CONTINENTAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF CANON: FROM EARLY JUDAISM TO PROTESTANT ORTHODOXY

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Epigraph

καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ,
ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός,
εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ,
τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

And be not conformed to this world,
but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,
that ye may prove what is that
good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:2)

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INTRODUCTION

Billions of Christians, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox have based their life and faith upon the written Scriptures compiled in a single book, commonly called "the Bible." However, despite the common name to their religious corpus of texts, these last are in some ways different.

Firstly, the number of books differs. While this number is 47 for the Roman Catholics' Old Testament, it is 39 for Protestants' and 52 for Ethiopian Orthodox. In order to justify their beliefs, Catholics raise the point that Jews included the Apocrypha in the number of their canonical corpus during the first century C.E. and that the Jews of Alexandria included them or part of them in the Septuagint.[1] For Protestants, the canon of Hebrew Scriptures did not include the Apocrypha and was closed long before the first century C.E.[2]

Secondly, the way in which these texts are approached is also different. The place accorded to tradition or exegetical techniques differs from one religious movement to another, and sometimes from one man to another. Therefore, a single concept of Biblical canon does not exist, but a multitude, which have been challenged through the centuries. Even if these differences could appear insignificant, they are of first importance for religious people, and are the basis of many disagreements among Christian religions. In fact, these differences of concept of canon are influential on the reading procedures. Thus, points and conclusions that emerge from the reading of a single book, or even of a single verse, differ from a person to another, depending on the concept of canon, whether this concept is conscious or not. These differences of conclusions are not harmless since they influence the way of thinking and living of Christians.

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[1] William Webster, *The Old Testament Canon and the Apocrypha* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2002), 9.

These differences of view of the Biblical Canon are one of the main issues that created a break between Roman Catholics and Protestant Orthodox theologies during the 16th century. For Protestants, nothing can be considered at the same level as the Scriptures, while for Catholics, the Magisterium (tradition) possesses at least the same level, if not a higher degree of authority than the one of the Biblical Canon.

Defining a clear concept of canon is not an easy task today. However, some elements can help us in that work. According to Mathison, "much of the confusion surrounding this discussion is due to the failure of Christians to honestly examine the historical teaching of those believers who have preceded us in the faith."[3] According to Ramm, History is one of the backbones of Scripture, and thus "all the theological attributes of Scripture must stand in the perspective of the historical character of Scripture."[4] Therefore, the goal of the author is to provide an honest and historical study of the evolution of the concept of canon.

In that context, the approach of this work will be threefold. Firstly, it is purely historical and will seek to provide an overview of the different steps that played a role in the evolution of the concept of the Biblical Canon from early Judaism to the Reformation.

Secondly, it is to evaluate if the concept of Biblical Canon and of Sola Scriptura brought by reformers is coherent with the initial view of Christians over the Scriptures.

Thirdly, regarding these elements, the thesis will respond to actual questionings of Christians: To what extent shall the Canon be considered trustworthy and authoritative? Is it universally authoritative or is that authority conscripted to a particular population and time, and who confers this authority? Should we make the canon evolve in parallel with our cosmological understanding, or in parallel with human needs?

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 19.

The purpose of this thesis is not to draw an exhaustive survey of all the history over the concept of canon, but it is to show the major historical events that have influenced its evolution, and to examine the validity of the concept of Sola Scriptura advocated by the reformers. By reason of the author's background, the predicate that theological and historical data within the Bible are trustworthy will be taken.

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[4] Bernard L. Ramm, "Scripture as a Theological Concept," Review & Expositor 71 no 2 (Spring 1974): 150-151.

1. Etymologies

1.1. Bible

Before going further in our study, note that the term "Bible" which is nowadays employed in Christians' milieus, is itself the result of a change in the concept of canon. In fact, the Greek plural "τά βιβλία"[5] was replaced by the singular "biblia" during the Latin period. The Greek term also went through another change. While it was only applied to the Old Testament till the 4th century, it became then applied to both the New and the Old Testament. According to Bruce, it is within the writings of Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, 47.3.) that this change appeared for the first time.[6] It is the first clear demonstration of a change of concept over the corpus of texts that compose the pillar of faith of Christians. In fact, since that time, the different texts are not any more considered as independent, but as a whole. Therefore, no distinction is made anymore between poetic and cultural books, but all are considered as the divine word of God for men.

1.2. Canon

The term canon, meanwhile is derived from the Sumerian gi (reed, measuring reed, rod) or gi(n), ge(n), gi-in (to be firm, stable, secure, true; to make firm, confirm, prove, verify, certify, guarantee; to standardize. Its stem is found in Assyrian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic and Modern Hebrew.[7]

The Hebraic equivalent קנה was "used for the bulrush, calamus or stalk [...] a measuring read or rod, or staff [...] for a scales or the arm of a candlestick."[8]

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[5] According to Suicer, John Chrysostom was the first writer to call the biblical corpus "τά βιβλία." J.C. Suicer, Thesaurus Ecclesiasticus, 2nd ed., (Amsterdam, 1728), col. 6.

[6] F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1988), 214.

[7] Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*κανών,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), III, 596.

[8] Ibid.

In Greek, the term "κανὼν" strictly meant "rod" or "measuring stick," and was first used in a technical way. However, it soon held a figurative sense of "norm," "ideal", " goal to be sought."[9] This term is employed by Paul in: 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, 16; Galatians 6:16 and in Philippians 3:16,[10] but only Galatians 6:16 uses it to describe "the norm of true Christianity."[11]

In a general sense, the thesis will deal with the Scriptures (γραφή). It is possible to define the Biblical corpus as a group of Scriptures considered as canon. However, the term Scriptures is not equal to the term canon. According to Sundberg, the canon is a closed list of Scriptures in which nothing can be added or withdrawn.[12] Canonization is the constitution of a list of stories that express preferences among a certain group of people. According to Davies, this constitution is the result of a long process, which is cultural and natural whether spoken or written.[13] According to Jülicher, with whom Beyer agrees, "the canon is the norm by which everything is directed in the Church; to canonize is to recognize to be part of this norm."[14] However, the notion of canon is not exclusive to an ecclesiastical context. According to Bruce, the first trace of the use of the word "canon" within a Christian context, i.e. "the list of the writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of the divine revelation" is found in a letter of Athanasius of Alexandria in A.D. 367.[15] There, he "says of Hermas that it is not ἐκ του κανόνος."[16] "From the beginning of the 9th century the term

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9 Ibid, 597.

10 The term "κανὼν" in Phl. only appears in some manuscripts.

11 Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*κανὼν,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, III, 600.

12 Albert C. Sundberg, "Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon," Studia Evangelica 4; TU 102 (Berlin, 1968), 453, 454.

13 Philip R. Davies, "The Jewish Scriptural Canon in Cultural Perspective" in *The Canon Debate, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 36.

14 A. Jülicher, Einleitung in das NT (1931), 555, cited in Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*κανὼν,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdlans Publishing Company, 1965), III, 601.

15 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 17.

16 Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*κανὼν,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, III, 601.

came to be used also of papal decrees, which had for a long time claimed equal rank.[17]" During the Middle Ages, the term canon came to be used to describe every decision taken by the Church and everything that was prescribed by it.[18]

According to the author, the process of canonization is influenced by the preferences of a minority since this process depends on the physical preservation of literature, which is itself the result of the choice of elitist minorities. Davies also goes in that sense, saying that canonization is the result of copying and classifying.[19] Consequently, this task was reserved to a small part of the population until late. Moreover, and still according to Davies, to copy a document in a formal list is not sufficient to make it become a canon. It also needs to be copied, edited, classified, collected and archived.[20] Canonical procedures within a Jewish and Christian context will be developed further.

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[17] Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*κανών,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, III, 601, 602.

[18] Ibid, 602.

[19] Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures (library of Ancient Israel)* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 9.

[20] Ibid.

2. Canon and Judaism

2.1. Canonization in Early Judaism

2.1.1 *The Formation of the Canon*

The formation of the concept of biblical canon took its roots within the development of the Jewish civilization. The early stages of this history remain unclear because of the lack of written sources we possess from those days. The majority of the positions upon the history of the creation of the Old Testament canon are based on hypothesis more than on evidence. Two major points of view exist concerning the creation of the first written canon in Judaism. One of the major key issues in that debate is the notion of documentary hypothesis.

Barr follows Wellhausen's view on the fact that "the Law of Moses as represented and understood in the late forms of the Pentateuch [...] is the result of a late stage in the development of the Old Testament."[21] According to him, there were the prophets who spoke to the men for God. He notices that one of the key phrases used by the prophets was "thus says the Lord," and there is no evidence that the prophets based their sayings on "an already existing scripture."[22] Because Israel did not have a king, there were priests, Levites and prophets who were the heart of both the spiritual and temporal life of Israel's community. They were the exclusive intermediary between men and God.

The author agrees with Barr on the role of prophets, priests and Levites. One of the roles of priests was to seek God's will for the nation of Israel (Number 27:21; 1 Samuel 14:36, 41-42; 28:6.) In this task, they were considered as possessors of a special authority, worthy to judge (Deuteronomy 17:8-12; 19:17; 24:7; 2 Chronicles 19:8-11; Leviticus 14:48, 57), worthy to bless (Number 6:23-27; Deuteronomy 10:8; 2 Chronicles 30:27).

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[21] James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1983), 7.
[22] Ibid, 5.

Still according to Barr, the first writing "central to the life of Israel" and which took the shape of a "canon" as we understand the term today, arose around the eighth and seventh century, and is the result of the Deuteronomic Movement.[23] The notion of "Deuteronomic movement" refers to 2 Kings 22-23, where King Josiah, after having listened to the reading of a book found in the temple, became troubled. As a result, he sent people to consult a prophetess about that book, and finally decided to "carry out a religious reform based on the book."[24] However, because the different parts of the reform that the king decided to make contain similarities with the book of Deuteronomy, it is believed that the book found in the temple was an early version of the book of Deuteronomy. So, the Deuteronomic movement refers to a group of people who was both at the origin of the book of Deuteronomy and at the origin of the reform engaged by the king Josiah. It is in that context that the principle of canon would have emerged, according to Barr, who refers to Deuteronomy 4:2 in order to support his point.[25] Thereby, the Deuteronomic movement would have provided the first document possessing inner authority, and to which one should refer in order to seek God's will: Deuteronomy. That is not to say that before the Deuteronomic movement no other document existed that the Hebrew people were consulting concerning spirituality. However, an official and delimited corpus of books that had to be followed or which were considered as "holy" did not yet exist.

