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Conference Paper

UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

The Bible Translator
2016, Vol. 67(2) 240–261
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/2051677016653801
tbt.sagepub.com
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Intercultural Construction of the New Testament Canons

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to discuss NT canons, using an intercultural method in dialogue with historical and canonical approaches. While focusing on NT canons, this study presumes that a Christian Bible is made of two subcollections, the Old or First Testament and the New or Second Testament. It also assumes that each of the two sections may have canonical and noncanonical books, but not deuterocanonical books, suggesting that the term "deuterocanonical" is inappropriate for designating books that faith communities regard as either canonical or non-canonical.

Keywords
biblical canon, New Testament, historical-critical approach, canonical criticism, intercultural criticism

Introduction

The Westminster Dictionary of Church History defines the term canon as "meaning both 'rule' and 'list' . . . to designate those Scriptural books which were regarded as inspired" (Brauer 1971, 156). Interest in the formation of biblical canons has been growing since the beginning of critical exegesis in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. While the discussion between Theodor Zahn and Adolf von Harnack greatly influenced the canon debate of

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the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, much of the interest in the twentieth century was fuelled by the earlier works of Herbert Edward Ryle, Alexander Souter, Heinrich Graetz, Moses Stuart, and Edward Reuss (McDonald and Sanders 2008, 1). This subject has mostly been studied through historical-critical approaches and, since the latter part of the twentieth century, through canonical criticism. The aim of this paper is to reflect on NT canons using an intercultural method, and to place this in dialogue with prior historical and canonical approaches. Although focusing on the NT canons, this study presumes that a Christian Bible is made of two sub-collections, the Old or First Testament and the New or Second Testament. It also asserts that each of the two sections may have canonical and non-canonical books, but not deuterocanonical books, given that the term "deuterocanonical"—coined by Sixtus of Siena (1520–1569)—is inappropriate for designating the books that faith communities regard as either canonical or non-canonical.

In early Christianity, other terms were used for non-canonical books. After the biblical canon of Marcion (85–160), which contained probably eleven books (Luke and ten Pauline Letters, excluding 1–2 Timothy and Titus), Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373) represents the earliest listing of the twenty-seven canonical books of the New Testament (Trebolle Barrera 1998, 237). He contrasted "the books included in the canon (*ta kanonizomena*) and the books termed apocryphal (*apokrypha*)," which the heretics mixed up with the books of the divinely inspired Scripture (PG 26:1436; Brown and Collins 1990, 1035). Origen (185–254) distinguishes between undisputed books (*anantirreta* or *homologoumenoi*), disputed books (*amphiballomenoi*), and false books (*pseude*). To the first category belong the four Gospels, thirteen Pauline letters, 1 Peter, 1 John, Acts, and Revelation. The second category includes 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Hebrews, James, and Jude. The third category includes gospels of the Egyptians, Thomas, Basilides, and Matthias. Eusebius (260–340) lists a threefold classification: recognized books (*homologoumena*), disputed books (*antilegomena*), and the altogether absurd and impious books (*atopa pante kai dussebe*). The first category comprises the books accepted by all the churches: Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul (Hebrews included), 1 Peter, 1 John, and, apparently, Revelation. The second category is divided into two groups: books approved by many of the churches (James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2–3 John) and books not accepted (Acts of Paul, Apocalypse of Peter, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, and Didache). Books deemed non-canonical were not to be included in a canonical edition of the Bible, regardless of how they were classified (apocryphal, disputed, impious, false, not accepted, or deuterocanonical, if this expression had ever been used in early Christianity). Needless to say, sacred writings that are regarded as canonical today were not all established as such

at once. It was a gradual process; but from the time when a faith community recognized a set of books as canonical, they were recorded in the list of canonical books without any further qualification such as protocanonical or deuterocanonical.

1. Brief literature review

Johann Semler is credited with being one of the first theologians to apply critical methods to the study of the biblical canon (cf. von Fleischer 2010, v). He is even given credit for destroying the foundation of the Reformation Protestant doctrine of canon (Dilthey 1985, 76).

