:34a).

[827] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 180.

[828] Biblical scholars have long recognised the problematic nature of the term 'original text'. For studies of the issue see Eldon J. Epp, 'The Multivalence of the Term "Original Text" in New Testament Textual Criticism', *Harvard Theological Review*, 92/3 (1999), 245-81; Michael W. Holmes, 'From "Original Text" to "Initial Text": The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion', in Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (eds.), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (2nd edn, Leiden: Brill, 2013), 637-88; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 272-4; Tov, *Text*, 163-9; Würthwein and Fischer, *Text*, 158-62.

[829] Joel Delobel, 'Luke 23:34a: A Perpetual Text-Critical Crux?', in William L. Petersen, Johan S. Vos, and Henk J. de Jonge (eds.), *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical: Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 25-36; Nathan Eubank, 'A Disconcerting Prayer: On the Originality of Luke 23:34a', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 129/3 (2010), 521-36; Jason A. Whitlark and Mikeal C. Parsons, 'The 'Seven' Last Words: A Numerical Motivation for the Insertion of Luke 23:34a', *New Testament Studies*, 52/2 (2006), 188-204.

[830] Childs, *NTC*, 528.

[831] All dates taken from Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*. For a full list of manuscripts containing and omitting the prayer see Whitlock and Parsons, 'Words', 189.

their scribes/editors regarding whether the prayer is original. The prayer was initially included in S, then marked for removal by a later editor, and then later again recognised as original to the Gospel.[832] Similarly, the prayer was initially omitted from D but then inserted by a later editor at the bottom of the page.[833] Good arguments have been made for why the prayer is original. As Nolland has noted, Acts 7:60[834] appears to assume Luke 23:34a.[835] Furthermore, the image of Jesus praying to his Father in this way is consistent with other parts of Luke.[836] There are also explanations for why the prayer is omitted in several early and diverse witnesses. One of the main theories is that the prayer was excised by anti-semitic scribes who could not accept that Jesus would have prayed in this way for the Jews who played a part in his crucifixion.[837]

The fact that several ancient manuscripts viewed the prayer as original suggests that the communities which utilised these manuscripts viewed the prayer as an authentic expression[838] of (what we today refer to as) the historical Jesus. For Childs, the inclusion of the prayer as original may be a sign of canonical shaping with the exegetical implication that it is to be read in the Church today as an authentic expression of Jesus Christ. As I have shown (§5.2), Childs seeks to redefine the location which contains the traditions that are authoritative for the Church today; he is not concerned with establishing the 'original texts' or the earliest forms of the Bible's traditions, but rather with establishing the canonical texts that he think contain the best received iterations of the traditions that have been passed on for future generations. However, the absence of the prayer from many early manuscripts of Luke is evidence that other communities

832 Whitlock and Parsons, 'Words', 190.

833 See 'Codex Bezae Page 537', *University of Cambridge Digital Library*, https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-NN-00002-00041/537, accessed 23 Jun. 2020.

834 Stephen's prayer: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (κύριε, μὴ στήσῃς αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) (Acts 7:60).

835 Nolland, *Luke*, 1141.

836 Luke 10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:46.

837 For detailed studies see Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper, 2007), 193-5; Eubank, 'Prayer', 528-32.

838 By which I mean that it reflects, to a reasonable degree, something that Jesus could have said, and not necessarily the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus.

in the Church did *not* view it as original and therefore did not see it as a piece of normative tradition. In the face of this plurality, Childs' theory reaches an impasse, as there is no indication that the Church as a whole had a stance on whether the prayer is original. Indeed, the problem with Childs' approach to NT Textual Criticism here is that it assumes that the Church is a single entity with a discernible preference for particular readings. Church historians and textual critics alike have proved this assumption to be incorrect by showing the plurality of both ecclesiastical and textual history. As I explore below (§5.3.2, §5.4), there is evidence that portions of the Church may have sanctioned particular texts, but this is not the same as Childs' idea of there being sanctioned ecclesial readings for the *entire* Church. As Herbison argues:

> Appeal to the "church's use" is made without nuance and without acknowledgment that when textual variation is concerned, any use of a reading by *the* church is really use by *a portion of* the church. Since the manuscripts used by the church disagree, the church's use is likewise divided.[839]

There is a further issue to raise at this point which has been made by McDonald in light of his extensive research into the formation of the Christian Bible.[840] McDonald argues that apostolicity was one of the major criteria employed in the early Church during the canonisation of the NT; i.e., that the NT books were selected primarily because they were deemed by the proto-orthodox to have been written by the Apostles. In McDonald's view, this shows that in the proto-orthodox communities of the early Church there was a desire for Christianity to be rooted in the authority of those who were closest to what we today would refer to as the 'historical Jesus'. McDonald finds that this desire conflicts with Childs' attitude regarding the canonical text of the NT: Childs seeks the traditions which stand downstream of the Apostles, containing later redactions of 'apostolic' (see below) material. Thus, whilst the early Church viewed the Apostles and, indeed, Jesus, as its source of authority, Childs believes that the source of authority is actually the redactors of later generations.

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[839] Herbison, 'Reconstructing', 134.

[840] E.g. McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*; Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, 2 vols. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

> Childs' focus on the biblical text at the end of the canonical process, which includes the redactional material added to the writer's original message and intentions, is at variance with the perspective of the very canonical community he is anxious to preserve. Why should the second through the fourth-century additions to the biblical text be added to the canon base of the church or be given equal weight to those of the apostolic community? Has the authoritative base of the church shifted from Jesus and those who first knew him to include equally the redactors of later generations? Does that not fly in the face of all that the earliest Christian community believed they were recognizing in the first place? What else does the criteria of apostolicity suggest if not that? Why should the text of a later generation of Christians, which admittedly has been corrupted by mistakes, glosses, and deliberate changes, be given priority over the earliest recoverable text? Childs does not answer this question satisfactorily.[841]

Because Childs is downplaying the Apostles and Jesus as the source of authority, McDonald argues that he is running the risk of removing Christianity from its 'historical moorings'.

> […] to ignore the original text in favour of a final "received" text even though the original text is sometimes capable of being located comes dangerously close to removing Christianity from its historical moorings. That practice ignores the emphasis of all early Christianity and favors the imagined Christ born out of the later Christian community over the historic biblical Christ of the NT and the early Christian community.[842]

McDonald's criticism is powerful but it does not fully represent Childs' views. Though Childs is concerned with establishing a text that is later than the original texts, Childs is not trying to establish a text which is disconnected from the historical Jesus (I suspect Childs would have been horrified by such an accusation). On the contrary, Childs wants to establish a text which he believes the Church, as the bearer and inheritor of apostolic tradition, has sanctioned to be authoritative. Chapman illuminates Childs on this point.

> […] for Childs the prophetic-apostolic witness is more than simply what individual prophets and apostles originally said and wrote. Their witness continues to develop and deepen over time, a process reflected in the history of the biblical literature itself, until that witness is acknowledged by the community of faith to be complete.[843]

Despite Childs' likely intentions, the fact remains however that he does not grant authority to the Apostles in the manner of the early Church and in doing so advocates ironically for a non-canonical stance. Yet I suspect that this was intentional. Childs, as a biblical scholar, would have been well aware that much of the NT was not written by the Apostles (a point McDonald also

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[841] McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 307. Henry makes a similar point when discussing textual meaning: 'For if textual normativity is the achievement of a final canonizing community, then the meaning of the biblical text is dissolved into what the early church decided, and the decisive role of the prophets and apostles is effaced' (Henry, 'Canonical', 83).

[842] McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 309.

[843] Chapman, 'Inspiration', 180.

acknowledges[844]). Thus, he would have been wary of an approach which uncritically trusted in the original 'apostolic' writings. Hence his approach to NT Textual Criticism involves critical engagement with multiple textual traditions to find the best received text, rather than any originals.

5.3.2 The Majority Text-Type and the Canonical Text

This section will explore the question of why Childs does not identify the Majority text-type as the canonical text of the NT. This is an important question to answer as the Majority text-type contains attributes that align with Childs' theory of canonical shaping, which make it a strong candidate for the canonical text by his own logic. Yet, despite this, Childs rejects identifying the Majority text-type as the canonical text of the NT.

Let us begin by considering the *Textus Receptus* since it is the 'chief printed representative' of the Majority text-type.[845] The term *Textus Receptus* (Latin for 'received text') refers to the text of several editions of the Greek NT which are revisions of the work of Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466-1536 CE).[846] Following the invention of the moveable type printing press by Johann Guttenberg c. 1439, the first *printed* Greek NT was contained in volume 5 of the 'Complutensian Polygot' printed in 1514 in the university town of Alcala in Spain (*Complutum* in Latin).[847] The first Greek NT to be *published* (i.e. sold on the market), however, was made by Erasmus and was finished printing in 1515.[848] Erasmus' edition was not based upon a single copy of the NT, for he did not have access to one (hence why he was writing his own), but was instead an eclectic

[844] McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 230.

[845] Michael W. Holmes, 'The "Majority Text Debate": New Form of an Old Issue', *Themelios*, 8/2 (1983), 13-9 (13).

[846] Namely, those of Robert Estienne (Latinised as Stephanus) (1503-59), Théodore de Bèze (Beza, 1519-1605), and Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 148-152. See also, David C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 198-9). The term *Textus Receptus* derives from the preface of Bonaventure and Elzevir's 1633 edition (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 152; Robert F. Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text: Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 3).

[847] Hull, *Text*, 33; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 139. The Complutensian Polygot did not receive the impratur of the Pope until 1520 and was only published in 1522 (Hull, *Text*, 34).

[848] Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 143.

edition produced from three manuscripts of the Majority text-type; one of the Gospels, one of Acts and the Pauline letters, and one of Revelation, all of which dated from the twelfth century CE.[849] Where these manuscripts were faulty (such as in the final six verses of Revelation, which were missing) Erasmus reverse-translated the Vulgate into Greek. Hence, Metzger and Ehrman note, 'As would be expected from such a procedure, here and there in Erasmus' self-made Greek text are readings that have never been found in any known Greek manuscript of these verses'.[850] The reception of Erasmus' edition, as well as its subsequent revisions, was mixed, though as it was the first on the market it became the prototypical edition of the Greek NT and remained as the 'base text'[851] for editions of the Greek NT until approximately the nineteenth century.[852] However, the *Textus Receptus* is not used as the base text in modern critical editions[853] for the simple reason that the majority of textual critics have judged the manuscripts utilised by Erasmus to be inferior to those available today, i.e. because scholars today are able to locate older readings than those presented in the editions of the *Textus Receptus*.[854]

It is for this reason that the majority of NT textual critics consider the editions of the *Textus Receptus* and, importantly, the Majority text-type to which it is a witness, to be of a lesser quality than the Western and Alexandrian text-types.[855] The Majority text-type is old, however, and can be glimpsed in the fourth century writings of Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379 CE) and John Chyrosostom (c. 347-407 CE), but it took time to develop and only solidified far later.[856]

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849 Hull, *Text*, 36; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 143-5.