Here, the author cannot follow Barr's view. Deuteronomy 31:9, 25-26 says that Moses entrusted the Levites with the law he had written for Israel. Here is the dilemma. For Barr, Deuteronomy 31:9, 25-26 are a late addition posterior to Josiah, while this is not the case for the author. The consequences are significant based on the date of the composition of the texts, and so on the date of the first canon to be in history, and thus on the first use of

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23 Ibid, 7.

24 John J. McDermott, *Reading the Pentateuch: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 191.

25 James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism, 7.*

a canon in the religious life of Israel. For some scholars, the composition of the Torah started around 850 B.C. and finished around 444 B.C. while for others it would have been written and entrusted to the Levites around 1405 B.C.[26] Even if everyone did not have access to this Torah, the fact that it was conserved with the arch of the covenant is the mark that it was considered above other writings, and that it did possess a certain sanctity. Nonetheless, the Torah has certainly been through different editions. According to Attias, the actual form of the Pentateuch appeared approximately between 586 B.C.E. and 323 B.C.E.,[27] which is not impossible. Nevertheless, it is impossible to quantify the authority that these writings possessed at that time, or to compare its authority to one of prophets. However, the fact that it was placed with the arch of the covenant is undoubtedly the sign of a high significance for the spiritual authorities of Israel, and maybe for the people of Israel. Nonetheless, we can imagine that the authority remained over the priests, Levites and prophets for a long time, due to the fact that the nation of Israel has been until late, an agrarian society in which the vast majority of people were illiterate. The position of the author is that the Torah was entrusted to the Levites around 1405 B.C. However, only few people did have access to these documents that were precious to Israel. It was not publicly read, but Prophets, Priests and Levites were aware of these documents and used them actively in order to lead Israel. It is only after many procedures of edition, and with a process of semiosis that the Torah started to be publicly read and spread.

It is only late, that Judaism became a scriptural religion, certainly after the destruction of the first temple. The reasons that lead to such a development of the religious life is the fact that after the destruction of the temple, Jews needed a canonical corpus, something that could move everywhere they were strewn upon the earth and that could

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[26] Gleason L. Archer, *Introduction A L'Ancien Testament* (Saint-Légier, Suisse: Emmaüs, 2006), 81-83.

[27] Jean-Christophe Attias, *Les Juifs et la Bible* (Paris: Fayard, 2012), 26.

represent both their faith and nationality. The decentralization of the people from the religious authorities had to be replaced. Thus, the Torah took a special place in the religious life of Jews. It became "near-absolute authority in religion and morality."[28] In addition to the Torah were added some books that are today part of the corpus of the Old Testament. However, it does not signify that these documents hold the same importance as the Torah. According to Sperling, the development of the written Jewish Scriptures took place with the disappearance of prophecies, which in Judaic tradition is linked to the beginning of the second temple period.[29]

The first Testament testifies of the importance of Scriptures in early Judaism. "In Deuteronomy 31:10-13, Moses commands the priests and elders of Israel to read "this law" before the people every seven years."[30] In 2 Kings 23:1-3, the King Josiah publicly read the book of the covenant. "The first interpreters known by name were Levites who assisted Ezra the scribe."[31]

An important element concerning the creation of a canon is found in Nehemiah 8:1-8. There, it is mentioned that Ezra read the book of the law of Moses to the people gathered at the Water Gate. After a moment of worship, Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained to the congregation what had been read. The reading of the book created emotions and tears among the people. This source testifies that it is already during early Judaism, at least since the period of Ezra, that Scriptures took a central significance. Therefore, it appears that Scriptures have been publicly read, commentated and explained at least since this period. Concerning explanations, it is possible that they were due to the fact that when

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[28] James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1983), 10.

[29] David S. Sperling, "Modern Jewish Interpretation," in *The Jewish Study Bible,* ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1909.

[30] Michael Graves, "The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 50 no 3 (September 2007): 469.

[31] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, JR., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1993), 36.

the Israelites came back from exile, they did not speak Hebrew anymore, but the Aramaic of Babylon. Consequently, commentaries may have contained translation.[32] "According to rabbinic tradition, this incident spawned a new Jewish institution, the Targum (i.e., translation-interpretation)."[33] Nonetheless, whether from commentary or whether from translation, not only the Scriptures possessed authority, but also the people who explained or translated them. Indeed, because interpretations and explanations are able to entirely modify the meaning of a text, its interpreters possess as much authority as the texts themselves. This passage also demonstrates that some texts already possessed a special meaning and created special emotions among the people. Moreover, not only the spiritual, but also the temporal were represented through the reading of such texts. The fact that the King Ezra read the Scriptures himself, demonstrates that they were not only religious scriptures, but also political scriptures. During the domination of the Greek and Roman Empires, Jews "found refuge in the study of their ancient Scriptures."[34] Religious activities have always been a sign of belonging to the nation of Israel for Jews. Therefore, they have always been political.

Other sources than the First Testament testify of the public reading and thus, of the importance of scriptures in Judaism, but because these testimonies are straddling between the periods of early Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism they will be studied in the Rabbinic Judaism Period.

2.1.2 *The Closure of the Canon*

Many hypotheses have been drawn in order to explain the closure of the Jewish canon. Graetz has exposed one of the last hypotheses in 1871, in his *History of the Jews*.[35]

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[32] Ibid, 22.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," in *The Canon Debate,* ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 146.

According to him, the canon of the First Testament was closed during the Council of Jamnia (or Yavneh). Before him, Elias Levita proposed in his *The Massoreth ha-Massoreth* in 1538 C.E. that the canon "was closed by the men of the Great Synaogue."[36] Earlier than that, it has been thought on the basis of Ezra 14:37-38 and b. B. Bat. 14b that Ezra "dictated ninety-four books of which seventy were stored up but twenty-four were for general reading."[37] Some other people thought that the canon came from Nehemiah's library.[38]

The theory of Jamnia that has been very influential during the twentieth century suggests that Jewish authorities assembled in the city of Jamnia around 90 C.E., where they would have decided to close the Jewish canon of Scriptures. However, as the title 'theory' mentions, it is only a theory and no real proof exist to make such an affirmation. "Neither Josephus nor ancient Christian literature knows anything of a Council of Jamnia or of a closing of the canon of scripture at its sessions. We are totally dependent on rabbinic sources, with only one early text (m. Yadayim 3:5) mentioning a discussion of Biblical books there."[39] Today, many scholars such as Cross, Sundberg or Barthélémy reject this theory.[40] According to McDonald, the only evidence that we possess is about discussions concerning the status of the books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs at Jamnia.[41]

One thing is sure; the closure of the First Testament, as the image of the one of the New Testament remains unclear. Moreover, some discussions about authoritative texts were still made long after the supposed Council of Jamnia.[42] For sure, the closure of the canon never took place suddenly, but is the result of a long process, which came out naturally over a long period of time.

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 153.
[40] Ibid, 161, 162.
[41] Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 49.
[42] Mark Mangano, *The College Press Niv Commentary: Old Testament Introduction* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 2005), 40.

2.2. Judaic Movements and the Scriptures

2.2.1. *Pharisees' Concept of Canon*

The Pharisees are certainly the best known of the Jewish groups since many mentions of debates between Jesus and them appear in the New Testament. The Pharisees had an important influence within Palestinian Judaism and they had the support of most of the Jewish population. The pillar of their faith was twofold. The first one was the written Torah and "the second was a body of interpretative tradition."[43] Some consider that these traditions were totally oral and others that they were partly written.[44] Yet, the Pharisees possessed two types of canon, an oral one and a written one. The Pharisees tried to reach a high standard of purity. Therefore, they strictly followed Moses' laws. In order to interpret their canon, the Pharisees used to practice Scribal exegesis. This type of exegesis is often linked to the Rabbinic methods of exegesis and is divided into two phases: the Tannaim and the Amoraim. However, the Amoraim period is ulterior to the birth of Christianity. Therefore, the author will not linger on this phase. The Tannaim phase, meanwhile, was born soon before the birth of Christ and was characterized in two different schools, the conservative one of Shammai and the liberal one of Hillel. The first school mostly gave stringent interpretations of the Torah, while the second, Beit Hillel, gave lenient interpretations.[45] Since these two schools existed, Jews accepted that two contradictory interpretations of Scriptures could both be paradoxically true.[46] "The divine word can be paradoxical, but the divine law must be directive. The minority opinion is true as Torah, but we do not live by it."[47] Therefore, Jews already had known disagreements on Biblical interpretations at that time. However, in order to promote unity, the interpretation of the

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[43] Gerald L. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (New York: IVP Academic, 2000), 50.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Stephen M. Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah: the Jewish Way of Reading the Sacred Scriptures* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2005), 55.

[46] Ibid, 56.

[47] Ibid.

majority was the norm by which they had to live. That is, to some extent, the position that the Roman Catholic Church will later adopt.

2.2.2. *Sadducees' Concept of Canon*

The Sadducees were more Aristocratic than the Pharisees, closer to the temple priesthood than the mass population. They were an elitist organization.[48] Like the Pharisees, they accepted and followed the Torah and in a more general way the First Testament as a guideline for their life. However, according to Bray, it seems that they rejected oral tradition and that their interpretation of Scriptures was mostly literal.[49] This point is supported by the writings of Josephus, in Antiquities 13.10.6, where he says:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.[50]

2.2.3. *Rabbinic Judaism's Concept of Canon*

We possess more sources and testimonies concerning the relation of Judaism to authoritative scriptures in the Ancient Roman period. Because a single Orthodox Judaism does not exist, our present study will focus on Rabbinic Judaism, one of the most influential movements in Judaism "which took shape in the first seven centuries C.E."[51] and is also called "Judaism of the dual Torah."[52] A term such as "canon" or "scripture" did not yet exist when this movement took shape. However, we can find Rabbinic discussions talking about books that "make the hand unclean" as in the Mishnah (Yadaim 4:6). In Judaism, a book

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48 Gerald L. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 51.

49 Ibid, 52.

50 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews,* translated by William Whiston.

51 Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, eds., *P-Z*, vol. 3 of *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (New York: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 1999),1132, 1132.