Having been himself a proponent of the accommodation theory (regarding verbal inspiration of the holy Scripture), Semler later used the historical method to revisit the doctrine of canon in his *Abhandlung vor freier Untersuchung des Canons* (1771–1775). He argued that Scripture cannot be identical with the word of God (cf. von Fleischer 2010, iv–v), though it can contain the word of God. He also held that canonical lists of biblical books are granted a merely local or regional validity, and are not binding for all the churches. One of the implications of Semler's "free investigation" of the canons is well stated by de Jonge:

> As a result, the traditional canon of the New Testament could not claim to be binding for the Church as whole or for all its members. Consequently, individual Christians are not obliged to accept the entire New Testament as canonical; they are free to look in the New Testament for what they themselves regard as authoritative and, in a way, to select their own canon. (De Jonge 2003, 309)

The historical-critical approach to NT canon was intensified by the works of Zahn (1881–1929; 1888–1892) and Harnack (1886–1890; 1889; 1914). Zahn argued that the NT canon came into existence around the end of the first century, while Harnack held that it did not take shape until the end of the second century. The details of the debate between Zahn and Harnack have been assessed by Metzger (1987) and more particularly by Barton (1997). As de Jonge puts it,

> Barton has pointed out that the controversy between Zahn and Harnack originated from the two scholars' fundamentally different ideas of what the nature of the New Testament canon was. For Zahn the canon was a product of continued collection, augmentation and growth. Harnack, on the other hand, looked upon the New Testament canon as the result of a process of delimitation and exclusion. Consequently, Zahn's concept of the canon was less strict than Harnack's and, as a result, Zahn's date for the canon earlier than Harnack's. (De Jonge 2003, 310)

In addition to several individual studies (cf. Gamble 2008), the dawn of the twenty-first century is marked by two major collections, the first edited by Auwers and de Jonge (2003), and the second by McDonald and Sanders (2008). Regarding NT canonical studies, Auwers and de Jonge (xxx–xxxii) summarize points on which there is general agreement in the current state of research:

- A number of writings were included in the New Testament on the basis of their claim to apostolicity (cf. especially epistles attributed to Paul and John).
- Marcion and Marcionism are no longer considered as the main stimuli behind the emergence of the NT canon (as they were by Harnack).
- Historical research into the history of the New Testament leads to several results, including the following: a collection of Pauline letters was in existence as early as the end of the first century (Lindemann 2003); the Muratorian Fragment was composed in the late second century in the West (Verheyden 2003; de Jonge 2003)[1]; the four Gospels are decidedly nearer to forming a fixed and closed canon in Irenaeus's work than they are in the works of Justin Martyr, who nevertheless considered them of the same level of authority as the Jewish Scriptures (Stanton 2003); and the *nomina sacra* did not serve as characteristic of a "first edition" of the New Testament to distinguish this "edition" from other collections of Jewish and early Christian writings (Tuckett 2003; 2014).
- Several authors argue that the interpretation of NT writings requires a canonical approach, taking into account the whole New Testament or even the whole Bible (Söding 2003; Niebuhr 2003; see already Lohfink 1988; 1993; and Zenger 1991).

McDonald and Sanders include an article by Gamble on the *status quaestionis* of recent research (Gamble 2008). In this he mentions ongoing work on issues like the history of smaller collections within the New Testament (e.g., the Gospels, Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistles) and on other books of the New Testament, both those that were eventually included in the NT canon and others which were eventually excluded (e.g., Apocalypse of Peter, Didache, Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Thomas,

[1] The "Muratorian Fragment" is a seventh-century Latin document containing part of a list of NT books recognized by the churches. It appears to have been translated from an original Greek document which is often dated to about A.D. 170, though some argue it is as late as the fourth century.

Acts of Paul, 1 Clement, Barnabas, and Shepherd of Hermas). But alongside these he identifies some other significant areas of research:

(1) General conceptions of the history of the canon: According to Gamble (268), the canon debate of the twentieth century was dominated by Harnack's view, which was taken up by von Campenhausen (1972), Sundberg (1964, 1973), and Hahneman (1992) in the discussion of the distinction between scripture (a collection of religious writings) and canon (an exclusively authoritative list) or the dating of the Muratorian Fragment (ranging between the second and fourth century A.D.).
(2) New approaches and perspectives: Gamble notes that since the second half of the twentieth century there has been renewed interest in the so-called NT Apocrypha (Hennecke and Schneemelcher 1992; Charlesworth 1987), "in bibliographical and textual realia" (Roberts 1979; Roberts and Skeat 1983; Gamble 1985), and in "the relation of texts and their transmission to the social settings in which they were used" (Pagels 1978; Koester 1991; Ehrman 1995; van der Kooij and van der Toorn 1998).
(3) A distinctive proposal (difficult to integrate into any traditional scheme): Here Gamble discusses Trobisch's thesis that the New Testament was produced as a single book, a "canonical edition," about the middle of the second century, and was promptly received and used in Asia Minor and Rome. Consequently, what is known as the history of the canon can be viewed as subsequent, progressive recognition and use of this canonical edition. Gamble finds Trobisch's hypothesis ingenious, but sketchy: "Even if all the phenomena Trobisch notes are correctly perceived and evaluated, which is arguable, it is yet another question whether they should all be taken together and traced to a single cause" (Gamble 2008, 291).
(4) The canonization of the New Testament: Based on canonical lists drawn up by bishops, synods, and councils, the formal canonization of the New Testament belongs to the fourth to fifth centuries, though the process itself would have started much earlier, including the period of events recorded in the New Testament and that of Marcion (Stuhlhofer 1988; Hoffmann 1994; Kinzig 1994). For Gamble, the history of the NT canon includes several dimensions such as "the social history of the early church, the history of theology and doctrine, the liturgical life of early Christian communities, the history of interpretation, the bibliographical practices of the Church and the textual history of particular documents and collections of documents" (2008, 294; see already Söding 2003, lxxxviii).

2. Historical-critical research

Regardless of particular views, historical-critical research has shed light on several issues pertaining to the NT canon, namely catalogues of NT books (McDonald and Sanders 2008, 584), codices containing NT books (Schröter 2003, 426; Niebuhr 2003, 563; McDonald and Sanders 2008, 584), early translations containing NT books, NT Apocrypha, criteria for selecting NT books (Ohlig 1972, 57–309; Collins 1983, 36–37; cf. de Jonge 2003, 313), primary sources for the study of the NT canon (McDonald and Sanders 2008, 591–97), as well as particular contexts of the United Bible Societies.

a. Catalogues of New Testament books

McDonald and Sanders (2008) bring together a number of useful lists of primary sources for canon in their appendixes. One is a listing of fourth- and fifth-century catalogues, including Eusebius, the catalogue in Codex Claromontanus, Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures*, the Council of Laodicea, the Muratorian catalogue, Athanasius, the Mommsen catalogue, also known as the Cheltenham canon (365–390) from northern Africa, Epiphanius, the Apostolic canons, Gregory of Nazianzus, the African canons of Hippo and Carthage, Jerome, Augustine, Amphilocius, Rufinus, Pope Innocent, and the Syrian catalogue of St. Catherine's.

b. Codices containing New Testament books

The contents of fourth- to sixth-century codices are another window onto the canonical situation of that period: Codex Vaticanus (22 books—missing 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Revelation); Codex Sinaiticus (29 books—including the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas); Codex Alexandrinus (29 books—including 1–2 Clement); and Codex Claromontanus (27 books—omitting Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews but including Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Acts of Paul, and Apocalypse of Peter).

c. Early translations containing New Testament books

The Syriac Peshitta (22 books: minus 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation); the Latin Vulgate (27 books; some editions of the Vulgate add the Epistle to the Laodiceans among the Pauline Letters, bringing the total number of books to 28); Sahidic Coptic (27 books); and Ge'ez (besides the expected 27, this includes Sirate Tsion [the Book of Order], Tizaz [the Book of Herald], Gitsew, Abtilis, 1–2 Dominos [Covenant], Clement, and Didascalia, for a total of 35 books).

d. New Testament Apocrypha

When the consensus on the list of books was being reached, some gospels, acts, and letters, as well as other genres, were excluded either before or after the fourth century, which represents an important period during which the lists of books receiving widespread approval, which had been converging since the second century, were being confirmed by local councils (Barton 1997, 5). Gospels excluded from the canonical books include the Protogospel of James, the Gospel of Thomas, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of the Twelve, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of Basilides, the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Gospel of Matthias. Excluded "acts" are the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of Peter and Paul, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and the Acts of John, while excluded epistles concern the Epistle to the Laodiceans, the Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Clement, and 3 Corinthians (formally accepted by the Armenian Orthodox Church). There are some excluded apocalypses, namely, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Apocalypse of Paul. Other excluded books included examples of various genres such as the Traditions of Matthias, the Didache, and the Shepherd of Hermas. This list is not exhaustive. Similar books can still be added from the Stichometry of Nicephorus (end of the eighth century) or from the Nag Hammadi library collection, discovered in Egypt in 1945. It goes without saying that each of the excluded books has its own historical trajectory.