850 Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 143-5. See also Hull, *Text*, 36.

851 I.e. the base text which all other manuscripts were compared against (on which see Hull, *Text*, 43).

852 Notably, the *Textus Receptus* provided the basis for much of Luther's translation of the NT, as well as the King James Version (Hull, *Text*, 37; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 145).

853 E.g. Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, et al. (eds.), *The Greek New Testament* (5th edn, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014) [*UBS5*]; *GNTTH*; Nestle et al., *NA28*.

854 It is for this reason that the King James Version is now seen as textually problematic by the majority of scholars (on which see Larry W. Hurtado, 'The King James Bible and Biblical Scholarship', *The Expository Times*, 122/10 (2011), 478-89).

855 This claim is made by: Holmes, 'Majority', 15; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 280. I have not included the Caesarean text-type here because of its disputed status, on which see Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 310.

856 Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 279. The earliest manuscript witness is the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (only in the Gospels) (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 280).

The Majority text-type came to prominence during the Byzantine period (c. 330-1453 CE)[857] primarily because it became popular in Constantinople and was then distributed throughout the Byzantine empire.[858] Metzger and Ehrman write, 'It is no surprise, then, that it was the text that came to dominate the Greek textual tradition from the seventh century onward so that the vast majority of witnesses surviving today are of this type'.[859] Statistically speaking, approximately 80-90% of extant NT manuscripts are of the Majority text-type[860] - hence 'Majority'.

Within NT Textual Criticism today there is a fringe movement which argues that a form of the *Textus Receptus* should once again be given priority both within Textual Criticism and Christianity.[861] The origins of this movement lie in the work of John Burgon (1813-1888), Oxford academic and Bishop of Chichester. Burgon was an erudite scholar who devoted his life to the pursuit of a doctrine of Scripture to defend the Bible's authority in light of the emerging challenges from historical-critical study. In particular, he was a vocal critic of Westcott and Hort's ground-breaking eclectic Greek NT and their relegation of the Majority text-type.[862] The Majority text-type movement today is represented by several respectable scholars who seek

[857] I.e. from the inauguration of Constantinople as the new capital of the Roman Empire under Constantine until its destruction and conquest by the Ottoman Empire.

[858] Eusebius, in his *Life of Constantine*, 4.36, records a request from the Emperor Constantine for fifty manuscripts of Scriptures for use in churches in Constantinople. If these manuscripts contained the Majority text-type then it could be said that this is evidence for the Church sanctioning a chosen text for the NT. Indeed, Ralston connects Constantine's manuscripts with a proto-Byzantine text-type (T. Ralston, 'The "Majority Text" and Byzantine Origins', *New Testament Studies*, 38/1 (1992), 122-37 (135)). Alternatively, Skeat thinks that both Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus (both Alexandrian text-type) are directly connected to Constantine's manuscripts (see Skeat, 'Constantine'). Ultimately, as it was only Eusebius (granted authority by Constantine) who determined the text of the fifty manuscripts, this event should not be seen as an official sanctioning by a denomination of the Church (i.e. it was not a conciliar decision such as with the Nicene Creed).

[859] Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 280.

[860] Holmes, 'Majority', 15

[861] For detailed studies, see Kurt Aland, 'The Text of the Church?', *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1987), 131-44; Gordon D. Fee, 'The Majority Text and the Original Text of the New Testament', *The Bible Translator*, 31/1 (1980), 107-18; Holmes, 'Majority'; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 218-22; Wallace, 'Majority'.

[862] Burgon's main work was published posthumously: John William Burgon (Edward Millar, ed.), *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated & Established* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896). For an overview of the period, see J. L. North, 'The Oxford Debate on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, Held at New College on May 6, 1897: An End, Not a Beginning, for the Textus Receptus', in David G. K. Taylor (ed.), *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts: The Papers of the First Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999), 1-25.

to argue their case within the context of Textual Criticism,[863] rather than only on the grounds of *a priori* convictions about the nature of the Bible.

One thesis of the Majority text-type movement which appears to be historically credible is their assertion that there was a preference for a particular text-type within Christianity by, at the latest, the Byzantine era. This point is well recognised by Aland:

> Every Church had a Gospels manuscript on its altar. […] Their use of the Majority text indicates clearly that it was the choice of those in authority as the text to be recognized officially and propagated […]. In the age of Justinian as in the 9th century the Majority text consolidated the position it had clearly claimed in the 4th century as the official, proper, and correct text of the developing Byzantine Church.[864]
>
> This Byzantine text was regarded as "the text of the church" – to return to the title of this essay. It was the text of the official Byzantine church, and the church in its striving for uniformity did all that it could to make it the common text.[865]

To its opponents, the Majority text-type is a later corrupted text than those readings which can be critically reconstructed through earlier manuscripts. To its supporters, however, the Majority text-type is an authoritative compendium of orthodox tradition that should once again be authoritative within the Church.

Now, if the Majority text-type advocates are correct, the Majority text-type is a strong candidate for the canonical text according to Childs' canonical logic. Indeed, if it is a text-type which the Church has historically viewed as authoritative then it could feasibly qualify as Childs' canonical text. However, Childs rejects this idea. He specifically rejects uncritically accepting the *Textus Receptus* (the primary witness to the Majority text-type) because it contains 'elements

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[863] E.g. Jakob van Bruggen, 'The Majority Text: Why Not Reconsider its Exile?', in Scot McKendrick and Orlaith O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text* (London: British Library, 2003), 147-53; Zane C. Hodges, 'The Greek Text of the King James Version', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 125/500 (1968), 334-45; Zane C. Hodges, 'Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Criticism', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 128/509 (1971), 27-35; Zane C. Hodges, Arthur L. Farstad, and William C. Dunkin, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (2nd edn, Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1985); Theodore P. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind* (2nd edn, Ithaca, NY: Just and Sinner Publications, 2018); Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text II* (3rd edn, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 2003); Maurice A. Robinson, 'The Case for Byzantine Priority', in David Alan Black (ed.), *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 125-39; Maurice A. Robinson, 'In Search of the Alexandrian Archetype', in Christian B. Amphoux and J. Keith Elliott (eds.), *The New Testament Text in Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Lille Colloquium July 2000*, Histoire Du Texte Biblique, vol. 6 (Lausanne: Éditions du Zébra, 2003), 45-67; Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1984).

[864] Aland, 'Text', 140-1.

[865] Aland, 'Text', 143.

of corruption which have entered into the conflated textual tradition'.[866] Yet he offers no comment on whether he might accept other forms of the text-type. Childs also rejects the Majority text-type implicitly because of his dialectical model of NT Textual Criticism which insists that there are canonical readings which need to be uncovered through a critical process that moves from the *Textus Receptus* towards the best received text (§5.3.1). Ultimately, it would have been helpful if Childs had reflected on this matter in more detail.

5.4 Should the Canonical Texts Have Priority?

This section considers in detail why Childs thinks that the canonical texts should have priority during interpretation and then evaluates his position.

Childs claims that the canonical texts have interpretative priority over all other texts, whether earlier or later. Noble refers to this as Childs' 'subordination principle', in the sense that all other texts are subordinated to the canonical texts.[867] Consider Childs' own words on the matter.

> Canonical analysis focuses its attention on the final form of the text itself.[868]

> The canonical form marks not only the place from which exegesis begins, but also it marks the place at which exegesis ends. The text's pre-history and post-history are both subordinated to the form deemed canonical.[869]

> In the end, it is the canonical text that is authoritative, not the process, nor the self-understanding of the interpreter.[870]

The authority of the canonical texts has a direct impact on the form of Childs' canonical approach: because the canonical texts are authoritative they are necessarily the object of

[866] Childs, *NTC*, 527. On which see, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (rev. edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[867] Noble, *Canonical*, 68. See also Brett, *Crisis*, 29; Gignilliat, *Canonical*, 25; Seitz, *Character*, 49.

[868] Childs, *IOTS*, 73.

[869] Childs, *NTC*, 48.

[870] Childs, *Isaiah*, 4.

interpretation.[871] This does not mean that Childs refuses to study any other texts of the biblical books, but he does so only as part of illuminating the canonical texts (§3.1.2).

Importantly, the prioritisation of the canonical texts is *only* a principle for determining the base text for Theological Interpretation. It does not imply that all of the theological claims made within the canonical texts are authoritative for the construction of theological knowledge. What does this mean? In Childs' works on Biblical Theology, for example, his methodology is to survey all of the theological claims made by the biblical books when read according to the canonical texts. The value of each claim is then considered in light of the whole and thus a developmental and hierarchical trajectory is created using the different theological voices in the Bible (§6.3.1). Thus, in Childs' perspective, not every theological claim in the canonical texts has equal value in Christianity today. Childs seeks the guidance of the canon itself on how to create this developmental trajectory, hence why he considers his approach to be exegetical and commensurate with the form of the Bible itself.[872]

Let us now consider Childs' arguments for the prioritisation of the canonical texts. Unfortunately, Childs never presents a systematic treatment justifying his position,[873] though several key points can be found across his works.

Firstly, the prioritisation of the canonical texts is a logical corollary of Childs' theory of canonical shaping (§4.1). As the biblical texts have been shaped to function as Scripture, and as this activity reached its climax in the canonical texts,[874] it is logical that the canonical texts must have priority for interpretation. Thus, the canonical texts are authoritative in Childs' mind because they best contain the authoritative traditions which have been deemed worthy to pass on to future generations. As shown earlier (§4.3.1), it is clear that the biblical books have often

871 Childs, 'Exegetical', 68.

872 Childs, *IOTS*, 73.

873 See also McDonald, *Christian Biblical Canon*, 307.

874 As Moberly writes in relation to the OT, 'The canon […] represents a culminating event in a theological process of sifting and discernment' (Moberly, 'Canon', 245-6).

undergone redaction to serve alternative functions from their original literary forms. However, it is far from clear that the canonical texts are those forms of the biblical books which contain the *pinnacle* of authoritative tradition and thus his argument is not fully convincing.

Secondly, Childs suggests that the canonical text of the OT specifically[875] has priority because 'it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation'.[876] Childs believes that the canon defines the scope of Israel's encounter with God and thus defines the beginning and end of that period of Israel's canonical history.[877] In doing so, the canon 'assigns a special quality to this particular segment of human history which became normative for all successive generations of this community of faith'.[878] Thus the canonical text is authoritative because it is the only text which contains the complete form of Israel's canonical history, i.e. it was the text which was stabilised after Israel's tradition-shaping process had reached an end.