52 Ibid, 1133.

that makes the hands unclean is a holy book that causes a person to undergo ritual purifications after handling it. For Rabbinic Judaism, the first compilation of writings to be considered as possessing a particular authority is the Torah, or Law. As historical sources that can support our sayings about the place of the Torah for Jews, are the writings of Philo, Josephus, Theodotus and the book of Acts. They all demonstrate that "the reading of the Torah constituted the primary and almost exclusive function of the religious activity in the synagogues" of the first century.[53] Here are some texts representative of this thought:

And will you sit in your conventicles and assemble your regular company and read in security your holy books, expounding any obscure point and in leisurely comfort discussing at length your ancestral philosophy?[54]

[Moses] appointed the Law to be the most excellent and necessary form of instruction, ordaining, not that it should be heard once for all or twice or on several occasions, but that every week men should desert their other occupations and assemble to listen to the Law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it, a practice which all other legislators seem to have neglected.[55]

Theodotus [...] constructed the synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments.[56]

However, there does not exist any single Jewish source, referring to synagogual reading of the Prophets until the second, or beginning of the third century C.E.[57] In fact, it is only since that time that the Mishnah testifies that the synagogual service is articulated around "prayer, reading of the Law and the Prophets, and the blessings."[58]

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53 Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: BRILL, 2010), 150.

54 Philo Som. 2.127 (tra. G.H Whitaker and F.H. Colson), cited in A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries.*

55 Josephus, Ap. 2.175 (tra. H.St.J Thackeray). Cf. Jos., Ant. 16.44;), cited in A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries.*

56 Chalres Perrot, "The Reading of the Bible in the Ancient Synagogue," in *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M.J. Mulder (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 137.

57 Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, 140.

58 Ibid.

Texts discovered at Qumran testify of the sacralization of scriptures, if not in the entire Judaism, at least for a part of it. The way of reading was regarded with extreme importance. Not everyone was allowed to read in the Torah. Even a slip in the act of reading a text was considered blasphemous and could lead to the expulsion from the community (1QS 7.1). The reading exercise was extremely important at that time, and not only for Jews. It was accepted that the better the reading, the better the understanding.[59] Reading aloud was common, even when reading for oneself, as did the Ethiopian mentioned in Acts 8:30.[60] This practice was recognized by some people as the only way of gaining the full meaning of a text, which was most of the time written in scriptio continua.[61] In the Jewish conception, Torah's canon, even if they did not use the term of canon at that time, held whether in written or non-written forms.

The Encyclopedia of Judaism identifies three different forms in which the Torah was expressed and protected. Firstly, through scriptures, secondly through oral tradition, which had also been written down in diverse documents, and thirdly through rabbis.[62] The non-written forms of the canon are transmitted through teachings which can themselves be articulated and received through speeches or deeds. In that concept, the man through whom the revelation is given, is considered at the same level as the canon. He is "the human embodiment of the Torah."[63] This concept is completely logical, since he is also the one who explains the scriptures and thereby influences their interpretation. Therefore, he has to be trustworthy. Hence, he is the model of whom the behavior has to become the norm, what has to be repeated.[64] However, in no way, were scriptures considered as possessing a higher

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[59] Rick Strelan, *Luke the Priest: the Authority of the Author of the Third Gospel* (Aldershot, Hants, England.: Ashgate, 2008),54.

[60] Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, 135, 136.

[61] Ibid, 136.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, eds., *P-Z*, vol. 3 of *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 1134.

[64] Ibid.

value or sacredness than another form of canonicity, even if it had in the past. So, it is not possible to say that Rabbinic Judaism was exclusively a religion of the book. It was also a religion of tradition, which was based on a pyramidal hierarchy. Even if the Torah and other writings were considered as possessing special authority, they were not the "ultimate" rule through which all had to be measured. To a certain extent, we can imagine that the way Rabbinic Judaism apprehended authoritative texts was in continuity with early Judaism. The cultural and economical development of Jews from an agrarian to a non-agrarian system allowed more people to have access to education and to literacy, and thus to written documents. Therefore, the importance given to the written canon in comparison to the oral form of the canon began to grow in parallel with the increasing of education.

As mentioned earlier, the source of authority in Rabbinic Judaism is diverse and can hold whether in a written or an unwritten form. In the written form, it is possible to distinguish the written Torah, which comprises the whole TaNaKh, and the oral Torah which "begins with the Mishnah, a philosophical law code that reached closure at the end of the second century."[65] Mishnah was the law code for everyday Jews' life, in both a theological and a political way.[66] The written torah was opened for exegesis and commentaries, "called Midrash-compilations."[67] The apparition of this Midrash-compilation is the mark of one of the first changes in the concept of canon. While it was before received for what it was, it became submitted to study, reflection and commentaries. Later, the Tosefta and different Talmud were written in order to comment the Mishnah. Writings of "sages" such as tractate Abot (the fathers) and Abot deRabbi Nathan were also considered authoritative. These evolutions can be seen as an attempt to harmonize the different teachings that occurred after the dissolution of the state of Israel. In fact, people were now

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65 Ibid, 1135.
66 Ibid, 1146.
67 Ibid, 1136.

influenced by new cultures, new religions and new thoughts. So the initial beliefs and understanding of the Torah took new directions. Thus, the Midrash and other authoritative texts became an attempt to correct these new interpretations of the Torah. Texts came to take the place that the Prophets, the priests or the Levites had in the nation of Israel. Scriptures, in a larger sense, became the guideline and the only way to harmonize the different theologies.

This focus on texts in order to correct or harmonize the variations in interpretations can be compared to the development that will emerge within Christianity and the development of the canon of the New Testament. But other parallels can be made at this point between the source of authority in Judaism and Christianity. Both religions recognize the authority of an initial corpus, but also recognize its own authoritative documents and personalities at the same time, these personalities being the pope and the saints for Catholics, and being Rabbis and other sages for Jews, the Mishnah for Judaism and the Missal for Roman Catholicism.

2.3. Christian Inheritance of the Jewish Concept of Canon

As already mentioned earlier, it is with early Christianity that the actual understanding of the term "canon" was defined for the first time. However, this understanding is the result of a long development. Christianity is not a new religion that was born with Jesus' theology. Christianity is a derivative of Judaism, in which it takes its roots. Therefore, Judaism has influenced the concepts and beliefs of Christianity. In that sense, Sanders even considers that early Christianity was a Jewish sect.[68] Thereby, at its birth, Christianity already considered Jewish sacred books as its own,[69] but not only its books,

[68] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon: 2nd Edition*, 5.
[69] Ibid.

also its concept of inspiration of the books.[70] This is why the names employed to designate the holy books in Christian milieus were the same as the ones used by Judaism: ἱερά βιβλία, ἱεραὶ γραφαί or ἱερά γράματα. Scriptures hold a high importance in early Christianity. They are referred to, if not quoted many times by the authors of the New Testament (Mat. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54; Mark 12:24; 14:49; Luke 4:16-19; 24:32; 24:45; John 1:45; 2:22; 3:14-15; 5:39; 7:15; 10:34-35, 12:14-16; 13:18; 19:18, 24, 28, 36, Acts 13:15-16; 15:21; 17:2; 17:11, 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 1 Tim 4:13, 2 Tim 3:16, 2 Peter 3:16.) At the same level, the church fathers often quoted the Scriptures, whether from the Old Testament, whether Scriptures that now are part of the New Testament. Early Christians attended synagogues and studied the Jewish Bible in its original language, or translated into Greek, in the version of the LXX. Even, the early translation into Latin of the Old Testament in the Western Church was a translation from the Septuagint.[71] It is commonly agreed among scholars that the scriptural reading tradition that exists in Christianity took its foundation in Jewish synagogues.[72] However, the fact of reading texts and explaining them was not exclusive to Jews. In fact, "education in the ancient world was almost entirely based upon the reading of literature."[73] Thus the Jews' and the Christians' ways of teaching and communicating their faith were analogous to the ancient world's schools.

In both Judaism and Christianity, canons have emerged because a community believed that some men received special revelations directly from God. So, the concept of religious canon is only possible if it is believed that God communicated his thoughts and will to some people. The author assumes that the Christian notion that God communicates his thoughts and will to certain people is a direct inheritance from a Judaic background. In

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[70] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5 ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 60.

[71] William A. Webster, *Holy Scripture: the Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001), 333.

[72] Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, 141.

[73] Frances Young, "Christian Teaching," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature,* eds. Frances Young and Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 469.

fact; "the expression "word of God" occurs about 500 times in the Old Testament, and expressions like "thus says the Lord" or "and the Lord said", which are similar in meaning, occur about 1800 times."[74] Moreover, Christians did not question the common beliefs of Judaism such as the authorship of the Torah. It is also what emerges from the testimony of Jesus about the Jewish canon.

Nonetheless, the recognition by Christians or Jewish-Christians of the Jewish documents as possessing a special authority does not mean the recognition of exactly the same concept of canon, even if the concept of revelation induced in the notion of canon was the same. In fact, Christians also recognized some new testimonies and documents that Rabbinic Judaism did not. Moreover, the methods of interpretation and exegesis began to differ from the ones used in Judaism. Jesus became in a way a living canon, since he was the example to be followed, and "Jesus' literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy was their [Christians] fundamental hermeneutical principle."[75] In Luke 4:18-21 and Mark 1:15 Jesus compares himself to the personal fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2.[76] Jesus also referred to Isaiah 35:5-6 to prove to John that he was the Messiah.[77] Christians began to see the first Testament as a witness of Christ. Jews continued to wait for what their Bible had announced to come "the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-19), the son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), the servant of Yahweh (Is. 42:1 etc), the stricken shepherd (Zech. 13:7), and others,"[78] while all these expectations and others had already happened and been fulfilled in Christ for Christians (Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:1-3). In that sense, the stone that the builders refused and that has become the head stone of the corner (Ps. 118:22) began to be identified as Jesus. Thus, Peter says in Acts 4:11: "He is the stone which you builders rejected, that has become

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[74] Bernard L. Ramm, "Scripture as a Theological Concept," Review & Expositor 71 no 2 (Spring 1974): 154.