e. Criteria for selecting New Testament books

Ohlig suggests that eleven criteria played a role in determining the canonicity of a book: apostolicity, document age, historical likelihood, orthodoxy, agreement with the Old Testament, edifying nature, catholicity, clarity and meaningfulness, spirituality, wide acceptance by the church, and public use in the church (1972, 57–309; cf. de Jonge 2003, 313). Gamble lists four such criteria (apostolicity, catholicity, orthodoxy, and traditional usage; 1985, 67–70; cf. de Jonge 2003, 313), while Metzger retains three of those (orthodoxy, apostolicity, and consensus among the churches; 1987, 251–54; cf. de Jonge 2003, 313). Taking note of the diverse views about the use of canonical criteria in early church, Collins writes,

> Certainly orthodoxy is among the criteria to which churchmen appealed in making their judgments as to the acceptability of certain books and their eventual

> inclusion in the official lists. Serapion, Tertullian, Eusebius, and the Canon Muratori attend to the concern that the Church make use of only those writings that are in accordance with the "norm of truth." It is not, however, quite so certain that a judgment as to the apostolic origins of the writings in question was as significant a factor. Both Eusebius and the Decree of Damascus include 2, 3 John among their books of the New Testament, even though they were not written by one of the Twelve. . . .
>
> . . . In sum, the New Testament canon reflects a historical judgment as to what essentially constitutes the Church. Luther could take issue with the Roman church and relegate Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to something of a subcanonical status and practically adhere otherwise to a "canon within the canon." In response, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the twenty-seven-book canon of the New Testament. (Collins 1983, 38)

De Jonge (2003, 311–19) also argues for orthodoxy as the criterion of which both implicit and explicit usages are attested. He finds an explicit use of orthodoxy when "Serapion, bishop of Antioch about 200, admonishes the Christian community at Rhossus, a town in his Diocese, to stop reading the Gospel of Peter," given that this document "shows traces of a Docetic view of Christ" (314–15). On the other hand, he views the Muratorian Fragment as displaying an implied orthodoxy when it makes reference to the recognition of the real humanity of Jesus Christ and the expectation of his second coming (318).

f. Primary sources for the study of the New Testament canon

Again, in Appendix B, McDonald and Sanders (2008) identify important primary sources for canon research, including the apostolic fathers; reference to the authority of Jesus' words in early gnostic teaching; Justin's use of NT writings; writings that mention Marcion's collection of Scriptures; Irenaeus on heresies and the use of Scripture; Origen's awareness of NT literature; discussion of Scripture, tradition, and authority in the church; gnostic beliefs and errors (Irenaeus); second-century reference to Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet 3.15-16); Athenagoras; Theophilus's calling on Autolycus to reverence the Scriptures and citing Rom 2.7; 1 Cor 2.9; and Rom 2.8-9 (*Autol*. 1.14 and 2.9; 14.22); Tertullian's discussion of Marcion's editing of Luke and Paul (*Marc*. 1.29; 4.2; 5.18.1; 5.21; and *Praescr*. 32, 36, 38.4–7; *Prax*. 15); a source that may refer to earlier collections of Scriptures in the second century (Hippolytus, *Haer*. 8.19.1); a discussion on the burning of sacred books during the Diocletianic persecution (A.D. 303) in *Gesta*

apud Zenophilum and *Acta Saturnini* 18; passages in Eusebius that list or discuss Christian writings.[2]

Other important primary sources include Epiphanus (*Haer*. 5 and 76; *Mens*.); Filatrius, *Haer*. 40; Council of Hippo, canon 18; Council of Carthage, canon 47; Council of Laodicea, canons 59, 60; Jerome (*Prologus galeatus*; *Epist*. 50 *ad Paulinum*; *Commentaria in Matthaeum*; *Epistola ad Dardanum* 2; *De viris illutribus* 5–10, 15, 17, 36, 41, 63, 81, 135).

The Roman Catholic Church abides by the books listed by the Councils of Hippo and Carthage (393–419), reaffirmed by the Council of Florence (1442) and the Council of Trent (1546; see also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 120). The Greek Orthodox Church follows the canon of Laodicea (364) and Trullo (692), while the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) is guided by the canon behind Feṯa Nagast, Law of the Kings (1240). The Church of England adheres to the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 and the Reformation churches to the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647. With the exception of the EOTC, all of these agree on the common list of 27 books in the NT canon.

g. New Testament canons: open or closed?

For most churches the biblical canons (OT or NT) are closed, yet their contents are open to new interpretations as led by the Holy Spirit and church traditions. Indeed the very concept of an "open canon" can be considered "confusing and counterproductive" (Ulrich 2008, 34).