Thirdly, Sumpter draws out a further reason why the canonical texts have authority for interpretation in Childs' thought. In Sumpter's opinion, Childs' thinks that the final canonisers produced a text which was a "'truer" witness to a reality more fragmentarily testified to at an earlier stage'.[879] Thus, Childs, according to Sumpter, thinks that the canonical text is authoritative because it is *more truthful* than any other texts (though not necessarily inerrant). Sumpter makes this claim on the basis of gleanings within Childs' works that are, notably, outside of his major methodological monographs. The first gleaning is found in Childs' comments on Isa. 11:1-9 in *Isaiah*.[880] Here Childs explores questions of the dating and dependence of the passage, though he concludes that its value does not depend upon knowing such details as they are transcended by the theological message of the canonical text. Childs

875 It is not clear if Childs' held a similar belief regarding the canonical text of the NT.
876 Childs, *IOTS*, 76.
877 Childs, *IOTS*, 75.
878 Childs, *IOTS*, 75.
879 Sumpter, *Substance*, 25.
880 Childs, *Isaiah*, 99-102.

then argues that the canonical text should be prioritised because it reflects the work of redactors who intended to shape the text so that it would be theologically true for future generations. Importantly, Childs notes that the concern for truth amongst these redactors was not akin to modern criteria of historical accuracy but rather was a concern for 'its faithfulness to its theological context'.[881] Childs views this concern as part of not just the shaping of Isaiah, but of 'canonical formation' itself, thus one can understand why Sumpter would use this reference to justify his interpretation of Childs. However, Childs never makes the universal claim that *every* biblical text has been shaped so that it will communicate theological truth. Thus, Sumpter erringly extrapolates a universal principle from a local idea. The second reference Sumpter gives is to Childs' article on the relationship between the OT and NT.[882] In the conclusion of his article, Childs addresses the possibility of reversing from subject matter to witness as a means of finding an additional layer of meaning in the biblical texts (§6.2.3). He then notes how the Holy Spirit can speak through the Bible (§6.2.2) in a manner which communicates 'the full ontological reality of God'.[883] Sumpter errs this time by interpreting Childs' claim as affirming the ability of the canonical redactors 'to perceive a fulness to the text not previously grasped'.[884] However, Childs is not concerned with the canonical redactors in his passage, he is instead discussing the theological value of the canonical text to the reader as empowered by the Holy Spirit (i.e. illumination by the Spirit).

Childs does articulate a concern for a truth when prioritising the canonical texts elsewhere. When searching for the canonical text of the NT, Childs seeks to find those sanctioned ecclesial readings which best reflect 'the *true* apostolic witness found in the church's scripture'[885] (§5.3). This requires some exposition. For Childs, the traditions which are

[881] Childs, *Isaiah*, 102.
[882] Childs, 'Nature'.
[883] Childs, 'Nature', 124.
[884] Sumpter, *Substance*, 124.
[885] Childs, *NTC*, 527. Emphasis added.

authoritative for the Church are those which (he believes) have been shaped to function normatively for future generations (§4.1). It is these traditions that are found in their most-developed form in the canonical texts of the OT and NT (§5.4). These normative traditions put forward by the canonical texts provide the theological basis for a *Sachkritik*, guided by the Holy Spirit, which ultimately reveals the relationship between the witness of those traditions and the subject matter to which they point (i.e. God) (§6). Childs' approach is, therefore, fundamentally concerned with truth, in the sense that it seeks to make claims about God that correspond with reality. But, importantly, that concern only emerges fully in the final stage of his approach (the move from witness to subject matter - §6); thus at the stage of his search for the canonical texts he is only interested in locating the traditions that previous generations have transmitted as 'canonically' true. Thus, there is a coherent logic within Childs' approach which attempts to make normative claims about God, though the manner in which it does so is complex and requires sophisticated nuance, as the above demonstrates. Importantly, Childs resists a positivistic attempt to only utilise those traditions which can be deemed 'original' or 'historically accurate' - which may be wise given the challenge (or perhaps impossibility) of such a task - and instead faithfully receives the traditions of the Church as a basis for theological reflection that, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, will enable one to better know God.

In addition to the above criticisms of Childs' arguments for the prioritisation of the canonical texts, there are several further points to make.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that the canonical texts are not extant. Childs is of course well aware of this,[886] hence why he has to employ extant texts for their recovery; the Masoretic text-type for the canonical text of the OT and a variety of texts, beginning with the *Textus Receptus*, for the NT. Now, this thesis is not arguing that Childs' canonical texts never existed; rather, only that the lack of an extant example means that Childs' canonical approach

[886] Childs, *IOTS*, 100.

is driven by an *a priori* ideal regarding their contents and quality. On the one hand this makes his thesis unchallengeable, but on the other it also makes it impossible to prove.[887]

Secondly, it is also important to highlight that no denomination of the Church has ever sanctioned the canonical texts (as defined by Childs) as authoritative. The closest example of such a phenomenon is the sanctioning of the Majority text-type by the Byzantine Church (§5.3.2). Yet, as has been shown, Childs rejects the Majority text-type as the canonical text of the NT, though he does recognise its usefulness as a starting point for recovering those readings which constitute the best received text. There is evidence that denominations of Christianity have sanctioned the titles and the structure of the canonical books within the Bible.[888] Various denominations have also sanctioned official translations; Jerome's Vulgate was sanctioned by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546 (though was used as authoritative from far earlier) and the King James/Authorised Version published in 1611 was sanctioned by the Church of England under the authority of King James I.[889] Thus, the concept of there being a canonical text-type which contains the pinnacle of normative tradition is something foreign to the institution responsible for the canonisation of Christian Scripture. This significantly undermines his call to prioritise the canonical texts.

Thirdly, the above (§5.3.1) demonstrated that, for Childs, the search for the canonical text of the NT is a 'continuing search';[890] indeed, 'the task of the church's understanding of its scriptures in all its various dimensions remains an ongoing responsibility for each new generation of believers'.[891] This aligns with the view which Childs has expressed elsewhere that

887 In logical terms it parallels the argument for the authority of the original autographs of the biblical texts (which no-one has ever seen) (see Chapman, 'Inspiration', 177).

888 E.g. *CCC* 120 and article VI of the *Thirty Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England* ('Articles of Religion', *The Church of England*, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion#VI, accessed 30 Dec. 2020).

889 For the latter, see Adam Nicolson, *When God Spoke English: The Making of the King James Bible* (London: Harper Press, 2003).

890 Childs, *NTC*, 529.

891 Childs, *NTC*, 530.

the search for the Christian Bible will never be completed 'once-and-for-all'.[892] Thus, focusing on his search for the canonical texts, there is both stability and dynamism at play. There is stability in that Childs prescribes the identity of the canonical texts, though they are still only loosely defined: the canonical text of the OT is a form of the Masoretic text-type which he believes was sanctioned by the central Jewish authorities by the end of the first century CE at the latest, and the canonical text of the NT is a set of sanctioned ecclesial readings that constitute the best received text. These descriptions exclude an array of other possible candidates. Yet there is also dynamism in both the way that these texts came in to existence (they underwent significant diachronic development, being increasingly shaped to function as Scripture) and in the text-critical process of locating these texts today. On the latter, Childs believes that it is the responsibility of all readers to engage in the continual search for these texts, a process which will always be ongoing. If his views on the value of the search for the Christian Bible (which he describes as 'constitutive for Christian faith'[893]) also apply to the search for the canonical texts, then Childs may view this as good and valuable for Christian formation. This thesis cannot comment on whether engaging in Textual Criticism as Childs proposes engenders faith, but it is the case that it leads to a richer appreciation of the biblical texts.

Fourthly, there is a parallel between Childs' urge to affirm specific texts as canonical (though with the above dynamic nuance) and the consequences of a theory of divine inspiration. In classical approaches to Textual Criticism, the object being sought was often the *Urtext* because of the assumption that it was this text which had been given by God. Of course, Childs changes the identity of the text being sought from original to canonical, but he maintains the conviction that only particular (but loosely-defined) texts can be authoritative. To bolster his argument, Childs could have argued that God inspired not the biblical authors, but the canonical shapers (§2.3.2.2.1) – though this would of course be impossible to prove. In my opinion, the

[892] Childs, *BTONT*, 67.
[893] Childs, *BTONT*, 67.

urge to define a universally authoritative text is a mistake because of the simple point that the identity of the text which is authoritative changes depending on what one is searching for.[894] If one seeks the oldest text of a passage, then the text which is closest to the (hypothetical) oldest form will be authoritative for that particular task. If one seeks the text of a passage that would have been read by Jesus, then the text which is closest to that historical era and geography (i.e. first century Palestine) will be authoritative. If one seeks to reconstruct some of the actual historical events which are described in a biblical text, then the text which best reflects history will be authoritative (which may not be the original version). As one's point of focus changes, so too does the text which will be 'authoritative' for that investigative endeavour. One major problem, then, with Childs' prioritisation of the canonical texts, is that it is invariable; the canonical texts *must always* be authoritative, subordinating any others. My point is not that the canonical texts can never be authoritative, but that one should not enforce the rule that they always are so.[895]

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the second main element of Childs' canonical approach: his prioritisation of the canonical texts. Childs identifies the canonical text of the OT as a form of the Masoretic text-type which he believes was stabilised and sanctioned before the end of the first century CE by the central Jewish authorities. It showed that it is likely that such a text existed, but that it did not have dominance across all sects of Judaism until the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism. The canonical text of the NT, then, is the best received text which can be reconstructed from multiple ancient witnesses in a text-critical process that begins with the *Textus Receptus*. It argued

[894] See also, 'At present an eclectic approach would seem to be more appropriate, with a scholar studying a text at whichever level appears (at the present time) to be the most fruitful for that particular text, while remaining open to the possibility that further research might show another level to be more appropriate. Here again Childs' Relevance Principle can provide useful guidance: Which level is 'the most fruitful' to study will depend, in part, upon the kind of fruit one is looking for' (Noble, *Canonical*, 334).

[895] See also Barr who writes, 'One would be quick to agree that sometimes the canonical form is useful and even decisive for interpretation; but sometimes it is not' (Barr, 'Introduction', 13); Noble, *Canonical*, 333.

that Childs' approach to NT Textual Criticism is flawed because it operates from the assumption that 'the' Church is a monolithic entity with a preference for particular textual readings; an assumption which is proven false by the plurality of ecclesiastical and textual history.

As well as identifying the canonical texts, Childs argues that they should have *priority* during interpretation. This thesis engaged with each of his reasons for why this should be the case and found that none are convincing. Childs' concern for the canonical texts emerged later on in his thinking as he realised that his signs of canonical shaping had to be located in particular texts. Whilst there is logic in the way that he approaches the issue, his ideas are not convincing enough to recognise the canonical texts as authoritative; thus this thesis argues that the second main element of Childs' canonical approach is not sufficiently established.