[75] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, JR., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1993), 29.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture, 56.*

the cornerstone."[79] Examples of that genre are numerous. These methods of interpretations that took shape within early Christianity lead one to see the concept that the prophecies of the Old Testament were mysteries, "whose solution awaited their fulfillment in the New Testament age."[80] This method of interpretation is certainly the soil of allegory that would become popular in Medieval Ages. Another method of interpretation that already appeared in the Old Testament is discernible in the New Testament. Events that are happening in the present age are images, or recapitulation of events that already occurred in the past. Thus, the exile and the release from Babylonia was a repetition of the exile and of the release from Egypt. After the development of the New Testament and the recognition of the closed list of books that make it today, the Church began to consider what were called Scriptures (γέγραπται) by Jesus in John 10:35 or Matthew 5:18, as referring to both the Old and the New Testament. Moreover, the teachings of people as Paul, some gospels and other documents related to Jesus began to appear and to be included within the list of documents considered holy by Christians. Slowly but surely, these new documents started to be spread and recognized possessing the same value as the early Jewish documents. "By the end of the second century CE most churches had a double-testament Bible."[81] That is not to say that early Christians had the desire to create a new corpus of books in order to counteract Jews. Jesus himself did not ask for the composition of his own book, neither does it appears in any document in our possession today, that he asked for the recording of any of his acts or words. It seems that none of Jesus followers intended a new corpus to emerge, even if writers such as Paul were believed to possess a high degree of authority, coming directly from God. Thus, the point Davies mentioned earlier, that the process of canonization is

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79 Acts 4:11 (KJV 2011).

80 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture, 59*.

81 James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon: 2nd Edition*, 6.

natural, seems to be true. Consequently, what was for Jews, The Testament became for Christians, the Old Testament. Therefore, polysemy began over Jewish writings.

The term "Old" employed by Christians to designate Jewish scriptures clearly reflects the idea that a step was taken; it demonstrates the transition from one state to another. Yet, Early Christians considered this Testament as inspired by God. If the First Testament was for Jews the guarantor of the laws to be followed, it was for Christians the divine revelation of the person of Christ. The key issue had changed although the word of God, the Old Testament "was no longer the communicator of salvation."[82]

2.4. Conclusion

In spite of the variety of positions over the canonical corpus or the methods of interpretation of the Old Testament, none of the Jewish movements has ever disputed the inspiration or the divinity behind Scriptures, nor the first Christian movements, that were derivatives of Judaism, ever disputed their authority. Moreover, the Old Testament was considered self sufficient to explain the relations between God and humankind.[83] However, it has always been believed that Scriptures needed to be interpreted by authoritative men, and dissensions between schools of interpretation have always existed.

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[82] James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*, 14.

[83] Gerald L. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present,* 55.

3. Canon in Early Christianity

3.1. From Birth to the First Century

3.1.1. *Jesus' Concept of Canon*

The reference to Scriptures was current in the first centuries of Christianity. However, the term "Scriptures" in early Christianity always referred to the books that were authoritative in Judaism, i.e. our actual Old Testament. One might think that scriptures were considered unimportant for Christ, since he was the Son of God (Mark 1:1), or God himself (1 John 5:20). However, he repeatedly referred to them. For example, Jesus cites Isaiah and Jeremiah in Luke 19:46, or Zechariah in Mark 14:27. In Matthew 4 and Luke 4, when Satan tempted him in the desert, Jesus repeatedly responded by quoting the first testament, saying: "It is written." The fact that Satan at his turn cites the first Testament (Psalm 91:11-12) is the sign that scriptures were important to Christ. However, the way Satan used scriptures was wrong. Therefore, Christ corrected Satan's interpretation, quoting himself the Old Testament. This element is one more proof among many others that Scriptures are the reflection of its user and interpreter. Even though Scriptures are perfect, as soon as its user's interpretation is wrong, scriptures lose their validity and relevance. Another case found in Matthew 5:21:48, where "Jesus taught his disciples how to behave according to a radical Mosaic law"[84], tends to demonstrate the same idea. This is again an example that Jesus did not only cite texts, but he also explained (exegeted) them or revisited them. This method was not particular to Jesus, but was in line with the Jewish notion of Scriptures of that time. They had to be interpreted.

Once more, Jesus appeals to scriptures in John, when Jews attack him. In John 10:34, Jesus makes a reference to Psalm 82:6 in order to confront Jews with their acts and to defend himself. Here, he refers to Psalms as Law, i.e. at the same level as the Pentateuch.

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[84] Henning Graf Reventlow, "The Early Church," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible, ed.* John Rogerson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001): 166.

The parenthetical statement of verse 35 underlines the importance of Scriptures in Jesus' view and in the Jews' view. In fact, if Jews had been opposed to the idea that scriptures cannot be broken, they would have snubbed Jesus. In Matthew 12:3:5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26 and Luke 6:3, Jesus asks: "have you not read...?" Therefore, it appears that the notion of scripture and of canon was for Jesus as it was for other Jews (Mark 10:4) of high importance. A part of the reason of this high importance is the belief that God himself contributed to the inspiration of these writings, even if, as we will see later, the notion of inspiration is not the ultimate element in the process of canonization. This belief can be perceived when Jesus explains the passages of the scriptures that are about him in Luke 24:27. Here, he recognizes the prophetic properties of some scriptures and thereby the divinity behind the writings.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says that he has not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill ("establish", "validate", or "confirm") them. The expression "law and prophets" here, is a substitute to the term Scriptures. This equivalent is also used in Matthew 7:12; 11:13; 22:40, Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 28:23 or Romans 3:21. In Matthew 5:18, Jesus presents Scriptures in an inalienable and eschatological perspective. Thus, it can be said that Jesus' concept of canon was an inalienable canon that was limited to the Law and to the prophets. It remains that the range of books that compose the canon of Jesus is not clearly specified in the New Testament. However, as a Jew, Jesus, with little doubt, shared the same books that other Jews did. The fact that the question of whether a book is authoritative or not is not mentioned in the New Testament, i.e. in the testimony of the first followers of Christ, means that this question was not a big deal at that time and that the corpus of books that were considered as authoritative existed whether not discussed, whether a little discussed. Therefore, it is not illogical to argue that Jesus considered as inspired by God the 22 books mentioned by Josephus: "For we have not an innumerable

multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books."[85]

As a result of the study of these different verses, we can argue that scriptures were for Christ the basics of faith, and a necessity from which result the knowledge of God (Matthew 22:29). When Paul says to Timothy that "all scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"[86], he certainly shares what was Jesus' thought, who was himself making appeal to them in various circumstances.

However, the scriptural canon was not the unique source for teaching or to correct someone. In fact, in many verses such as Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9 or Luke 8:8, he says: "he who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Therefore, it is clear that Jesus' authority derives not only from scriptures, but also from his inner authority due to the fact that he is the Son of God. In that sense, Jesus' concept of canon was again, similar to the common Jewish concept. The catalogue of books that is recognized as "holy" is very important, but they are not the only source of authority among believers. Moreover, Jesus' sayings show that truth is not only based on Scriptures, but is as much in the reader and in the fact of reading as in the Scriptures themselves. This is what passages such as Matthew 4 tend to demonstrate. Therefore, it can be argued that Jesus acted in the pure tradition of the Rabbis concerning his relation to Scriptures.

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85 Flavius Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus, Against Apion, and an Extract Concerning Hades,* Translated by William Whiston (Lawrence, Kansas: Digireads.com, 2010), 44.

86 2 Timothy 3:16 (KJV_2011).

This concept of canon present in Jesus' thought was in some ways similar to the one of Paul. It is what the author will now present.

3.1.2. *Paul's Concept of Canon*

As his contemporaries, Paul recognized the Jewish canon as divinely inspired. He cited it about 90 times and used it "as a basis for his theology."[87] Paul did not have a single way of interpreting the First Testament. Bray underlines at least six types of exegesis in Paul's writings. The first type is literal, e.g. Romans 7:7 (Exodus 20:12-17); 1 Corinthians 6:16 (Genesis 2:24); 2 Corinthians 13:1 (Deuteronomy 19:15). The second type of exegesis is Midrashic: Romans 3:10-18; 9:12-19; 10:18-21 or Galatians 3:10-13. Thirdly, he uses Hillel's middot (Qal wa-homer) in Romans 5:15-21; 11:12; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 (Gezerah shawah) in Romans 4:1-12 (Kelal upherat) Romans 13-8-10 (Kayoze bo bemaqom ʾaher) Galatians 3:8ff (Dabar halamed ʿinyano) in Romans 4:10 and Galatians 3:17. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 reflects a rabbinic tradition for the notion of baptism and reflects a rabbinic conflation with the reference to the rock. Still, according to Bray, Paul cites three passages out of context in Romans 10:6-8; Galatians 3:16 and Ephesians 4:8. Paul also uses allegory in 1 Corinthians 9:9ff and Galatians 4:21-31 and finally interpretation according to pesher is found in Romans 16:25:27; Colossians 1:26f or Ephesians 3:1-11.[88]

In his study on Paul's use of Kanōn, Farmer, not only focuses on the concept of canon in the sense of scripture, but also on the way the word itself is employed by Paul. Therefore, he does not only study the concept of canon as the normative list of scriptures, but of canon in a more general way. It follows that what was the canon of Paul includes different theological concepts that are: "the new creation," "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," "the truth of the Gospel," "the law of Christ," "and, not least important, the

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87 Ibid, 167.

88 Gerald L. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 66, 67.

confession that "Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins.""[89] Thus, the concept of canon not only appears as words or scriptures, but before all as a kerygma, an εὐαγγέλιον.

McDonald argues that the only book of the New Testament that commends itself as inspired literature is the book of Revelation.[90] If this affirmation seems to be true at first glance, it can appear wrong after thinking about Paul's letters. Repeatedly, Paul appeals to Scriptures to support his points, which means that he does not invent commandments, but he draws them from the Old Testament. Moreover, he also appeals to his apostleship at the beginning of almost all of his letters. He insists on his title of apostle and on the divine provenance of this apostleship. If Paul points out these elements, it is surely because he wanted his letters to be authoritative. In 1 Corinthians 7:10, Paul will say that when he writes, it is not he who gives the command, but the Lord and a few verses further, verse 40, he argues that his belief is prompted by the Holy Spirit who dwells in him. However, it is not the writings in themselves that are authoritative but they are so because of the call received by the author of the letters from God and by the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in him. Therefore, the notion of inspiration discerned by the church fathers was not new, but was drawn from an idea already present in Paul's thought. Nevertheless, 1 Corinthians 7:12, 17 and 25 are destabilizing since Paul does distinguish the authority of God and his own authority, even if he admits that he possesses also authority to command the Church. While he considered his voice authoritative, "we can suppose that similar authority was claimed for all the epistles that were circulated as written by apostles."[91] Yet, "all of the ancient church fathers believed that the scriptures were inspired."[92] Nonetheless, they did not consider their own writings to be at the level of the one of Paul or of the Tanakh. The only difference

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[89] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon: 2nd Ed.* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 325.