Yet there are some contexts where the collection might be considered to be open to increase or decrease, if, for instance, apocalyptic literature is taken out of the New Testament and replaced with the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, or the unknown gospel of the Egerton Papyri, as the Jesus Seminar has suggested (cf. McDonald and Sanders 2008, 1).

Further, it is interesting to note that for the EOTC, the biblical canon is fluid, neither open, nor closed, nor in-between (Bruk and Decock 2012; Bruk 2014, 62). Besides, EOTC holds that the "word of God is found in two major components, Scripture and tradition, on equal ground" (Bruk 2014,

[2] These are numerous and include his own perspectives (*Hist. eccl*. 3.3.1–5; 3.25.1–7); Papias's preference for oral sources over written sources (3.39.4); the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienna (5.1.3–63); the Montanists (5.14–19); on persecution and burning of sacred books (8.5–6); on Irenaeus's NT canon and LXX collection (5.8.1–15); on Origen's OT and NT canon (6.24–25; see also Rufinus's translation of *Hom. Jes. Nav*. 7); on Clement of Alexandria's collection of divine names (6.13.4–8; 6.14.1–24); on why Serapion rejected the *Gospel of Peter* (6.12.1–6); Dionysius's perspective on Scripture (7.25.22–27); on Constantine's role in the churches and his ordering of fifty copies of Scriptures (*Vit. Const.* 2.2–4; 4.36).

68). In the contexts where the biblical canon is considered closed, the contents continue to be open to new interpretations, while in faith communities where the biblical canons are open even the number of the canonical books can increase or decrease.

h. Biblical canons in the contexts of the United Bible Societies (UBS)

Within UBS, text and canon issues have been addressed by Burke (1987) and in the 1987 Guidelines. They have also been tackled by Meurer (1991), Pagán (2001), and Bonilla Acosta (2001). Some years later, they resurfaced in an updating of the Guidelines (UBS 2004), with Crisp and Jinbachian (2004), and, more specifically in that collection, with Konstantinou (2004) and Scanlin (2004). Two years after Crisp and Jinbachian (2004), de Regt revisited this subject with the intention of addressing "selected issues of canon and deuterocanon that frequently come up in Bible translation projects, as well as some implications for the United Bible Societies' Guidelines for Scripture Translation" (2006b, vii). In most of the publications mentioned, text and canon issues are approached from the perspectives of textual differences, canonical diversity, formation of the biblical canons, or church preferences with regard to the number and order of "deuterocanonical and extracanonical books" to be included in a given Bible (cf. de Regt 2006a; 2006b). If fact, as far as the New Testament is concerned, UBS documents pay very little attention to the issue of the scope of the canon. But in general, the UBS deliberately does not take a position on definition of canon, stating that "the scope of the canon of the Church for whom the translation is intended should be respected as well as its canonical order of books" (UBS 2004, 8).

3. Canonical criticism

a. Emergence of canonical criticism

James Sanders and Brevard Childs are two scholars who have shaped the approach of canonical criticism, especially with reference to the notions of canonical context and canonical hermeneutics (Callaway 1993, 145–52). Sanders (1972, 1984, 1987), who coined the expression "canonical criticism," uses it to refer to a critical pursuit that builds on tradition history and comparative midrash. For him, the biblical canon is a paradigm by which the believing community learns how to appreciate God's activity. The very nature of canon is to be simultaneously stable and adaptable, since Scripture does not offer eternal truths, but a set of stories in which

a believing community finds meanings for its life and passes them on to the following generations (Sanders 1972, 4). For Childs (e.g., 1984; 1985), canonical criticism begins with the results of redaction criticism in order to illuminate the final text, but takes into consideration the confession of the particular faith community.

Dale Brueggemann (1989) is a leading voice among those with negative views of Childs's canonical criticism, calling it "an example of post-critical naïveté." He reproaches Childs for his post-critical biblicism and relativized canon, and concludes that "Childs' radical text-immanent exegesis, even though the text is the Bible, lacks a proper foundation for authority or meaning" (Brueggemann 1989, 326). Here are some details that inform his conclusion:

> At times Childs appears to be working in the area Barton calls the "upper reaches of redactional criticism," but he seems quite set on interpreting the final form with reference neither to the theological *Tendenz* of the writers or redactors nor to the theology of the community that was involved in the canonical process. The meaning, he says, is in the canonical shape of the text. . . .
>
> . . . The only context that counts for Childs is the canonical context. . . . Which canon? . . .
>
> . . . Barton lists three possible canons: Jewish, Protestant, Roman. He rightly criticizes Childs' failure to admit that the Protestant OT canonical context is different not only from that of Roman Catholics but also from that of Jews. Though the identity of the OT books themselves may be the same for both Protestant and Jew, the Protestant has a different canonical context for his OT because the NT operates as context for the OT. . . .
>
> . . . When Barr asks what reasons Childs can give for overthrowing the historical-critical approach for his canonical approach, for adopting the canonical interpretation, Childs' response is this: Accept it by faith. (Brueggemann 1989, 316–18)

Childs (1992, 72) restates his position that the whole point of focusing on Scripture as canon in opposition to the anthropocentric tradition of liberal Protestantism is to emphasize that the biblical text and its theological function as authoritative form belong inextricably together. Paul Noble (1995, 1) finds that despite publications in favour of or against Childs, "no clear consensus has emerged concerning the viability of Childs' canonical approach or the contribution it might make to biblical studies." More recently, Chen Xun (2010, 11) recognizes that the evaluation of Childs's works "ranges from warm support to almost complete repudiation of his vision."

b. Key concepts of canonical criticism

i. Intrinsic rather than extrinsic authority. Michael Kruger (2012; 2013) analyses both the extrinsic and intrinsic models for understanding the nature and limits of canon, and argues strongly for the latter. For him, extrinsic models (i.e., historical-critical approaches) explain the canons from *de facto* perspectives, but they fail to provide sufficient answer to *de jure* objections (Kruger 2012, 289). In his view, the intrinsic model solves the issue of canonical authority through the concept of the canon's self-authentication (inherent authority), which can well accommodate the concept of the collection of authoritative books but not an authoritative collection of books:

> In order for us to have knowledge about which books belong in the canon and, at the same time, not subordinate the canon to outside authorities, that knowledge must be determined by the canon itself. The canon must be self-authenticating. This, of course, does not mean that the twenty-seven books of the canon are listed for us within the covers of our New Testament. But it does mean that the canon guides, controls, and determines how it is authenticated. (Kruger 2012, 290; see also Metzger 1987, 287; Dykstra 2009)

So far, extrinsic models have been promoted by diachronic approaches (Semler, Zahn, Harnack) while the intrinsic models are vigorously propagated by such scholars as Sanders, Childs, Barton, and Kruger. However, extrinsic and intrinsic models (or diachronic and synchronic models) can be integrated in a more comprehensive canonical approach that will also involve a dialogue with historical and dogmatic disciplines, as well as with theological, philological, and cultural studies (Söding 2003, lxi).

ii. Canonical contexts and hermeneutics. In expounding his canonical criticism, Childs argues, among other things, that the New Testament's reading of the Old Testament is not just an early part of the history of interpretation, but it "functions as the voice of the apostles which the church hears along with that of the prophets" (1974, xv). In this regard, the New Testament constitutes a canonical hermeneutics for an Old Testament text within the canonical context of the Christian church. Accordingly, Childs (1974) reads the book of Exodus with the lenses of both Old and New Testaments (see also Childs 1979, 82; 1985, 15; Auwers and de Jonge 2003, 5–26).

Childs's views have further been developed by many scholars, including Gamble (1985) and Barton (1997). Gamble (1985, 79) reasserts the canon as a locus of meaning. This is further emphasized by Barton:

> The essential point of agreement between secular and biblical critics of a "canonical" turn of mind is the unity or coherence of all the texts that make up Scripture: the sense that they constitute not just a collection but, in the technical sense, a "work." The implication of mutual consistency means that the canon, for this way of thinking, generates another "hermeneutical imperative": Read all these books as chapters in a single work. (Barton 1997, 152; see also Vogels 2003, 299; Niebuhr 2003, 563)

For Robert Wall, a canonical reading of the Bible takes into account three elements: canonical context, canonical content, and canonical conversations. The *canonical context* consists of "the whole scripture, Old and New Testament," and when received and read as a textual deposit of the church's canonical heritage, it "aims at Christian formation rather than historical reconstruction" (2008, 533). Wall offers a number of observations on the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments or the reading of the New Testament as an "intertext" of the Old Testament. Four of these are mentioned here (see also Söding 2003, lxxxi–lxxxiii; Landmesser and Lichtenberger 1997, vii):

1. "The Old Testament contains meaning for Christians" and its "theological authority . . . presumes its trustworthy witness to God's Gospel, now disclosed in Jesus."
2. "This same Jesus refuses to de-canonize Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament)," they are received "with him as the normative context in which his people deepen their faith in him as the Lord."
3. "Paul's claim that Christ is the *telos* . . . of Torah (Rom 10.4; Gal 3.24) may provide another biblical analogue for relating New Testament (= Christ) and Old Testament."
4. The intertextuality of Old Testament and New Testament means that "the Old Testament supplies the New Testament with its normative theological and historical markers, while the New Testament witness to the risen Messiah supplies the subject matter for a Christian hermeneutic by which the Old Testament becomes Christian scripture" (Wall 2008, 536–37).