6 The Search for the Bible's Subject Matter

> [Q] Is the whole business of doing Biblical Theology getting to grips with the reality and nature of God?
>
> [A] Yes that's right. That's what I wanted to do.[896]

The aim of this chapter is to consider and evaluate the third and final of the main elements of Childs' canonical approach: the search for the Bible's subject matter. It is in this element that the canonical approach theoretically reaches its goal to use the Bible as a vehicle to God (§2.3.1). Indeed, the canonical approach is supposed to culminate in a search for how the Bible's witness relates to its subject matter via a kind of *Sachkritik* guided by the Holy Spirit.

With regard to structure, the chapter begins (§6.1) by providing an answer to the question, 'what is the search for the subject matter?' Following this, it reflects on Childs' methodology for undertaking this search (§6.2): a *Sachkritik* (§6.2.1) guided by the Holy Spirit (§6.2.2) that includes a kind of figural interpretation (§6.2.3). It then considers whether his methodology works in practice by employing a case study on the identity of God from *BTONT* (§6.3). The chapter finishes with a conclusion (§6.4).

6.1 What is the Search for the Bible's Subject Matter?

> […] in his long-standing disagreement with Stendahl, Childs has always insisted that biblical theology is not to be merely descriptive but is also to engage in (as Barr puts it) "the construction, criticism, and refining of *our* concepts of God." In other words, biblical theology should be a normative discipline, which is therefore necessarily concerned with the formulation of *truth*-claims (i.e., with the question of what we can affirm about God).[897]

It was earlier noted that Childs believes the Bible to be a vehicle between its readers and God (§2.3.1). Because of this, Childs' insists that exegesis should not end with a description of how the biblical books have been shaped to function as Scripture; one must reflect normatively upon

[896] Childs as quoted in Wilson, 'Childs', 222.

[897] Noble, *Canonical*, 361.

what these books reveal about the God who is their ultimate 'subject matter'.[898] Indeed, one must ask, 'What is that of which this speaks?'[899]

> The theological task cannot be adequately done when the exegete is satisfied only to analyse the witness of Scripture and to trace its different levels within the tradition. The final task of exegesis is to seek to hear the Word of God, which means that the witness of Moses and Jeremiah, of Paul and John, must become a vehicle for another Word. The exegete must come to wrestle with the kerygmatic substance which brought into being the witness.[900]

This process of reflection is what this thesis means by 'the search for the Bible's subject matter'. This search is something which Childs described at various points throughout his career, but which at times was side-lined. For example, *IOTS* is not concerned with locating the subject matter of the OT and rather is only concerned with describing what ancient Israel believed that subject matter to be (§2.2). The same is true of *Isaiah*, notably published after *BTONT*; though Childs does consider how certain texts have been understood normatively within Jewish and Christian tradition,[901] he only ever describes what others have believed to be true.

The methodology which Childs employs to grasp at the subject matter of the Bible is encapsulated in his dialectical maxim of moving 'from witness to subject matter'.[902] Importantly, this maxim assumes that there is a fundamental difference between the Bible's 'witness' and the 'subject matter' (i.e. God) to which it points. Hence, with regard to the OT he writes, 'it is incumbent on the interpreter, especially of the OT, not to confuse the biblical witness with the

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898 Noble, *Canonical*, 69.

899 I owe this phrase to Walter Moberly who used it in a telephone conversation with me on 24th May 2019.

900 Childs, 'Interpretation', 443.

901 E.g. see the study of Isa. 52:13-53:12 (the suffering servant) in Childs, *Isaiah*, 407-23.

902 'Involved in the reflective process of Biblical Theology is the movement from the witness – whether Biblical or not – to the subject matter of the witness' (Childs, *BTC*, 111); 'The last section offers a theological reflection on the text within the context of the Christian canon. It seeks to relate the various Old Testament and New Testament witnesses in the light of the history of exegesis to the theological issues which evoked the witness. It is an attempt to move from witness to substance' (Childs, *Exodus*, xvi); 'we have sought to demonstrate that an essential part of the theological reflection which constitutes Biblical Theology is to move from the dual witness of scripture to the reality of God to which the witnesses point (Childs, *BTONT*, 380); 'Throughout this volume the attempt has been made to understand Biblical Theology as theological reflection on the subject matter of scripture's witness' (Childs, *BTONT*, 721); 'it belongs to one of the central tasks of exegesis to get from the witness of Scripture to the reality of which this Scripture deals' ('es gehört zu den zentralen Aufgaben der Exegese, von dem Zeugnis der Schrift zur Realität, von der diese Schrift handelt, zu gelangen') (Childs, 'Beziehung', 32-3); 'proper exegesis does not confine itself to registering only the verbal sense of the text, but presses forward through the text to the subject matter (*res*) to which it points (Childs, 'Witness', 60, cited verbatim in Childs, 'Toward', 19).

reality itself'.[903] To consider the extent of the variance between witness and subject matter, Childs then employs a *Sachkritik* under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is this aspect of his approach which is supposed to transcend from the descriptive into the normative, since it is here that the canonical approach tries to determine whether the Bible's witness corresponds with its subject matter.

What does Childs mean by the 'witness' of the Bible? This is no simple question to answer as Childs never offers a definition. From the examples he gives, the witness of the Bible can be understood at multiple literary levels. At the level of the passage, it is the plain sense of a text when read according to signs of canonical shaping. At the level of the Testament/Bible, it is the body of material which is produced when one observes the canonical shaping of that entire corpus. In addition, it is the Bible's witness which provides the basis for theological reflection[904] and thus descriptive study of the Bible's witness provides the basis for later normative engagement.[905]

Importantly, in Childs' approach, the process of discerning what the Bible tells one about God does not involve the separation of eternal truths from the human witness of Scripture (in a Gabler-like manner, §3.1.1) as one would a kernel from a husk (so §2.3.2.2.1).[906] Rather, it involves reflecting on how the witness of Scripture points to its subject matter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (§6.2.2). Furthermore, for Childs, a properly *Biblical* Theology must always be grounded upon the theology which is articulated by the witness of the Bible itself, which to him is of value because it contains authoritative theological traditions that have been shaped for future generations.

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[903] Childs, *BTONT*, 379.

[904] Contra Seitz, *Character*, 69.

[905] Childs' descriptive study of the witness of the Bible as a prelude to theological reflection parallels the Reformation idea that the historical study of a biblical text is necessary preparation for theological exegesis without being an end in itself (Stuhlmacher, *Historical*, 35).

[906] See also Seitz, *Word*, 105.

In sum: the search for the Bible's subject matter is a main element within Childs' canonical approach in which one seeks to use the Bible as a vehicle to God. One uses the 'witness' of Scripture (found via the canonical texts (§5) which themselves are the pinnacle of normative traditions passed on through canonical shaping (§4)) as a vehicle to know the subject matter to which the Bible points (i.e. God).

6.2 Childs' Methodology

6.2.1 A Kind of Sachkritik

It has not been well noted by biblical scholars that Childs' dialectic[907] of 'witness' and 'subject matter' is influenced by the *Sachkritik*/*Sachexegese* of the so-called 'dialectic theologians', Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann.[908] Though Barth and Bultmann differed in their views, both are responsible for advocating an approach to biblical interpretation which makes a distinction between the witness of the Bible (i.e., what the biblical authors wrote) and the subject matter (the *Sache* – see §1.3.2) to which it points (i.e. God), and which seeks to understand the relationship between the two. Bultmann's *Sachkritik*[909] was more critical than Barth's *Sachexegese*[910] as he sought to not only understand the relationship, but also evaluate it; which of course led to his process of demythologisation. As Congdon identifies, Bultmann sought 'to make judgments as to whether certain witnesses are more faithful than others' to the subject matter.[911] In a similar fashion, Morgan writes, 'Bultmann welcomed Barth's concern for the theological subject-matter of scripture (*Sachexegese*), but followed Luther in reserving the right

907 Note Childs' use of 'dialectical' in Childs, *BTC*, 112-3.

908 The observation that Childs' approach contains a *Sachkritik* is made by Barr, 'Pneumatology', 42-8; Noble, *Canonical*, 69.

909 Bultmann makes a distinction between 'what is said' and 'what is meant', the former being the realm of historical exegesis and the latter being the realm of exegesis which seeks to grasp the actual subject matter of the Bible. He then seeks to critique the former in light of the latter (Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament', trans. by Louis De Grazia and Keith R. Crim, in James M. Robinson and Jürgen Moltmann (eds.)*, The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, vol. 1 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 236-56 (239-40)).

910 The principal source for Barth's *Sachexegese* is the preface of Barth, *Römerbrief*, 6-18.

911 Congdon, *Demythologizing*, 732.

to criticize the biblical writers' fallible human formulations'.[912] Childs' approach, which he identifies as incorporating a kind of *Sachkritik*,[913] straddles both Barth's and Bultmann's forms, involving both a respect for the Bible's witness (so Barth) and also a critical instinct to determine whether that witness is true (so Bultmann).

6.2.2 The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

> […] the church approaches its scripture in the confidence that in spite of its total time-conditionality the true witness of the gospel can be heard in the sacred text through the continuing work of the Spirit.[914]
>
> […] as Brevard Childs frequently reminds us, theologically fruitful interpretation does not happen apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[915]
>
> […] the Holy Spirit for Childs is the dynamic Spirit who guides the community of faith into Christological discernment through the reading of the scriptures and in the activity of the church as it exists in a continuously changing world.[916]

As outlined above, the final stage of Childs' canonical approach is a kind of *Sachkritik* in which one seeks to move from the witness of Scripture to the subject matter to which it points. Childs argues that one is not alone in this task, rather one is guided by the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the God whom one seeks to find in the Bible is already actively seeking the faithful reader. In Childs' pneumatology, the role of the Holy Spirit during biblical interpretation is primarily to reveal to the reader how the Bible's witness relates to its subject matter; Childs has expressed this idea in many ways across his works.[917] Thus Childs' canonical approach incorporates a form

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912 Robert Morgan, 'Sachkritik', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 604-5 (605). See also Robert Morgan, 'Sachkritik in Reception History', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 33/2 (2010), 175-90.

913 'Biblical Theology attempts to hear the different voices in relation to the divine reality to which they point in such diverse ways. In one sense, this appeal is to a *Sachkritik* (a critique in terms of its content), but one in which the *Sache* is defined in such a way as to justice to the witness of both testaments' (Childs, *BTONT*, 85); 'Scripture is also not self-referential, but points beyond itself to the reality of God. The ability to render this reality is to enter the "strange new world of the Bible." […] The task of Biblical Theology is therefore not just descriptive, but involves a *Sachkritik* which is called forth by the witness to this reality' (Childs, *BTONT*, 721).

914 Childs, *NTC*, 215.

915 Lindbeck, 'Canonical', 51. See also, 'Childs clearly believes that the illuminating by the Spirit is indispensable for a proper understanding of the Scriptures' (Noble, *Canonical*, 290).