[90] Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: a Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 219.

[91] Peter Balla, "Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century)," in *The Canon Debate,* eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 375.

[92] Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: a Guide for the Perplexed, 375.*

between Paul's letters and the book of Revelation is the manner of writing. However, it is impossible to argue that Paul had a different view of his writings than the writer of the Apocalypse had of his own, since both approach the subject of salvation, and both authors claim authority. Moreover, it is not always necessary for an author to demand that his letter be considered authoritative, if the authority of this author is already known of the readers. Therefore, it can be thought that Paul did not put as much accent as the author of Revelation, on asking for the recognition of the authority of his letter, since he already knew it was going to be considered authoritative anyway.

In conclusion, Paul did not have a concept of canon such as the one that will be developed later and in which his writings will be included. For him, the only authoritative canon is the one developed by Jews. He was certainly not looking for, or aware that his own writings would reach the same level as the one of the First Testament. Yet, he had a high opinion of what he wrote, but certainly lower than the one he had of Jesus' teachings or of the writings of the Old Testament. His writings are partially drawn from his interpretations of the Jewish scriptural corpus of authoritative books and partially of his knowledge of Jesus' teachings. These were for him the real canons. His teachings were only interpretations, such as a pastor could claim authority from his teachings. There was no difference between his concept of canon and the one of the Jews, unless he added the teachings of Jesus and that Jesus was the key of interpretation of the Jewish Testament.

3.2. Second Century

3.2.1. *The Apostolic Fathers' Concept of Canon*

It is certainly with the Apostolic fathers, that the discipline of theology took its roots. At least, it is the idea that the author and Olson share together.[93] Indeed, it is with them that a real reflection on the concept of canon began. The Apostolic fathers were the direct successors of the apostles, by the fact that they were their students. Therefore, they possessed an authority de jure in the eyes of Christian communities, at the same level as their own students. When the Church was going through struggles, it is this apostolic succession that was considered as the guarantor of Jesus' teachings. For example, John the apostle tutored Polycarp who himself tutored Irenaeus.

It would have been possible that the Apostolic fathers only cite their teachers, Jesus, the apostles, or even themselves, in the exercise of teaching the Church. In fact, if they possessed the authority to direct the Church and to preserve the faith of their spiritual fathers, why would they make reference to Scriptures? Nevertheless, as Jesus did, the Apostolic fathers used to submit themselves to Scriptures whether making reference to them or whether quoting them.

3.2.1.1. Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome made reference to the Old and to the New Testament. In both of them he does refer to many books. In the First Testament, for example, he refers to the three sections of the Hebrew Bible: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, but also to the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, "in a way not dissimilar to his use of the canonical writings."[94] In the New Testament, he refers to some books, but not to all of them. It is

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[93] Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform,* 26.

[94] Donald A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome.* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Pub, 1997), 111.

possible to underline references to Matthew, Luke, some of the Pauline epistles and to the epistle to the Hebrews. Some people also recognize references in his writings to Acts, James and 1 Peter. On the one hand, the references to the Old Testament are often introduced by formulas such as: "the scripture says," "it is written," or "that which is written" and are often "made with great exactness from the Greek text of the Septuagint."[95] On the other hand, when referring to the New Testament, Clement does not use such formulas. However, twice he uses "Remember the word of the Lord Jesus." Moreover, the references to the New Testament in 1 Clement are approximate. According to Metzeger, "Clement is either quoting from memory from Matthew or Luke, or is making use of some written or unwritten form of the catechesis of Jesus' teaching current in the Roman church."[96] Therefore, the limits of authoritative books were not the same for him as for Roman Catholicism or Protestant Orthodoxy. For Clement, the New Testament writings possessed a part of authority but were not placed at the same level as the Old Testament writings, which were the only ones to be called "Scriptures".

3.2.1.2. Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch, meanwhile, even if he recognized a certain authority to Scriptures, repeatedly quoting Paul, exceedingly emphasized the authority of bishops when he says that "the bishop is nothing less than God's representative to the congregation";[97] a position that he will also support in his letter to the Magnesians 7 and to the Ephesians 6. However, according to Olson, there is no reason to think that he considered himself on the same level as the apostles.[98]

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[95] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 41.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ignatius, *To the Romans* 4 Lightfoot, Harmer and Holmes.
[98] Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform,* 46.

Nevertheless, Ignatius was not the norm. "Proportionate to the length of what they wrote, Polycarp has two or three times more quotations and reminiscences from the New Testament than does Ignatius." Moreover, if Clement did not consider the writings of the apostles at the same level as the ones of the Old Testament, Polycarp quoted the writings of Paul, and called them "sacred Scriptures"[99] in the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians 12.

3.2.1.3. Conclusion

In conclusion of our study of the Apostolic fathers, it is possible to say that some disparities existed upon the concept of canon and the place that some books had to hold in the Church, and especially the extra-canonical books (the canon being the First Testament). No clear definition of a Christian canon existed yet, whether in terms of limits or in terms of value and concept. Only an implicit authority emanated from some of the books that were going to form our New Testament. The supreme authority in the church was yet tripartite: firstly, the authority of Jesus' sayings; secondly, a scriptural authority; and thirdly, the authority of the bishops.

3.2.2. *Heresies' Influence on the Concept of Canon*

It is with the birth of heresies and with the birth of apologists in parallel, that clear definitions about the canon started to take shape. The attacks that were led against Christian faith, led to a systematization of its beliefs. The main troublers of apostolic Christianity in the second century were the Gnostics, the Montanists, Marcion and the anti-Christian Celsus. Gnostics, Montanists and Marcion are particularly interesting for our study. While Celsus was a pagan philosopher clearly opposed to Christianity, and who wrote a pamphlet against Christians during the second century with the evocative name *The True Doctrine: A*

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99 William A. Webster, *Holy Scripture: the Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* Vol. II (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001), 21.

Discourse Against the Christian. Gnostics, Montanists and Marcionists all proclaimed to be Christians. Thus, if Celsus denigrated Christianity in a general sense, extrapolating from rumors that Christians were known to be false, the three other movements could have disturbed Christians themselves. That is why the author will now focus on these three.

3.2.2.1. Gnosticism

During the second and third centuries, "several systems of Gnostic thought had developed that called themselves Christian."[100] The term "Gnosticism" is only a "generic label".[101] The name of Gnostics is a derivative from the Greek *γνώσις* which means "knowledge" or "wisdom". Gnostics all believed they possessed a special knowledge, and that spirit and matter are in conflict, the first being divine and the last evil. Thus, Christ was not material, but immaterial, a "spiritual messenger sent down from the unknown and unknowable God to rescue and bring home the stray sparks of his own being that had become trapped in material bodies."[102] They used scriptural texts whether written by themselves or whether of those in circulation among the Great Church to support their points and appealed "to alleged secret apostolic traditions."[103] Ebionitism, meanwhile, "humanized Jesus and rejected the writings of Paul, resulting in a more Jewish than Christian faith."[104] One of the dangers of Gnosticism is that many Christians of the second century were attracted to it, believing in a special truth, "better", "higher" and "more spiritual" than the one taught to the "unwashed and uneducated masses."[105] The elitist and

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[100] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), 76

[101] E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform,28.*

[102] Ibid, 29.

[103] Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 22.

[104] Jimmy Williams, ed., *Evidence, Answers & Christian Faith: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 107-108.

[105] E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform,29.*

secrecy spirit of Gnosticism was in total contradiction with the εὐαγγέλιον that Jesus and his apostles preached. A simple message equally delivered to everyone.

3.2.2.2. Montanism

Another great danger in the eyes of the second-century apostolic fathers were the Montanists. Montanism is the name given to the movement by its opponents. This name derives from the name of its founder and prophet: Montanus. Its adherents meanwhile called the movement, the New Revelation or the New Prophecy. Montanus was an ascetic who did not recognize the spiritual authority of the Apostolic fathers and considered the spiritual authorities of the church dead. His theological focus was on the interaction between men and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he argued for the necessity of a "new prophecy" and he considered himself as the "mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit."[106] In the line of his theology, he used to speak in the first-person voice as if God were speaking through him, calling himself Lord or God, while he entered into trances and spiritual frenzies.[107]

One of the dangers of this movement was that there was no possibility to contradict Montanus, since according to what he said, God talked through his mouth. Therefore, who would have contradicted God?

3.2.2.3. Marcionism

Marcion was a Christian mainly interested by the writings of Paul, whom he considered to be the highest of Jesus' apostles. The only apostle who understood who Jesus was. Moreover, he rejected the Old Testament and Jewish writings. Yet, he trusted the Gospel of Luke. However, his distinction was not only limited to scriptures. In fact, he also admitted a difference between the God of the Jews who, according to him, was a God of justice and the Creator, with the Supreme God of goodness from whom Christ, not a human, but with the appearance of a human, was the messenger.

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[106] Ibid, 31.
[107] Ibid, 32.

3.2.2.4. Conclusion

These different movements, considered heretical by the early church fathers, led them (1) to develop "a clear system, for the false gnosis had to be opposed by the more precise definition of the true,"[108] (2) "to determine which writings" are to be regarded as authoritative[109] and (3) "to seek for a just view of the relation of Judaism to Christianity, and of the permanent value of the Old Testament, which many Gnostics rejected."[110]

So, we can argue that one of the reasons for the establishment of a frozen canon is the apparition of diverse heresies that jeopardized the initial faith of Christians. The concept of a frozen canon did not mean for the early church fathers that only some scriptures are Holy or inspired, but that these scriptures are a referential, a norm. The principle of a frozen canon appeared to be a necessity to avoid heresies. Thus, it is possible to consider that other scriptures are as inspired, or as holy as the ones that compose the Protestant canon. However, the boundaries that have been established around the canon represent a limited security over spiritual and theological tradition. Nevertheless, the security remains partial. In fact, as soon as written scriptures are submitted to the interpretation of a reader who is conscripted in a certain time, in a certain culture and with a particular background, the danger of a misinterpretation is highly present.