The *canonical content* is described firstly by means of traditional grammatical, literary, and rhetorical exegesis before further examination of "the distinctive contribution that each witness makes to the overall canonical project" (Wall 2008, 538).

Canonical conversations are "formative and integral," as they engage the ancient teachings of the biblical canon with a contemporary faith community. A canonical conversation proceeds in two ways: the first is intercanonical

(between different biblical traditions/writers) and the second is inter-ecclesial (between the Bible and different faith traditions; Wall 2008, 539).

It is important to notice that canonical context refers to two realities: the faith community context (Childs) and the context of the whole Scripture (Wall).

iii. Canonical edition. Benjamin Warfield suggested that the mention of the earliest collection of a Christian Bible goes back to the second century:

> The earliest name given to this new section of Scripture was framed on the model of the name by which what we know as the Old Testament was then known. Just as it was called "The Law and the Prophets and the Psalms" (or "the Hagiographa"), or more briefly "The Law and the Prophets," or even more briefly still "The Law"; so the enlarged Bible was called "The Law and the Prophets, with the Gospels and the Apostles" (so Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. vi.11.88; Tertullian, *De Præs*. *Hær*. 36), or most briefly "The Law and the Gospel" (so Claudius Apolinaris, Irenæus); while the new books apart were called "The Gospel and the Apostles," or most briefly of all "The Gospel." This earliest name for the new Bible, with all that it involves as to its relation to the old and briefer Bible, is traceable as far back as Ignatius (A.D. 115), who makes use of it repeatedly (e. g., *ad Philad*. 5; *ad Smyrn*. 7). (Warfield 1892, 7)

Trobisch (1989; 2000) has argued in favour of a canonical edition of the whole New Testament sub-collection that was added to the Old Testament sub-collection to form the Christian Bible by the end of the second century A.D. and more than likely by Polycarp of Smyrna. For Trobisch, "the Roman Catholic Church has preserved the *editio princeps* of the Christian Bible more faithfully than their Protestant sisters and brothers as far as the number and arrangement of writings are concerned" (2000, 104). This view is considered almost convincing by Parker (2008, 251), though we have already noted above Gamble's more sceptical evaluation (2008, 291).

The Bible content that was officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in its Vulgate version reflects the Carthage biblical canon. It would be interesting if each Scripture edition revealed its canon through a subtitle (e.g., *The Holy Bible: Carthage Canon*). This would be a handy clarification that might dissipate some of the confusion between Scripture and canon.[3]

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[3] Besides, this clarification could, in a way, respond to new suggestions regarding three types of NT editions that might in fact bring more confusion if faith communities do not specify the canonical frame of their Bibles. The proposed three editions include one with original sayings of Jesus and Paul, a second one with the current twenty-seven books plus others such as the Sayings Gospels Q and the Gospel of Thomas, and a third one with an entire library of early Christian texts (Funk 2008, 557).

4. Intercultural approach to New Testament canons

a. Notion

In African contexts, the intercultural approach is a development of the inculturation paradigm, the latter being one of the major epistemological trends in African theology, alongside liberation and reconstruction/construction. It is the combination of intercultural and construction perspectives that leads to the concept of intercultural construction, where the two perspectives together contribute to the process of building a renewed culture or a new interculture. Intercultural construction is also a meaning-construction strategy (Schnelle 2003) that is developed through dialogue among three frames of reference: original biblical cultures, church cultures, and contemporary target cultures (see Loba-Mkole 2010; 2011; 2013; 2014; see also Ukpong 1996 and Manus 2003, who did not explicitly include church cultures). An intercultural approach to canon will involve thinking about the nature and scope of canonical Scripture in each of these different cultural contexts, and bringing them into connection with each other, without any one being made subservient to another.