916 Barr, 'Pneumatology', 41.

917 'The role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation is not to add a new dimension to the literal sense, but to effect the proper actualization of the biblical text in terms of its subject matter for every succeeding generation of the church' (Childs, 'Sensus', 93); 'The God of the Bible is not a theological system, but a living and acting Lord, the one who is the Eternal Present. Prayer is an integral part in the study of Scripture because it anticipates the

of the doctrine of the illumination of the Spirit,[918] which both Barr and Noble think he derived from Calvin.[919] Because the Holy Spirit works in this way, Childs considers prayer to be an essential aspect of biblical interpretation.[920] This further reveals how Childs' approach is confessional and designed primarily for Christians (§2.4), indeed he writes how it 'requires a stance of expectation'.[921] To Childs, the Spirit's connection of the Bible's witness to its subject matter is a form of actualisation which makes the ancient words of Scripture relevant to the Church today.[922] Thus, in addition to Childs' claim that the canonical texts already contain

Spirit's carrying its reader through the written page to God himself' (Childs, *BTC*, 219); 'a canonical context includes not only the scope of the sacred literature, but the means by which the reader engages the scriptures, namely an expectation of understanding through the promise of the Spirit to the believer. Within this context the modern Christian interpreter strives to discern how the time-conditioned, historical witness of the Bible becomes the medium of revelation of God's present and enduring will' (Childs, *NTC*, 40); 'the modern biblical theologian takes his stance within the testimony of Israel and struggles to discern the will of God. Fully aware of his own frailty, he awaits in anticipation a fresh illumination through God's Spirit, for whom the Bible's frailty is no barrier. Although such understanding derives ultimately from the illumination of the Spirit, this divine activity functions through the scriptures of the church; that is to say, completely within the time-conditioned form of the tradition' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 15); 'The true expositor of the Christian scriptures is the one who awaits in anticipation toward becoming the interpreted rather than the interpreter. The very divine reality which the interpreter strives to grasp, is the very One who grasps the interpreter. The Christian doctrine of the role of the Holy Spirit is not a hermeneutical principle, but that divine reality itself who makes understanding of God possible' (Childs, *BTONT*, 86-7); 'If the Church confesses that the spirit of God opens up the text to a perception of its true reality, it also follows that the Spirit also works in applying the reality of God in its fulness to an understanding of the text' (Childs, *BTONT*, 382); 'the Spirit is that which keeps the text always tied to the subject matter that confronts us' (Childs as quoted in Wilson, 'Childs', 228-9); 'The Bible in its human, fully time-conditioned form, functions theologically for the church as a witness to God's divine revelation in Jesus Christ. The church confesses that in this human form, the Holy Spirit unlocks its truthful message to its readers in the mystery of faith' (Childs, 'Era', 52).

[918] On which see M. X. Seaman, *Illumination and Interpretation: The Holy Spirit's Role in Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013); *CCC*.III. In Childs view the Holy Spirit does not illuminate the meaning of a passage but rather the truth and significance of the passage (contra. Ephraim Radner, 'The Absence of the Comforter: Scripture and the Divided Church', in Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (eds.)*, Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 355-94 (356)).

[919] Barr, 'Pneumatology', 15-7; Noble, *Canonical*, 290-301. Childs also makes this connection (Childs, *OTTCC*, 12) and even traces the idea back to the NT (Childs, 'Speech', 380).

[920] 'The great challenge of the exegete comes, as in prayerful expectation, God's Spirit opens his eyes to the full reality known only in faith. The temporal form becomes then a transparency through which the divine light shines giving the picture its true perspective' (Childs, 'Jonah', 59); 'Prayer is an integral part in the study of Scripture because it anticipates the Spirit's carrying its reader through the written page to God himself' (Childs, *BTC*, 219).

[921] Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 9. See also, 'To suggest that the task of theological reflection takes place from within a canonical context assumes not only a received tradition, but a faithful disposition by hearers who await the illumination of God's Spirit' (Childs, *OTTCC*, 12).

[922] The biblical exegete 'remains open in anticipation to those moments when the Spirit of God resolves the tension and bridges the gap between faith and history' (Childs, *Exodus*, 302); 'The role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation is not to add a new dimension to the literal sense, but to effect the proper actualization of the biblical text in terms of its subject matter for every succeeding generation of the church' (Childs, 'Sensus', 93); 'through the Spirit the reality to which the text points, namely to Jesus Christ, is made active in constantly fresh forms of application' (Childs, *BTONT*, 724).

actualised traditions for the modern reader (§4.1.1), he claims that the Holy Spirit also reveals how the Bible is normative and relevant for every new generation.

As was shown earlier (§5), Childs accepts the canonical texts as the authoritative basis for theological reflection. Though he is aware that these texts often have complex compositional histories resulting in canonical witnesses that do not necessarily reflect real past events, he nevertheless thinks that they are authoritative for theological reflection. As Childs is ultimately concerned with reading the Bible to know God, and thus to know what is true in reality, his approach incorporates a *Sachkritik* to reflect on how the Bible's witness relates to its subject matter. For Childs, this critical process is guided by the Holy Spirit who will reveal to the reader that which is true and make the Bible relevant to all generations. Though this experience is personal to each reader, Childs is not advocating for some kind of subjective individualistic pietism/quietism. Rather, he is affirming the traditional ecclesial beliefs that the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church (John 16:12-15) and that one of the primary mediums for this engagement is the Bible.[923] Importantly, the work of the Holy Spirit in this way does not provide an alternative to the reader's struggle to understand the Bible's subject matter, rather it enables that struggle to be meaningful, fulfilling the work started by the faithful reader.

Despite his myriad exegetical examples, Childs never provides the methodology for how the Holy Spirit enables one to progress from the witness of Scripture to the subject matter to which it points. Whilst this may have frustrated his students,[924] it is understandable. For Childs, the work of the Holy Spirit is a divine initiative which is beyond the control of any individual,

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923 E.g. *CCC* §113. See also, 'exegesis and exposition involves hearing the two-testament witness under the power of the Holy Spirit and within the life of the church' (Seitz, *Word*, 108).

924 Wilson observes how Childs was regularly disappointed by the work of those students who attempted to replicate his approach. Yet, Wilson comments on how Childs never actually provided them with a methodology for how to grasp the Bible's subject matter correctly: 'it is clear to me that some of the students at least were looking for the wrong thing. They understood what Childs taught as a method. But as far as the canonical project was concerned, there really was no method supplied for the second part of the enterprise. There were no instructions on how to penetrate to the texts essence. There were no easy to follow guidelines that would infallibly lead students to hear the word of God. Childs' approach wasn't that easy' ('The Life and Work of Brevard Childs', *Yale Divinity School*, https://divinity.yale.edu/news-and-media/videos/life-and-work-brevard-s-childs, accessed 1 Jul. 2020).

thus there is 'no one method'[925] for how the progression from witness to subject matter can be made beyond the reader waiting in 'prayerful expectation' for it to happen.[926]

Evaluating Childs' theory on the role of the Holy Spirit in his *Sachkritik* is an extensive task that is beyond the possibilities of this thesis, since it requires an evaluation of (i) whether the Holy Spirit (and indeed the Christian God) exists, and (ii), if it does, whether the Holy Spirit operates in the manner Childs claims. These are extensive and complicated theological topics which require theses in themselves. This is not to say that no points of evaluation can be made, however, and this matter will be returned to later (§6.3.2, §6.4).

6.2.3 Reading in the Light of the Full Divine Reality

For Childs, when searching for the subject matter of the Bible one begins from the witness of the Bible as a basis for theological reflection. However, Childs also affirms a different angle of approach: one can engage in a *return* movement from that subject matter *back* to the witness in a manner which will further illuminate the subject matter. This is what Childs calls 'Reading Scriptures in the Light of the Full Divine Reality'[927] and is Childs' personal articulation of figural interpretation and ruled reading. Childs' views on the matter are scattered across his works, but their fullest expression is found in *BTONT*.[928] Childs makes three key points.

> (i) First, it is incumbent on the interpreter, especially of the Old Testament, not to confuse the biblical witness with the reality itself. In order to hear the voice of each biblical witness in its own right, it is absolutely necessary to interpret each passage within its historical, literary, and canonical context.[929]

Childs makes a distinction between the witness of a text and the subject matter to which it points; he wishes to make clear that the two are not the same, thus further emphasising the

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925 Childs, *NTC*, 40. Here Childs is arguing that there is 'no one method' by which the 'time-conditioned, historical witness of the Bible becomes the medium of revelation of God's present and enduring will', which I think equates to his idea of moving from witness to subject matter. The idea that the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to a method is also expressed by Stuhlmacher, *Historical*, 90.

926 Childs, 'Jonah', 59.

927 Childs, *BTONT*, 379.

928 Childs, *BTONT*, 379-83. The three points made in *BTONT* are repeated in very similar terms in Childs, 'Witness', 61-2.

929 Childs, *BTONT*, 379.

view that he may not believe the Bible to be from God (§2.3.2.2). Furthermore, Childs argues that it is 'absolutely necessary' to study a text 'within its historical, literary, and canonical context', i.e. with a concern to identify its plain sense, before one proceeds to reflection upon the subject matter to which it points.[930] Indeed, 'The movement from *res* to witness dare not destroy the historical voice of the text. The substance of the text must not be construed as a static deposit or according to some philosophical schema, but must continue to be encountered within the dynamic of the biblical witness'.[931] Thus, Childs appears to rule out the possibility of any form of Theological Interpretation which is not grounded upon exegesis of the plain sense.

> (ii) Secondly, there is another avenue into the Bible according to which the Bible can be read. It is an approach which does not in itself contradict the literal/historical reading, but rather extends it.[932]

In light of his insistence of the importance of the plain sense, Childs attempts to articulate a way of using the witness of the Bible for accessing the subject matter in a way that does not contradict the plain sense 'but rather extends it'. What Childs is speaking of here is a typological approach, though he does not like the term 'because of its accretions within the history of exegesis'.[933] As traditionally understood, typology in a Christian interpretative context looks to expound a biblical passage as a symbolic prefiguration (not prediction) of a later event. This can be seen in the NT itself.[934] Whereas allegorical interpretation seeks to understand the meanings a text has that are beyond the intention of its author and its semantics,[935] typological interpretation seeks only to compare one passage with another to demonstrate that one

930 Childs, 'Interpretation', 441; Childs, 'Witness', 61.

931 Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

932 Childs, *BTONT*, 380. See also Childs, 'Witness', 61. It seems likely that Childs is influenced by Frei here, 'Far from being in conflict with the literal sense of biblical stories, figuration or typology was a natural extension of literal interpretation' (Frei, *Eclipse*, 2).