3.2.3. *The Muratorian canon*

The Muratorian canon is an eighty-five-line document written in barbarous Latin. It was discovered in the 18th century by Ludovico Antonio Muratori, and is dated according to Metzger, on the basis of internal evidence at the close of the second century.[111] However,

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[108] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 77.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 191.

according to scholars, the manuscript in our possession nowadays dates from the eight century.[112][113] The author of this "canon" being unknown, it took the name of its discoverer. It is today considered as "the earliest surviving canonical list."[114] This introduction to the New Testament lists the books accepted as authoritative by the Church of his time in four categories and discusses them. The listed books are the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, Jude, two (perhaps three) Epistles of John, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Johannine Apocalypse. But it is also about the Apocalypse of Peter, which is discussed but refused to be read in the Church by some Christians, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, which is to be read privately, and finally about some books that are recognized to be heretical, and therefore, have to be rejected.[115]

This "canon" gives valuable information concerning the criteria of canonization in use at that time. In order to make it into the New Testament, writings had:

(a) to be written at a time close to the time of Jesus. The older, the better.[116] According to Mc Donald, "what was old was generally considered more reliable and acceptable than what was new. This attitude continued in the church until the time of the Enlightenment."[117] For example, the author of the Muratorian canon argued that the *Shepherd* of Hermas could not be included in the New Testament canon because "Hermas wrote [it] very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal]

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[112] Ibid, 192.

[113] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: the Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 241.

[114] Ibid, 240.

[115] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, 199.

[116] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: the Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew,242.*

[117] Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate, eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 430.

chair of the church of the city of Rome. (lines 73-76)."[118] This criteria is closely linked to the following:

(b) to be written whether by an apostle, whether by one of his companions.[119] The criterion of apostolic tradition has been supported by many early church fathers. Irenaeus for example said that

> *The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the church committed into the hands of Linus the office of* episcopate [...] In *this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us. And this is the most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.*[120]

When Marcion claimed the superiority of the Lukan gospel, Tertullian replied that Luke "was not an apostle, but only an apostolic man; not a master, but a disciple, and so inferior to a master."[121]

(c) to be widespread in "established" churches.[122] In order to be in use within churches, texts had to meet churches' needs and to be adaptive to their evolution.[123]

(d) to be orthodox and theologically valuable. If a text was not orthodox, it could not enter into the two previous categories (apostolic and catholic.)[124] According to Theissen, primitive Christianity was formed of "two basic axioms," which were "the axioms of monotheism and belief in the redeemer."[125] Added to these basic axioms, Theissen notices basic motifs which he refers to as limited rules, formal convictions and "which recur in different themes, genres and themes of tradition."[126] These motifs are, according to him, the

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118 Ibid, 241.
119 Ibid, 242.
120 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III. 3 .3.
121 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, V.2.2.
122 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: the Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 243.
123 Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," 432.
124 Ibid.
125 Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (London: SCM, 1999), 271.
126 Ibid, 271, 272.

motifs of creation, wisdom, miracle, alienation, renewal, representation, indwelling, faith, agape, change of position and finally the motif of judgment.[127]

Therefore, if the necessity of the making of a canon was natural, the process of canonization itself, has not been totally natural, but has also been influenced by a system.

3.3. Third Century

3.3.1. *The Apologist Fathers' Concept of Canon*

3.3.1.1. Irenaeus of Lyon

Irenaeus of Lyon, an apologist of the early times of the Christian Church, often referred to the Scriptures as inspired,[128] perfect,[129] sacred,[130] authoritative[131] and divine.[132] However, it is interesting to note the context in which Irenaeus cites and defends the importance of the Scriptures. In fact, he did refer to them and defended their importance while he was responding to the attacks of Gnostics sects. His rhetorical strategy consisted in confronting Gnostics with their lack of written sources.

Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures...[133] Moreover, they possess no proof of their system, which has but recently been invented by them... [134]

In opposition to the Gnostics, he argues that Christians have proofs of what they announce:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.[135]

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127 Ibid, 274-282.
128 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.28.2.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid, II.27.1
131 Ibid, III.5.1
132 Ibid, II, 35.4.
133 Ibid, I.8.1
134 Ibid, II.28.8.
135 Ibid, III.1.1.

Therefore, for Irenaeus, Gnostics' theology has been purely invented, since no one testified of such beliefs if not themselves. Nonetheless, this argumentation is low, since Gnostics proclaimed secrecy and elitism. Moreover, the fact that something is written should not be automatically a proof, neither something unwritten should be automatically unconsidered. However, the thought of Irenaeus was certainly that no one of the direct spiritual descendents of Jesus, or of the apostles had ever heard of that. Even if Gnostics had written scriptures supporting their points, it would be void, without the inner authority whether of Jesus, whether of an apostle or of a prophet. Accordingly, the books are not declared to be important, but the apostolic tradition. In that sense, the Church Fathers were not that far from the Jewish concept of canon. In fact, "one of the central pillars of Jewish teaching is the appeal to antiquity and tradition."[136] This element explains the long genealogies found in the Bible. This apostolic tradition was so important for Irenaeus that he would even proclaim that no matter if scriptures are understood or not, because whatever is thought, they are "spoken by the word of God and by His Spirit."[137]

It is important to notice at this point that Irenaeus was the first Christian writer who developed allegory of diverse New Testament writings. This allegory is directly due to the concept that not a man, but God is behind the writings. Additionally, he was also the first to develop the *Rule of Truth* that he also called *The preaching* or *The faith.*[138] This concept is better known under the name given by Tertullian, *Regula Fidei* (*Rule of Faith*). It "was essentially the content of the profession of faith that every catechumen was asked to recite from memory before his or her baptism."[139] Therefore, he believed that even if someone could not read or hear Scriptures, he was saved by this rule that summed up the whole

136 Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins*, 2nd ed. (London: Spck, 2002), 228.
137 Irenaeus, Against Heresies II.28.2
138 Ibid, I.2.
139 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 23.

meaning of the gospel.[140] Because this concept was a set of ideas, it was always worded differently according to the will of the Church fathers.[141]

3.3.1.2. Tertullian

Tertullian, also known under the name of "Father of Latin Christianity," was another of those great apologists of his time (2nd, 3rd century). As Irenaeus did, he deeply influenced the concept of canon, or at least expressed well the common view of his time. In his compilation of authoritative Scriptures, Tertullian includes the Old Testament, but also contemporary texts of his time. When he referred to them, they appeared to be Divine,[142] inspired,[143] sacred,[144] holy,[145] but also the word of God.[146] As for Irenaeus, they are the ultimate reference, to which everyone should refer in order to avoid heresies: "Take away from the heretics the wisdom which they share with the heathen, and let them support their inquiries from the Scriptures alone: they will then be unable to keep their ground."[147]

3.3.1.3. Clement of Alexandria

Also referring to Scriptures as inspired,[148] divine[149] and truth.[150] Clement of Alexandria supported that Scriptures were the ultimate authority toward which the people of God should refer. Because of the great accent that Clement put on the importance and the

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140 Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 62.

141 Ibid.

142 Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews 9*.

143 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh 18*.

144 Tertullian, *Apology 47*.

145 Tertullian, *On the Treatise of the Soul 21*.

146 Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul 26*.

147 Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh 3*.

148 Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 1.3, 7.16, 2.2.

149 Ibid, 7.16.

150 Ibid.

authority of Scriptures, Campenhausen calls him a "scriptural theologian."[151] Thus, every doctrine has to emanate from the recognized Scriptures of the Church. As for Irenaeus or Tertullian the major interest of Clement in proclaiming the superiority of Scriptures above all, was to defend faith against heresies and schisms. Therefore, individual theologies were supposed to disappear. Until that point, there is no great difference between him and his predecessors. However, Clement brought a new view on the concept of authority. While the other Church Fathers considered tradition equal to Scriptures and to the rule of faith, Clement claimed tradition to include "an unwritten method of interpreting Scripture which he referred to as the ecclesiastical canon or rule."[152] This declaration is the prelude to the Roman Catholic belief that it is the only Church to possess the unique and true method of interpretation of Scriptures.

Origen followed this idea of considering the interpretation of the canon possible only in the Church. He declared that "Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have a meaning, not such only as is apparent at first sight, but also another which escapes the notice of most."[153] As Irenaeus, Origen practiced allegory seeing in that practice the possibility of access to a deeper sense of Scriptures.

3.3.2. *Inspiration in the Process of Canonization*

Another question has to be raised. Is inspiration the only criterion for canonization? As we have seen with the Muratorian canon within the second century, and with the different concepts of canon within the early Church, inspiration was not the only criterion in the process of canonization at the birth of the Church. In fact, certain Scriptures that were

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151 Hans Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power: In The Church of the First Centuries* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), 202.

152 William A. Webster, *Holy Scripture: the Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* Vol. II, 47, 48. To argue his point, Webster quotes *The Stromata* 6.15.

153 Origen, *De Principiis*, preface 8, ANF.

considered authoritative and inspired by the Early Church have not been canonized. For example, the Epistle of Barnabas 16:5 considers 2 Enoch 89:56 as Scriptures. Gregory of Nyssa considered Basil's commentary on the story of creation as inspired by God and even above the writings of Moses "in terms of beauty, complexity and form."[154] However, they did not become part of our actual corpus of Holy books. Clement of Alexandria considered the Didache, 1 Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Preaching of Peter and the Apocalypse of Peters inspired.[155] According to McDonald, none of the church fathers have ever said until the end of the fifth century that only sacred Scriptures were inspired.[156] In other terms, it is only after the end of the fifth century that the idea that only the biblical canon was inspired was born. This comment is pertinent. Indeed, if the Church believes that the Holy Spirit dwells in its members, God himself, therefore, inspires their thoughts and writings. This is the reason why the Christian community was considered as the "living witness of Jesus Christ." Only something in contradiction with the message of Christ or coming out of the Church could have been considered uninspired. So, to be included in our actual canon, texts had to be recognized as such by Judaism or to be something more than inspired. In other words, a canon was not merely a list of inspired writings during the third century.

3.3.3. *Conclusion*

As we have seen through these examples, Scriptures had a great importance for the first apologists of the Church, but as with Judaism, they were not the ultimate source of authority, nor were they a well-defined and unchangeable collection of books. It seems that

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154 Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: a Guide for the Perplexed, 222.* In reference to Apologia hexaemeron in Migne, Patrologia Graeca 44.61: "Exposition given by inspiration of God...[admired] no less than the words composed by Moses himself."