As a matter of fact, each frame of reference is granted a distinctive epistemological privilege. The unique epistemological privilege of canonicity (status of word of God) is given to the original biblical cultures because they contain authoritative books for ruling in matters of faith and conduct. The unique privilege of elderliness (seniority status) is conferred to the church cultures because on one hand they shape the original biblical cultures through the fixation of the biblical canons, and on the other hand they spiritually engender their target contemporary cultures through the evangelization ministry. The unique epistemological privilege of liveliness (vitality status) is bestowed upon the target contemporary cultures because they revitalize both the original biblical cultures and the church cultures in the present situations and hand them over to the future.

The application of an intercultural construction to biblical canons begins with the identification of two key constituents for each of the cultures being considered, namely, the major or dominant biblical canon in that context and other parallel canons which may have been influential to some extent. This must be applied to the present target culture, the past church culture, and the original biblical cultures. Similarities and differences among the canons can then be identified, as well as a way forward regarding the expected change for the current target culture.

b. Illustration of an intercultural canonical approach

We will look at one specific target community to illustrate how this approach might provide new insights for the understanding of canon. For most purposes, original biblical cultures can be located between the third century B.C. (positing the LXX as the *terminus a quo*) and the fifth/sixth century A.D. (with the Geʿez Bible as the *terminus ad quem*). This delimitation arguably allows a fair inclusion of all major biblical canons. The church culture in the case described here is Roman Catholic, whereas the target contemporary community is the Indru/Ndru ethnic group in the upper eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This cultural community privileges senior or elder status, which may be acquired by birth through a patrilineal heritage, or by marriage into a status-bearing line. In this context the church acquires seniority status through the merits of her bridegroom and head, Jesus Christ, the proto-ancestor. This view epitomizes a major idea of African inculturation theology, for which life comes from God by the mediation of the elders and ancestors (Bujo 1979; Nyamiti 1984). Indru Catholics, then, are predisposed to respect the seniority of the church, while at the same time expecting respect for their own cultural ancestry, one in which the word of God is more oral than scriptural, and is never fully comprehended in one formulation, collection, or catalogue. Rather it transcends all historicity and yet permeates every historical situation.

Within this particular interculture, we can identify the following implications:

1. The major biblical canon of the present target culture: For an Indru target culture with a Roman Catholic background, the major biblical canon is still that of Carthage. This canon is reflected in the French Bible de Jérusalem and the Swahili Biblia Takatifu that are currently used by the Indru Catholics.
2. The parallel canons in the present target culture: For the Indru Catholic culture, a parallel canon is represented by the French Louis Segond Bible (Westminster confession).
3. The major canon of the past church culture: The major canon of the past church culture of the Indru Catholic community was the Carthage canon, which was represented by the Vulgate.
4. The parallel canons of the past church culture: The parallel canons of the past church culture of this community included the canon of Laodicea-Trullo and the canon behind Fetḥa Nagast of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church.

5. The major canon of the original biblical cultures: The Christian biblical times having been set from the period of the LXX translation to that of the Geʿez translation, for a Catholic Indru, the Carthage canon will still be the major canon of the original biblical cultures.
6. The parallel canons of the original biblical cultures: Keeping in mind the same biblical time frame, for a Catholic Indru the Laodicea canon and the canon behind Fetḥa Nagast will be parallel canons of the original biblical cultures.
7. A summative comparison and a way forward: We are now in a position to identify the major similarities and differences among the canons, and suggest a way forward. The main feature shared by the Laodicea-Trullo, Carthage, and Fetḥa Nagast canons is that each of them represents the Christian Bible for its own canonical contexts and hermeneutics. The differences among them pertain to the number, order, and content of the biblical books. In terms of a way forward, the Ndruna Bible which is currently in progress can be produced in two editions, one being *The Holy Bible: Carthage Canon* and the second being *The Holy Bible according to the Westminster Confession*.

Conclusion

The historical approaches show that the biblical canons have been set or confirmed by church clerics, bishops, and synods/councils. The canonical approaches emphasize reading the Christian Bible as a literary and theological whole made of the Old and New Testaments. The intercultural approach recognizes the unity and the diversity of biblical canons throughout church history, as well as the importance of engaging with the Christian Bible as a literary and theological whole. It proposes that each contemporary church culture / faith community should not only construct appropriate Bible translations but also be explicit about the canonical frames that provide the hermeneutical grid for those translations (e.g., *The Holy Bible: Carthage Canon*).

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Abbreviation

PG Migne, J.-P., ed. 1857–1886. *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*. 162 vols. Paris: Migne.