933 Childs, *BTONT*, 380. See also Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 11.

934 E.g. in Rom. 5:14 Adam is described as a 'type' (τύπος) of one to come, i.e. Jesus.

935 'Allegory is a figure of speech implying that its reference is something other than what is being said, and the crucial issue lies in determining the theological substance to which it points metaphorically' (Brevard S. Childs, 'Allegory and Typology within Biblical Interpretation', in Christopher R. Seitz and Kent Harold Richard (eds.)*, The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 299-312 (304). This is a posthumously published paper that was originally delivered at the University of St Andrews in 2000.

prefigures the other. In this way typological interpretation does not look for an additional 'sense' of meaning but is rather concerned with drawing parallels on the assumption that there is continuity in God's plan.[936] Hence Soulen and Soulen write, 'According to Reformation theory and practice, typological interpretation supplements rather than competes with scripture's literal or historical sense',[937] and this in theory makes it compatible with Childs' maintenance of the plain sense. The difference between Childs' typology and typology as traditionally practised is that Childs is interested in drawing parallels between different parts of the *canon*, rather than having an explicit concern for prefiguration.[938]

> (iii) Thirdly, the most difficult question still remains which initiated this hermeneutical discussion. Is there a level of interpreting the biblical text in which the full-blown reality of God gained from a reading of the entire Bible is used?[939]

One will notice that this is, in fact, a question, and not a statement. It is also the second time that Childs has asked this question in *BTONT*,[940] and he has already revealed the answer.

> […] after the task of biblical theological reflection has begun in which the original integrity of both testaments has been respected, there is an important function of hearing the whole of Christian scripture in the light of the full reality of God in Jesus Christ. In other words, there is a legitimate place for a move from a fully developed Christian theological reflection back to the biblical texts of both testaments.[941]

It is in the later section of *BTONT* that Childs presents the details of his idea. Childs rightly identifies that this was the exact way in which many of the NT authors interpreted the Jewish Scriptures. For example, speaking about the Gospel authors:

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936 Brian McNeil, 'Typology', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (SCM: London, 1970), 713-4 (713).

937 Soulen and Soulen, *Biblical*, 227.

938 'This reading proceeds from the fact of a two part canon, and seeks to analyse structural similarities and dissimilarities between the witness of both testaments. In this sense it is not merely a history of exegesis which is being proposed, but an exegetical and theological enterprise which seeks to pursue a relationship of content. If the first level of exegesis focusses on the relation of text to history, the second which presupposes the first, seeks further to analyse the relationship between the two witnesses' (Childs, *BTONT*, 380). Seitz highlights how Childs may have gained the idea for a restructured form of typology from von Rad (Seitz, *Convergences*, 3-4).

939 Childs, *BTONT*, 380. Later on the same page Childs continues, 'Is the hermeneutical movement of biblical interpretation only from witness to reality or can one also proceed from reality to witness?' (Childs, *BTONT*, 380).

940 'In what sense within Biblical Theology is there a movement in the reverse direction, namely, from the reality back to the biblical witness? Can an interpreter, following his theological reflection toward a fuller grasp of a Christian understanding of the divine reality, now read this larger understanding back into the text?' (Childs, *BTONT*, 87).

941 Childs, *BTONT*, 87.

> As we have previously sought to show, the writers of the Gospels consistently interpreted the life of the earthly Jesus from the perspective of his true identity, namely, as the resurrected Christ. Each evangelist did his theological redaction in different ways, but all came from an encounter with the reality of Christ and brought that understanding to bear on the scriptures. Similarly, it was fully characteristic of Paul's exegesis to use the gospel of the exalted Christ as the kerygmatic key for understanding the Hebrew scriptures. He also moved from reality to text.[942]

Surprisingly, however, Childs argues that 'the hermeneutical practice of the New Testament does not in itself provide a theological warrant for the church's imitation of this approach'.[943]

> We are neither prophets nor Apostles. The Christian church does not have the same unmediated access to God's revelation as did the Apostles, but rather God's revelation is mediated through their authoritative witness, namely through scripture.[944]

Thus, the NT authors (in Childs' terms, the 'Apostles') were only justified in reading the Jewish Scriptures as they did because they had direct access to God's revelation. The Christian Church today, however, does not have this same access to revelation; rather revelation is mediated through the witness of those authors in the Bible. This is an odd claim for Childs to make as it borders on a form of cessationism which contradicts his other arguments regarding the illumination of the Holy Spirit (§6.2.2). It is also odd because it seems inconsistent with Childs' theory of canonical shaping (§4.1). If one is supposed to look for signs within the canon as to how to read it, then a strong case could be made that the actions of the NT authors serve as authoritative guidelines for the Theological Interpretation of the OT in Christianity today.[945] Importantly, this thesis is not affirming that the practices of the NT authors should be followed, but rather that one who employs the internal logic of Childs' canonical approach should probably be led to this conclusion.

Childs argues that an approach which attempts to read the Bible in light of its subject matter 'does not function as a rival to the historical study of the biblical text' (i.e. to the study of the plain sense).[946] One would expect, therefore, for Childs to argue that reading in this way

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[942] Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

[943] Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

[944] Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

[945] So Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[946] Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

is a separate, but yet equally valid, means of interpretation. However, he confusingly argues that to read the Bible in light of its subject matter is part of the same approach which seeks the plain sense.

> Nor does an exegesis which comes to the biblical text from a larger theological grasp of God's reality function apart from the various other historical and literary readings. It is not a final step, nor does exegesis proceed in stages with a fixed sequence. Rather, it is constitutive of true interpretation to move within a circle which encompasses both the movement from text to reality as well as from reality to the text.[947]

What does it mean to come 'to the biblical text from a larger theological grasp of God's reality'? Childs does not provide a clear answer, though his opinion would likely be that this means reading the Bible from the perspective of credal Christianity. Elsewhere Childs argues that to read the Bible in this way is to undertake a 'ruled reading' which suggests that a credal confession may be used to balance the plain sense which one finds in the biblical texts; he writes, 'the literal sense is to be balanced by a ruled reading'.[948] Furthermore, he suggests that having 'a knowledge of the nature of the subject matter does decisively affect the perception of the text and influence the questions posed and the response received in interpretation'.[949]

There are several problems with Childs' ideas about figural interpretation, however. Firstly, Childs does not provide a clear methodology for how to return from subject matter to witness. His examples in *BTONT* do not provide clear examples of how his ideas are supposed to work in practice and his thoughts on typology and ruled readings seem disconnected. Indeed, these two reading strategies pull in contradictory directions. The former, as Childs rightly notes, does not affect the plain sense of a text and therefore maintains the meanings of the canonical texts. The latter, however, does affect one's reading of the plain sense and prioritises Christian

947 Childs, *BTONT*, 381.

948 Childs, 'Christ the Lord', 11. For a collection of views on the topic of ruled reading, see Radner and Sumner, *Rule*.

949 Childs, *BTONT*, 381-2.

doctrine over canonical shaping.[950] It is not at all clear how these two reading strategies are supposed to be reconciled in Childs' approach.

Secondly, his suggestion of reading the Bible in the light of its subject matter creates a tension with his insistence that the canonically-shaped text has priority for interpretation (§5). Childs argues for a 'multiple-level approach' to interpretation,[951] which is an accepted position within denominations of the Church both historically and today,[952] but it is unclear how this is reconcilable with the theory of canonical shaping which plays such an important role in his approach.

6.3 Case Study: The Identity of God

With the above in mind, this section will now present a case study of Childs' search for the subject matter (and, indeed, his entire methodology) from *BTONT*. The topic is the identity of God.

6.3.1 Analysis

The first chapter (6.I) in the section, 'Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible',[953] in *BTONT* is dedicated to the theme of 'The Identity of God'. This is the first chapter in which Childs attempts to present a complete form of his Biblical Theology, as opposed to just a study of the witnesses of the biblical texts (sections 1-4 of *BTONT*) or just one passage in the context of Biblical Theology (section 5 of *BTONT*).

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950 Contra Childs' claim that 'it is a misunderstanding of the canonical method to characterise it as an attempt to bring extrinsic, dogmatic categories to bear on the biblical text' (Childs, IOTS, 73).

951 Childs, *BTONT*, 382.

952 One thinks primarily of the medieval four senses of Scripture, on which see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: I. the Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. by Mark Sebanc, Ressourcement: Retrieval & Renewal in Catholic Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). The four senses are still employed in the Catholic Church today, see *CCC* §115-19. See also Childs, *BTONT*, 379; Childs, 'Nature', 122.

953 Childs, *BTONT*, 349-716.

Childs begins by describing the Bible's witness on the topic, presenting his findings in three sections: 'the Old Testament understanding of God',[954] 'Early Judaism's Understanding of God',[955] and 'the New Testament's Understanding'.[956] Importantly, Childs has already undertaken the groundwork of studying the entire witness of the Bible on the topic and thus is presenting his findings in a systematic format.[957] The purpose of including a consideration of early Judaism, by which Childs means the Judaism that was active in the 'intertestamental period' (c. fifth century BCE-early first century CE[958]), is to determine the theological antecedents for the NT and thus explain the theological developments between the OT and NT.[959] Notably, Childs is broadening his considerations to more than just the canonical books. Whilst this may seem to imply that Childs is affirming a 'non-canonical' approach, he only seeks to study the non-canonical books as contextual material for the better illumination of the canonical ones.[960] Thus, as Noble writes, 'Merely pointing to extra-canonical factors in Childs' work, then, is far from sufficient grounds for convicting him of inconsistency. The crucial question is *how* they enter his work'.[961] As they do so as part of illuminating the canonical texts, the practice is in keeping with Childs' approach.

With regard to the witness of the OT, Childs focuses on the 'variety of Israel's witness to God'.[962] He highlights that Israel's understanding of the identity of God did not develop along a 'unilinear trajectory' but was rather a 'complex' development reflecting 'rich multi-

954 Childs, *BTONT*, 351-9.

955 Childs, *BTONT*, 359-61.

956 Childs, *BTONT*, 361-8.

957 It has already been shown that it is incorrect to assume Childs' systematic presentation is evidence of his dogmatic convictions predetermining the outcome of his research (§3.2.2.2).

958 From the death of the prophet Malachi to the appearance of John the Baptist.

959 Childs, *BTONT*, 359.

960 For example, understanding the apocalyptic developments within early Judaism during the intertestamental period is important for understanding the apocalyptic perspectives in the NT. For a classic detailed study, see David S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (rev. edn, London: SCM, 1963).

961 Noble, *Canonical*, 363.

962 Childs, *BTONT*, 352.

layered dimensions of Israel's encounter with God'.[963] For example, Childs claims that an ancient pre-Israel patriarchal/ancestral tradition is received and reconceptualised by Israel to claim that the deity of the patriarchs/ancestors was none other than YHWH, the God of Israel.[964] Thus YHWH, whose name was narratively first revealed to Moses in Exod. 3:14-15, is presented as the same deity who appeared by other names in the Patriarchal narratives.[965] Despite the diversity of the witness to the identity of God in the OT, Childs writes, 'there are clearly some unifying themes, some characteristic patterns, and some strong elements of unity which resist atomizing the whole into unrelated fragments'.[966] These include: God has a name;[967] he is Israel's God because of a gracious covenant;[968] monotheism is insufficient as a term for describing the beliefs of ancient Israel.[969] These are accurate descriptions of the identity of the Israelite deity in the OT, but they are not exhaustive. Thus Childs' Biblical Theology is not entirely *biblical* in the sense of reflecting the entire Bible, though this is understandable for to write an exhaustive study on each biblical theme would be a vast undertaking (see below §6.3.2).