155 Ibid, 225.

156 Ibid, 224.

the Apologist Fathers did not refer to Scriptures because they were Scriptures, but because their authors were trustworthy. Therefore, every canon until that point was submitted to evolution. That is why the writings of Hermas or Barnabas could be integrated or dropped away from the authoritative corpus of books that composed the pillar of faith of the first Christians. The composition of the "biblical corpus" was influenced by the personal decisions of the church leaders of that time. As for Judaism, the authority emanated first from individuals who were considered as empowered by a special authority from God. This is the reason why the teachings of Paul surpassed the authority of the Judaic corpus of texts on subjects such as cleaning rituals or the role of faith and Law in salvation's process. To a certain extent, it is possible to say that Paul 'decanonized' certain texts or parts of texts inherited from Judaism.[157] This is also the reason why the New Testament Canon is considered by some to be a canon within the Canon.[158] Consequently, written documents were not important because they were written, but for the link their author had with Christ, following the concept of apostolic tradition. According to Kelly,

there is no reason to infer [...] that the primitive Church regarded the apostolic testimony as confined to written documents emanating from, or attributed to, the apostles. Logically, as it must have done chronologically, the testimony stood prior to the documents.[159]

3.4. Conclusion

Early Christianity's theology was not a theology of the book, but was first based on the person of Jesus,[160] even if taking their origins in Judaism, the first Christians considered scriptures very important. For them, salvation was found in the kerygma of Jesus, that is to say, in the form of a proclamation more than in a written text.[161] In that sense, even if the Old Testament was a pillar of faith for early Christians, it was not a source of delimitation

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157 J.D.G. Dunn, *Living Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 156.
158 Ibid.
159 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 23.
160 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, *55.*
161 James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism, 14.*

for faith, as it could have been for Judaism, since this canon was expansible. The authors of the New Testament did not systematically base their teachings on the Old Testament. New Testament writings are mostly based on historical facts about Jesus and on the authors' own philosophies and theologies, according to what they thought to be in accordance with Jesus' teachings. The writings of the apostles were circulating among different congregations and churches and were quoted by apostolic fathers and the leaders of the churches. However, not every church possessed the 27 books that compose our New Testament.[162] The quotations of the Apostolic fathers of the writings of the apostles were not used in order to form the genre of commentaries that can be written today. They were mostly used in homilies,[163] not in order to analyze words or sayings, but in order to proclaim, to testify or justify their own sayings.

The reference to Scriptures was a leitmotiv for the Church Fathers and as we have seen in this last part, the special authority accorded to Scriptures even if always important, has grown in parallel to the heresies and to the propagation of the gospel. Evidently, already during the Second Century, Scriptures whether from the Old or from the New Testament were not merely considered as descriptive, but also as normative. They were the norm with which personal and global theology had to be measured. Therefore, the canon has enlarged from the Old Testament to the inclusion of new authoritative books that were going to form the New Testament even though the limits of the books that were going to be included in our New Testament were not already delimited. Moreover, the notion of Sola Scriptura was not yet present, since the notion of apostolic tradition and of pyramidal authority was very present. However, the modern concepts of canon were ready to be formed.

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162 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 21.

163 John Breck, "Lire la Bible aujourd'hui: Quels enjeux pour les Eglises? Actes du colloque de l'Institut Supérieur d'Etudes Oecuméniques (31 janvier - 2 février 2006) publiés sous la direction de Gérard Billon," *Cahiers Evangiles 141* (Septembre 2007): 28.

What was the place of tradition in early Christianity? Scriptures and tradition were not considered as antagonistic concepts in early Christianity.[164] "There was simply no way of imagining possible conflict between the Christian Scripture and the Christian tradition and, therefore, no necessity to choose between them"[165] in those times.

[164] Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 19.

[165] Albert C. Outler, cited in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1964), 173.

4. Canon And Its Modern Concept

4.1. Ecclesiastical views

4.1.1. *Athanasius' concept*

One of the main figures of the Church of the Fourth Century is Athanasius. As already mentioned earlier, Athanasius is the first Christian to have developed the term canon unto its modern meaning. Athanasius' concept was very advanced since he is, for certain people, the one who decided on the list of books that had to be included in the catalogue of the books of Christianity. It is in 367 C.E., that he sent an annual letter to the churches of his jurisdiction in Egypt, with the purpose to "set the date of Easter, which was not established well in advance."[166] But taking the benefit of this letter, Athanasius included in it advice to follow his own churches' choice of the books that are to be accepted as canonical. The list of books that were included in this advice were the books that are today part of our Old Testament (including the apocrypha for devotional literature) and "the twenty-seven books that we now have as the New Testament."[167] After citing the list of books, Athanasius declared: "These are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone, the teaching of godliness is proclaimed. Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away from them."[168]

Therefore, it appears that the Fourth Century has marked a turn in the concept of canon. At that time, the number of books that were considered holy by the Church started to be harmonized. Moreover, our last citation of Athanasius denotes similarities between the concept of canon of Athanasius and the concept of Sola Scriptura later prescribed by Reformers.

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166 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: the Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 230.

167 Ibid.

168 Athanasius, cited in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 212.

4.1.2. *Gregory of Nazianzus' Concept*

From the letter of Athanasius, it is possible to believe that the formation of our actual canon came naturally to impose itself. It is possible to think that the concept of a well-defined canon, limited to 66 books, which govern the entire life of Christians, came to exist naturally, without direct human interactions. But it is not the case. In fact, many influential voices among the Church began to rise. It is the case, for example, of Gregory of Nazianzus who agreed with Athanasius on the books that compose the Old Testament, but not on the number of the books that would compose the new one to which he would add the Catholic Epistles and remove the book of Revelation.[169] In his poem *Iambics for Seleucus*, which "instructs Seleucus on how to follow a life of study and virtue,"[170] Amphilocius reports debates that really occurred among Hebrews, about the Catholic Epistles and the book of Revelation. However, he does not only make reports, he also argues with himself of his unwillingness to accredit 2 Peter, Jude and 2 and 3 John and certainly the Apocalypse.[171] His own list appears to him as "perhaps the most reliable canon of the divinely inspired Scriptures."[172]

Therefore, what was an attempt at the harmonization of the writings to be considered normative actually created dissensions within the Church.

4.1.3. *Jerome's Concept*

Jerome is nowadays famous for his production of a revised Latin version of the four gospels in 383, present in the so-called Vulgate, based on a translation of the Septuagint. Jerome's interpretations of the Bible were based on literal and historical methods. Jerome

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169 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 212.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Amphilochius of Iconium, cited in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 213.

expressed many times about the notion of canon. For example, in 394, when he wrote to the bishop of Nola (Paulinus), "he outlines the books of the Old Testament at some length and then undertakes to deal more briefly with the New Testament."[173] In his writing in 414 to the prefect of Gaul (Dardanus), he said talking about the discussed authorship of the book of Hebrews that

> *it is of no great moment who the author is, since it is the work of a churchman and receives recognition day by day in the churches' public reading. If the custom of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical scriptures, neither, by the same liberty, do the churches of the Greeks accept John's Apocalypse. Yet we accept them both, not following the custom of the present time but the precedent of early writers, who generally make free use of testimonies from both works. And this they do, not as they are wont on occasion to quote from apocryphal writings, as indeed they use examples from pagan literature, but treating them as canonical and ecclesiastical works.*[174]

It is interesting to see in that letter of Jerome, that his point of view differs from the one of his predecessors when he says that it does not matter who is the author of canonical books. So, already during the fifth century, the apostleship of some epistles was discussed. Moreover, men such as Jerome were not able to prove their authenticity, or even had doubt about them. Nevertheless, age and use were for Jerome the guarantors of their sacredness.

4.1.4. *Augustine's Concept*

Augustine as Jerome strongly influenced the concept of canon in Church history and received it as it was given. In *On Christian Learning*, Augustine lists the books of the New Testament. This list is the same as the one made by Athanasius, even if the books are not given in the same order although, he admits in this same book, in 2.12, that the 27 books that he mentioned in 2.13 do not all possess the same authority within the Catholic Church. Thus, he advises the interpreter of the canon, to prefer the books that are accepted by the greater number of churches and by those of greater authority. In the case that the greater number of churches are in conflict with the churches of greater authority, both views are

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173 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 225.

valuable and to be considered equal. The books that were the most discussed at that time were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation.[175] Therefore, it is evident that the notion of canon does not only depend on the list of books that compose it, but also on the way the books are viewed and interpreted. Even if a list of Holy Books was early established within the Church, it does not mean that all the books that composed this list were accepted or were accepted having the same value.

Concerning interpretation of the books, he said in *On Christian Doctrine*, that the right one is based on two steps. The first step depends on the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning of a text and the second step depends on the way of making known the proper meaning of a text.[176] In order to interpret a text, Augustine says that the interpreter should seek the intended meaning of the biblical author. Yet, these steps, he said, do not depend on the interpreter's own strength, but on thoughts that God accords to him.[177] In that sense, he was an adept of analogy. Yet, in Book I, chapter 39, Augustine explains that the written documents are not always needed in someone's life. According to him, someone who dwells in love, faith and hope only needs scripture in order to instruct others.[178] For him, the sense of scripture is twofold, in reference to Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 12:30-31 and Luke 27.

4.1.5. *Conclusion*

It is clear that the concept of canon at this period was varied. The author could have also cited many other church fathers' concepts of canon, as the one of the list of John Chrysostom, which also differs from the one of Athanasius. His one was closer to the Syriac

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174 Jerome, *Epistle* 129.3.
175 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 231.
176 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.1. Digireads.com Publishing, translated by J. J. Shaw.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid, I, 39.

one, rejecting 2 Peter, 2, 3 John, Jude and Revelation.[179] "In the Tenth Century no fewer than six different lists of Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were received in the Greek Church."[180] In the Syrian Church, no less than five or six different versions of the Scriptures existed.[181] Thus, it is clear that the definition of Scriptures and of canon was not frozen until late in the East.

The number of books that composed the Biblical canon was not of first important, and Christians did not see their faith in danger because of the lacking or the adding of one or two books. Moreover, all the books that composed the canons were not attributed the same authority. Additionally, if the canon was of a great importance for the Church Fathers, differences of views upon it were accepted, and discussions about it were done, certainly with the desire of a harmonization of views. Therefore, the canon was not put on a pedestal yet, and differences of views about it were not a reason for excommunication.