With regard to early Judaism's understanding of God, Childs briefly reflects on how early Jewish understandings of the nature of God affirm, but yet build upon, those found in the biblical witnesses. For example, he notes that many Jews in the post-exilic era maintained a view that there was an unbroken connection between themselves and ancient Israel, as demonstrated

963 Childs, *BTONT*, 352.

964 So too R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press, 1992). In this way Childs provides a counterpoint to pentateuchal scholars who claim that the 'patriarchal narratives' and 'Mosaic Yahwism' are two originally independent Israelite origin traditions (so Schmid, 'Traditions'; Thomas L. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel: I. Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1-23*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); John Van Seters, "The Patriarchs and the Exodus: Bridging the Gap between the Two Origin Traditions," in R. Roukema (ed.), *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman,* Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, vol. 44 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 1-15).

965 Childs, *BTONT*, 351. E.g. אֱלֹהִים 'God' (Gen. 1:1); יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים 'LORD God' (Gen. 2:4); אֵל עֶלְיוֹן 'God most high' (Gen. 14:18-20); אֵל שַׁדַּי 'God almighty' (Gen. 17:1).

966 Childs, *BTONT*, 354.

967 Childs, *BTONT*, 354.

968 Childs, *BTONT*, 355.

969 Childs, *BTONT*, 355.

by the Psalter amongst other (unspecified) sources.[970] Thus, many Jews continued to believe that God was immanent despite His transcendence (or absence) in their present experience.[971] It is not entirely clear what Childs means by this claim as he provides no references to the Psalms which support his view that Israel's liturgical practices enabled a continuity with the past. One could speculate that Childs had in mind those Psalms which contain references to past figures and events,[972] notably in their titles,[973] but he does not say this himself.

With regard to the NT's understanding of God, Childs begins by trying to describe both the continuity and discontinuity between the OT and NT witnesses. He starts by showing how many NT authors re-affirm the theological claims of the Jewish Scriptures. For example, in Mark 12:29, Jesus uses the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) in his disputation with some scribes. Paul too uses the *Shema* when arguing against the existence of other gods (1 Cor. 8:4).[974] Similarly, Matt. 27:46 has Jesus quote Ps. 22:1 in his final words on the cross. Childs gives many more examples, but the point is clear and well-made that much of the NT's witness is derived from the theological claims of the OT. Discontinuity between the Testaments is also present, however, though Childs only specifies how the NT makes claims which re-define the meanings of OT passages.

> "It is the God who said: "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Cor. 4.6 citing Gen. 1.3). In II Cor. 5.17 Paul again relates the work of Christ in creation, but this time to the new creation by paraphrasing Isa. 65.17 and 66.22. God's promise of a new heaven and earth is realized in the person who lives "in Christ." In Heb. 1.5 God addresses Jesus in the words of Psalms 2 to designate him as his son: "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee." Then again Jesus assumes the titles of God by explicit reference to the Old Testament. In Heb. 1.8 he is identified with the 'God' of Ps. 45.7. He is 'Lord' in Romans 10.8f. with reference to Deut. 30.14. He is the "first and last" of Isa. 44.6 in Rev. 1.17; the "I am He" of II Isaiah in John 8.28, and the "one who is and was and who is to come" of Rev. 1.8 with an allusion to Ex. 3.14. In addition, Jesus shares or fully assumes the functions of the God of the Old Testament. He is the Lord, the one before whose judgment seat all must stand (II Cor. 5:10 with reference to Eccles. 12.14). Jesus is now the one at whose name "every knee should bow … and every tongue confess," whereas God was the object of this

970 Childs, *BTONT*, 360.

971 Childs, *BTONT*, 360.

972 E.g. Psalms 68, 78, 99, 106, 135.

973 E.g. מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד : בְּבוֹא־אֵלָיו נָתָן הַנָּבִיא כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בַּת־שָׁבַע 'A psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba' (Ps. 51:1-2). Childs actually wrote an article on this topic: Brevard S. Childs, 'Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 16/2 (1971), 137-50. However, he makes no mention of how the Psalms allowed post-exilic Israelites to connect with their ancient 'past'. It is notable that Sheppard calls these titles 'canon conscious redactions' (Sheppard, 'Canonization', 23).

974 Childs, *BTONT*, 362.

> adoration in Isa. 45.23. The Old Testament's "day of the Lord" is now identified with the coming of Jesus (I Thess. 5.2). Similarly, many of the liturgical forms of Israel's worship of God have been transferred to Christ. Christians now "call upon the name" of Christ (Acts 19.13; Rom. 10.14, etc.), and baptize "in his name." Angels worship him (Heb. 1.6) and give praise to God and "the Lamb" (Rev. 5.13). In sum, the New Testament writers, even in the process of developing their christologies, see no real tension between the Old Testament's understanding of God and their own understanding of Jesus Christ, but explicitly make use of the Old Testament in formulating their Christian confessions.[975]

Importantly, Childs argues that one should reject a flat view of the NT (i.e. one which assumes that its books all present a unified voice) in the same way that one also should reject a flat view of the OT.

After commenting upon the witnesses of both the OT and NT, Childs progresses to 'biblical theological reflection on the identity of God'.[976] Here Childs seeks to find unity across what he has studied so far; indeed, 'Biblical theology's focus remains on the immediate problem of relating the diverse biblical witnesses to the unity of the one Word of God'.[977] Importantly, Childs' 'Word of God' here is not the Bible itself, but rather the self-revealing God who is the subject matter of the Bible. Thus, in a manner which follows the precedents of *Sachkritik*, he seeks to determine the relationship between the biblical witnesses and the subject matter to which they point. His strategy for moving from witness to subject matter is to 'analyse the inner coherence within the biblical text',[978] meaning that one should search for theological claims that are affirmed as the pinnacle of developmental trajectories which traverse the entire Bible. The criterion for locating these claims is not simply multiple attestation (i.e. to find those claims which are consistently affirmed throughout the Bible), but rather what could be called 'developmental priority' on the assumption that the canon as a whole has been shaped to provide a canonical perspective (§4.3.3). On the topic of the identity of God, these claims in Childs' opinion are: 'God's identity has been made known through his name';[979] 'God has

[975] Childs, *BTONT*, 364-5.
[976] Childs, *BTONT*, 369-75.
[977] Childs, *BTONT*, 369.
[978] Childs, *BTONT*, 371.
[979] Childs, *BTONT*, 371.

revealed himself both as creator and redeemer';[980] 'The two testaments which comprise Christian scripture together bear witness to the unity of God's identity';[981] 'The God of Israel reveals himself to his people as a God of righteousness and mercy';[982] 'The holiness of God is constitutive to his being';[983] the 'God of the Bible is without sex'.[984]

Childs' approach then progresses to what he calls 'From Biblical Theology to Dogmatics: Trinitarian Theology'.[985] This is one of the many sections in *BTONT* where Childs attempts to draw upon Systematic Theology after completing his Biblical Theology (§3.1.9). As Childs' topic is the identity of God, he focuses on the Trinity. To begin, Childs acknowledges that 'the Bible does not contain a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity', yet he rightly goes on to argue that 'it was precisely by observing the unity and differentiation of God within the biblical revelation that the church was confronted with the Trinity'.[986] Childs then observes that the creation of the doctrine of the Trinity did not involve the imposition of Greek philosophy onto the message of Jesus; 'Rather, it emerged in heated controversy in an effort to do justice to the Christ who was from the church's inception confessed as lord'.[987] After this groundwork Childs moves into a sub-section focusing on the sex of God. Childs proceeds to argue against using inclusive language in reference to the God of the Bible. For Childs, though the nature of God ultimately transcends sex, the fact remains that biological sex is a key aspect of the incarnation and therefore also of christology. Indeed, in Christ God the son was incarnated as a man who referred to God as 'Father'. To abandon these concepts altogether is to suggest that the sex of Jesus the son of God, as well as of God the Father, is arbitrary imagery. For Childs

980 Childs, *BTONT*, 371.
981 Childs, *BTONT*, 371.
982 Childs, *BTONT*, 373.
983 Childs, *BTONT*, 374.
984 Childs, *BTONT*, 374.
985 Childs, *BTONT*, 375.
986 Childs, *BTONT*, 375.
987 Childs, *BTONT*, 376.

this is a problem as it leads to the non-orthodox idea that God is somehow different to what he has revealed Himself to be.[988] In his study, Childs refers to the history of the Christian tradition (the Nicene Creed, Arianism, Modalism) as well as to the ideas of several major theologians (Barth, Cullman, Torrance), thus demonstrating how he has moved beyond the boundaries of Biblical Studies. His aim in this section is ultimately to shed light on his chosen theme using theological resources beyond the Bible.

Childs then progresses to his final task in this section, 'Reading Scriptures in the Light of the Full Divine Reality'; i.e. figural reading (§6.2.3). Here Childs attempts to move in a reverse direction to see if what has been found can shed light back onto the canonical texts. Childs provides the methodology for his figural reading strategy, but as this has already been analysed in §6.2.3 it shall not be repeated here. Notably, regarding the identity of God, Childs comments on the way that Isa. 53 has regularly been utilised by Christians as a witness to Jesus. He then affirms a 'multiple-level approach'[989] to interpretation common to both Jewish and Christian interpretative history (§6.2.3). At the level of the plain sense, the 'interpreter struggles to hear the precisely the form of the witness as it entered its concrete historical form'.[990] At this level, the passage does not refer to Jesus but rather to 'the suffering community of historical Israel within the context of the old covenant, sounding the message of salvation through the vicarious suffering of a divinely appointed servant'.[991] Yet the passage also functions at a further level:

> […] the reality of God testified to in the Bible, and experienced through the confirmation of God's Spirit, functions on a deeper level to instruct the reader toward an understanding of God that leads from faith to faith. Because of a fuller knowledge of the reality of God revealed through reading the whole corpus of scripture, the biblical texts resonate in a particular Christian fashion which has been of course confirmed by the church's liturgical experience.[992]

[988] Childs, *BTONT*, 377.
[989] Childs, *BTONT*, 382.
[990] Childs, *BTONT*, 382.
[991] Childs, *BTONT*, 382.
[992] Childs, *BTONT*, 382.

Thus, in Childs' views, Christians reading Isa. 53 find that the Passion experiences of Jesus Christ have 'an immediate morphological fit'[993] to Isaiah's suffering servant.

6.3.2 Evaluation

The entire purpose of Childs' canonical approach is to utilise the Bible as a vehicle to know God (§2.3.1). The purpose of studying the canonical shaping of the Bible is to gain an understanding of the Bible's witness which one can then utilise as the basis for theological reflection on that which is actually true about God (§6.2). In this way, the canonical approach begins as a descriptive enterprise but then is supposed to progress into the normative via the assistance of the Holy Spirit (§6.2.2).

The problem is, however, that in this final main element of his approach, Childs does not exemplify in practice what he speaks of in principle; in the above example from *BTONT* he does not ever progress from the descriptive to the normative in the manner he theorises. Childs claims that his approach moves into the normative via a *Sachkritik* which is guided by the Holy Spirit (§6.2.1, §6.2.2), yet he does not demonstrate how this works in practice. As stated earlier (§6.2.2), this is understandable as it is unreasonable to prescribe a methodology for the actions of a divine transcendent being. It is also understandable since, in light of the work of Gadamer, many scholars of the Humanities are alert to the notion that precise methods (such as those employed in the Natural Sciences) can in fact be a hindrance rather than a help when reading texts.[994] However, Childs could at least have described his own experience of this process and how it led him to develop the idea.

As stated earlier (§2.3.1), Childs' entire canonical programme was established to use the Bible as a vehicle to God, but, to continue the metaphor, the vehicle is a design that never enters production. Thus, *BTONT* is better understood as being a *descriptive* Biblical Theology which

[993] Childs, *BTONT*, 382.

[994] This is the main thesis of Gadamer, *Warheit*.

follows the contours of canonical shaping and which is topped with brief input from Systematic Theology. As Noble writes, 'despite Childs' insistence that biblical theology is a normative discipline, his work is mostly at the descriptive level – i.e., that he has done little to show us that the descriptions that emerge from his canonical exegesis are a *true* witness to God'.[995] This lack of normative consideration in practice is not unique to the theme of the identity of God, but is common to each of the examples in *BTONT*. Furthermore, the same issue is attested in all of Childs' other publications. Even *Isaiah*, as one of his later major books, does not embrace the normative theory that he laid out in earlier publications and instead focuses on describing the theological worldview of the communities which gave rise to the Book of Isaiah, as well as of those who utilised it as Scripture. In fact, *Isaiah* diverges entirely from the aim of Childs' earlier *Exodus* which explicitly sought to locate the subject matter of the Bible (§2.2). Childs claims that this was a practical decision,[996] and this is understandable, yet it undermines the validity of the approach that he himself tried to create by not demonstrating how his theory integrates with the practice of actual normative interpretation. In sum: the third main element of the canonical approach is supposed to be a movement from witness to subject through a *Sachkritik* guided by the Holy Spirit that moves from the descriptive (describing the witness of the Bible) to the normative (prescribing how the Bible's witness relates to God in reality). The fact is, however, that Childs does not exemplify in practice what he speaks of in principle.

How feasible is Childs' approach if one were to consider it as just an approach to descriptive Biblical Theology? It is successful in part as it captures genuine claims that are made by the biblical texts regarding the identity of God. In addition, it presents them in a helpful format which shows a developmental trajectory that does not try to force the texts into a unilinear mould. Furthermore, Childs incorporates critical scholarship and is willing to honestly recognise the variety of textual traditions. However, his results are highly selective; e.g. in the

[995] Noble, *Canonical*, 368.

[996] Childs, *Isaiah*, 3, 420.

above case study he focuses only on affirming points of agreement across multiple passages. It would be an extremely difficult task to write a Biblical Theology which investigated every biblical theme in complete detail, but there are too many lacunae.[997] A further issue is that Childs does not properly explain how his methodology for Biblical Theology relates to his theory of canonical shaping (§4.1). Indeed, his examples in *BTONT* do not adequately show how the canon itself provides guidance as to the establishment of a Biblical Theology. On the contrary, one could argue that the form of the Bible promotes the opposite; it is an *ad hoc* collection of texts whose diversity is preserved, rather than removed (though in cases it has been harmonised, e.g. Gen. 6-9), with the implication that it is to be treated more like a library than a single book. Childs is often right when he suggests that individual texts have often been shaped to function in a particular way. However, he is incorrect to apply this logic to the entire Bible as if it itself provides guidance on the creation of a Biblical Theology. Barr is correct when he writes that 'the canon of scripture, as canon, does not provide organisational guidance for the construction of theologies, and was never intended to do so'.[998]

6.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to consider and evaluate the third and final of the main elements of Childs' canonical approach: the search for the Bible's subject matter. Childs reads the Bible because he wants to know what it tells one about God (§6.1). This reflects Childs' doctrine of Scripture, which holds that the Bible is a vehicle for knowing God and therefore should be read as such (§2.3.1). This chapter explored the methodology by which Childs attempts to move

[997] E.g., Childs does not comment upon how the OT's witness to YHWH as being one god among many (Exod. 12:12; 15:11; 18:11; 20:3; Deut. 3:24; Ps. 82; 1 Kgs 8:23) relates to the Christian (and Jewish) doctrine of monotheism (e.g. 'we believe in one god' in the Nicene Creed). For more on the nature of early Israelite religion as henotheism, see Michael S. Heiser, 'Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, Or Henotheism?: Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18/1 (2008), 1-30; 'Appendix C: The Origins of Monotheism', in William C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 757-94; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, Biblical Resource Series (2nd edn, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

[998] Barr, *Scripture*, 40.

from the Bible's witness to its subject matter (§6.2). It categorised Childs' method as a kind of *Sachkritik* (§6.2.1) which operates under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is ultimately responsible for revealing the truth of the Bible's theological witness (§6.2.2). It also explored Childs' ideas for a kind of figural interpretation (§6.2.3) which largely takes the form of typology but which also includes aspects of ruled reading. It found that Childs' views regarding figural reading need more work to establish how his various ideas are reconcilable with each other and with his theory of canonical shaping. To show Childs' methodology in practice, this chapter then presented a case study focusing on the topic of the identity of God (§6.3). The major problem this revealed is that Childs never progresses from witness to subject matter in the way he promises and therefore his approach never moves from the descriptive to the normative. Indeed, Childs does not exemplify in practice what he speaks of in principle and thus his canonical approach does not achieve the aim that he set out to achieve of using the Bible as a vehicle to know God. For all of these reasons, therefore, the third and final element of Childs' canonical approach is not sufficiently established.

7 Conclusion

We have now completed our study of the main elements of Brevard Childs' canonical approach. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to provide a final evaluation of these elements in the context of Childs' intention to create an approach to Theological Interpretation which uses the Bible to know God (§2.3.1).

Throughout its analysis of Childs, this thesis has tried to properly discern the plain sense of his publications and therefore present an accurate understanding of his canonical approach. Though it has largely been able to do this, there have been many instances where it has been impossible to fully understand Childs for the simple reason that he is often imprecise. This imprecision is furthered by his lack of footnotes in the majority of his publications,[999] as well as a lack of guidance for his readers in prefaces and chapter/section introductions. If he sought to create an approach which could be replicated within Christianity, he has not been particularly successful,[1000] though he has of course had a substantial impact (§3.2). As this thesis shows, it takes a doctoral thesis to explain how his approach works, and even then there is still ambiguity.

The aim of this thesis was to evaluate Brevard Childs' canonical approach from the perspective of Biblical Studies. It can now conclude that the main elements which constitute Childs' canonical approach are not sufficiently developed to support an approach to Theological Interpretation designed to establish knowledge about God using the Bible (for all of the many reasons summarised in §4.4, §5.5, and §6.5). Therefore, this thesis also concludes

[999] There are no footnotes in *Exodus*, BTC, *IOTS*, *NTC*, *OTTCC*, *BTONT*, or *Isaiah*. Childs does occasionally make page references, but his general practice is to list all of the works which have informed his thinking at the start of a section. If one looks at his earlier *Myth and Reality* (related to his doctoral thesis), one sees a far higher level of scholarly precision. Barr takes serious issue with the lack of a proper index in *BTONT* and the ambiguity of references to certain scholars (Barr, *Concept*, 399).

[1000] See also, 'He does not offer a method which can be followed by others, especially if they do not share his views in full' (Barr, *Concept*, 438); 'I would concede that Childs's work is not easily comprehended or digested' (Chapman, 'Inspiration', 65).

that the canonical approach composed of these elements unfortunately fails to complete the aim that Childs set out to achieve.

Importantly, however, this is not to say that there is nothing positive within Childs' approach, and this thesis has also sought to highlight its strengths when they emerged. For example, Childs' desire to read the Bible to know God is reasonable (§2.3.1, §6.2), there is good evidence that many biblical texts have been shaped theologically to function as Scripture (§4.3.1), and there is convincing evidence that the canonical text of the OT existed by the end of the first century CE at the latest (§5.2.2).

There is one particular aspect of Childs' approach which this thesis argues is his greatest contribution: its methodological integration of diachronic *and* synchronic approaches for the exegetical purpose of illuminating the plain sense meanings of the biblical texts. In the above (§4.4) it was concluded that Childs' theory of canonical shaping is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, because it is not clear that all of the biblical texts were shaped according to a canonical design, and secondly, because even when there is this evidence, there is not a good reason to grant the results of canonical shaping authority in the Church today (§5.4). Despite this, Childs' theory of canonical shaping encapsulates a valuable idea which itself leads to an interpretative approach that should be maintained and, indeed, taken forward within Biblical Studies. The idea is that the canonical forms of the biblical texts exist as they do for a reason, and that this reason can be unlocked through careful literary *and* historical study. The idea leads to an interpretative approach which draws together diachronic and synchronic techniques in a manner which, in the experience of many, can illuminate the plain sense meanings of the biblical texts. Childs rightly reminds scholars that there is a text which stands at the end of the transmission phase as it does for a reason, and thus he rightly calls into question interpretative methodologies which focus solely on atomising the biblical texts into their earlier strata (e.g. Source Criticism). Yet, he also rightly reminds scholars that the canonical text can be better understood through careful historical study of its development and therefore challenges purely

synchronic approaches (e.g. Literary Criticism). The integration of diachronic and synchronic study for the purpose of exegesis was the methodology that Childs employed effectively in *IOTS*, which I personally find to be the best of Childs' publications because of its many tangible examples showing how the integration of diachronic and synchronic study illuminates the biblical texts in a rich way (e.g. §4.3.1). Thus, this thesis holds that the methodological integration of diachronic and synchronic approaches for the purpose of exegesis is the greatest legacy of Childs' canonical approach and should be taken forward within Biblical Studies.

Furthermore, I and many others are extremely grateful to Childs for his contribution to the field. His works have sparked all kinds of interesting debates about important topics, involving both confessional and secular scholars. Furthermore, his ambition in attempting to provide a responsible hermeneutic that encompassed both Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology is inspirational, regardless of its success. I have no doubt that Childs' legacy will live on for years to come. This is not a problem, so long as it is properly understood. I hope that this thesis has, at the very least, shaped a better understanding of Childs for future readers, much in the same way that the canonical shapers shaped the traditions they received for the benefit of future generations.

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