4.2. Politics' Influences

4.2.1. *Diocletian's Influence on the Canon*

Politics have played a strong role in the West in the establishment of a harmonized concept of canon. The first political influence over the concept of canon emerged under the reign of Diocletian who published four successive edicts that had the purpose of Christian persecution. The first edict was taken on February 23, 303 and stayed valid until 313. Its goal was to destroy Christian edifices, Scriptures and to revoke Christian officials.[182] Thereby, Christians had to determine which books they had to hide and which books were worth dying for. Moreover, the question of which book was to be considered holy was not anymore reserved to theologians, but every Christian became concerned with this question.

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179 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 214, 215.
180 Ibid, 217.
181 Ibid, 218.
182 M. Christol and D. Nony, *Rome et son Empire* (Paris: Hachette, 2011), 232, 233.

Those who collaborated with the government were called traitors and those who resisted until death were called martyrs. When Constantine began to reign and Christians became free to practice their religion, different movements who condemned traitors began to arise. These movements were the Donatist controversy in Africa and the Melitian schism in Egypt. Donatism began with the election of a certain Caecilian as bishop and its rejection by members of his church.

About seventy Numidians assembled at a synod... They excommunicated Caecilian, in part because of his three consecrators, Felix of Aphthugni, was allegedly a traditor, and they replaced him by a certain Maiorinus. Maiorinus soon died and was succeeded by Donatus of Casae Nigrae - apparently an enemy of Caecilian.[183]

Nevertheless, the Donatists who claimed to be "the pure Church of the martyrs, the one whose sacraments were valid"[184] also had traitors among themselves. Therefore, one could doubt of the integrity and of the reasons of these Numidians to excommunicate Caecilian. The Donatists expected Constantine to "hand over church buildings and church property to them. Constantine, however, backed the Catholics."[185] In 313, 314 and 316, Constantine ordered the establishment of ecclesiastical tribunals in which Caecilian was vindicated.[186] Therefore, Constantine was already charged of both the spiritual and temporal authority in 313. Finally, on August 15, 347, after having persecuted Catholics, Constans (one of Constantine's children) ordered to dissolve the Donatist church and to confiscate its buildings and properties. The recalcitrant to the reunification with the Catholic Church were forced to exile until the reign of Julian, during which the situation reversed.[187]

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183 Winrich Löhr, "Western Christianities," in *Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to C. 600, Vol. II eds.* Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 42.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid, 43.

Therefore, it is in that context of interactions between spirituality and temporality that the first synods and councils that were going to discuss the biblical canon took place.

4.2.2. *Constantine's Influence on the Canon*

The second important event that influenced the concept of canon is the coming to power of Constantine in 313 and the publication of the edit of Milan the same year. Since his conversion in 312 A.D., politics strongly influenced scriptures' interpretations.[188] Constantine literally overthrew the situation since it became dangerous not to be part of the Church under his power.[189] His reign permitted the harmonization of Christian views through the organization of councils, which was one of his highest desires. In fact, he saw in this harmonization a way to impose stability among his kingdom and also the possibility to consolidate his power. In his desire to establish religious unity within Christian communities, he threatened banishment to those who did not conform to the religious rules in place.[190] One of the first elements that encouraged the constitution of a well-defined canon is the request of Constantine to Eusebius to produce fifty copies of the Christian Scriptures.[191] Therefore, Eusebius had to draw the delimitations of what had to be the so-called Scriptures.

Eusebius had the special quality according to Metzger to possess "the instinct for historical research."[192] However, after his historical inquiries and his registration of many individual testimonies concerning Scriptures, Eusebius' thoughts became confused about Scriptures.[193] In his work, he classified Scriptures into three different categories: the

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188 William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, JR., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1993), 36.

189 Jules-Marcel Nicole, *Précis d'Histoire de L'Eglise, 7th ed.* (Nogent-sur-Marne, France: Editions de l'Institut Biblique, 2005), 43.

190 Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," 417, 418.

191 Ibid, 418.

192 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 201.

193 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III. XXV. 1-7.

homologoumena, which were the scriptures for which authority and authenticity were recognized by all the authors he had consulted; the antilegomena, which were familiar to most people, but yet discussed; and finally, the "illegitimate" or "spurious."[194] Therefore, the concept of canon formed by Eusebius was not arbitrary. It is a systematization, result of the study and of the compilation of the different concepts of Scriptures in use within Orthodox Christianity. However, one could wonder if his study was biased or impartial. It is nowadays recognized that it is almost impossible not to be biased when studying theology. In fact, everyone is influenced by his background, culture and thoughts. In that line, von Dobschütz underlines some tensions in Eusebius' work, tensions between the historian and the churchman.[195] According to Metzger, with whom the author agrees, the lack of consistency in the account of Eusebius is a proof of his honesty, since he has not imposed "an overly neat classification."[196]

194 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 203.

195 Ernst von Dobschütz, "The Abandonment of the Canonical Idea*," American Journal of Theology,* XIX (1915), 416-429, mentioned in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 204.

196 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance,* 206.

5. Canon and Catholicity

5.1. Canon and Councils

5.1.1. *Laodicea*

The Council of Laodicea is a small council that took place in Pacatian Phrygia,[197] probably around 360 A.D.. Some scholars recognize it as "the first synodical inventory of the Scriptures."[198] In fact, the canon 60 lists all the books that are today part of our New Testament, except the book of Revelation. However, this canon 60 is sometimes considered to be an addition to the previous canon. Nonetheless, even if the biblical corpus had not been discussed during the council, this canon reflects the books in use at that time. According to Bruce, it reflects more specifically the influence of Athanasius.[199]

5.1.2. *Hippo*

The Council of Hippo (393) is considered by scholars such as Bruce, as the "first church council to lay down the limits of the canon of scripture."[200] This council held up under the authority of Augustine, bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa. Augustine of Hippo is nowadays known under the name of Saint Augustine. Even if the enactments of the Council of Hippo are not anymore extant, they have been repeated in canon 47 of the Third council of Carthage,[201] that was held four years later, and of which we today possess the proceedings. It says: "And further it was resolved that nothing should be read in church under the name of the divine scriptures except the canonical writings. The canonical writings, then, are these: ..."[202]

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[197] William A. Jurgens, *Faith of the Early Fathers, Vol I* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Order of St. Benedict, 1970), 315.

[198] Mark Edwards, "Synods and Councils," in *Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to C. 600, Vol II eds.* Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 372, 373.

[199] F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 210.

[200] Ibid, 232.

[201] Ibid, 232, 233.

[202] Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, series 2, XIV.

5.1.3. *Carthage*

"The Sixth Council of Carthage (419) promulgated in Canon 24 the resolution of the Third Council regarding the canon of scripture, and added a note directing that the resolution be sent to the bishop of Rome (Boniface I) and other bishops."[203]

5.1.4. *Conclusion*

The author follows the idea of Everett Ferguson, that councils played a little role in the closure and constitution of the canon.[204] In fact, "The New Testament canon was never ratified by an "ecumenical" council (i.e. a meeting of bishops from around the Christian world) in the early church.[205] At most, they helped in the uniformity of view within the Roman Empire.

5.2. From Catholicity to Reformation

Catholicity was defined in the fifth century by the triple criterion of Vincentian canon, i.e. what has been believed everywhere, always and by all. However, the triple criterion is very subjective. How can someone know what has always been believed everywhere, always and by all? Christian theology forever undergoes disputations and divisions, not only between the East and the West, but also between members of local churches and congregations. In other words, the triple criterion admits the notion of the older the better and what the majority of people have believed the better. However, if the first element can be defended, since it agrees with the early criteria of canonization, the second cannot. In fact, the notion of democracy upon theological choice is in contradiction

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203 Ibid, 233.

204 Everett Ferguson, "Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon: A survey of Some Recent Studies," in *The Canon Debate,* ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 319.

205 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 241.

with the view of the early church. If it was the case, since Jesus was Jewish, he would never have contradicted theological views of his time.

As we have already seen, the biblical corpus holds a very important place in the early age of Christianity. However, at the end of the Middle Age, Latin liturgy had almost replaced it.[206] At that time, biblical pericope were read in a language that the people did not understand. Added to this practice, rites, ceremonies, stories, legends, beliefs and prayers which were traditions, canonized by use, at the same level as Scriptures.[207] The task of reading and teaching Scriptures belonged to the ecclesiastics. However, their knowledge of the Bible remained insufficient. Some of them did not even possess a complete Bible such as the Vulgate, but an annotated Bible written by Pierre le Mangeur in which the wisdom books do not appear, nor the Prophets, the Epistles or the book of Revelation, but are replaced by the Church fathers' writings.[208] If the Council of Vienna in 1311 advocated the study of oriental languages in principal universities, it seems that it has often been forgotten by ecclesiastics that their Bibles were translations. Therefore, their conclusions were drawn from Latin language digressions.[209]

The traditional method of exegesis in use within the Catholic Church was the exegesis of the fourfold sense, resumed in a sentence attributed to Nicholas of Lyra (1330): "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia."[210] [211] According to De Lubac, the real author of this thought is the Dominican Augustine of Dacia who died in 1282.[212]

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206 Victor Baroni, *La Contre-Réforme devant la Bible: la question biblique;* doctoral thesis (Lausanne: La Concorde, 1943), 31.

207 Ibid, 32.

208 Ibid, 32, 33.

209 Ibid, 33, 34.

210 Elisabeth Parmentier, *L'écriture Vive: Interprétations Chrétiennes de La Bible* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2004), 40.

211 Translation: The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe, Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.

212 Henri de Lubac, *(Ressourcement: Retrieval & Renewal in Catholic Thought)*, vol. 1 of *Medieval Exegesis: the Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 1.

5.2.1. *The Papacy's Influence on the Canon*

The development of the papacy played an important and direct role in the development of the Roman Catholic Church and its concept of canon, but also an important, but indirect role in the constitution of the concept of canon formed by the reformers. The notion of pope was not yet developed during the reign of Constantine. The development of this notion took place between "the death of Stephen (A.D. 257) and the accession of Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 590."[213] "Much of this development was due to the work of Pope Leo I."[214] From this time to 1000 A.D., the papacy's independence continued to be developed.[215] Therefore, the bishop of Rome was not anymore the chief of the Church of Rome, but the chief of the invisible Church, the representative of God on earth. Later, between the 13th and 14th century, the notion of papal infallibility took shape. This exaltation of papal authority led to the centralization of the ecclesiastical powers unto one person. But this power was not only spiritual, but also temporal; therefore, the pope won the possibility to kill Christians who disagreed with him or to name them heretics. It could appear to us that being named heretic is not so important. However, it meant the rejection from the entire society. Therefore, it became easier to unify Christians, theologies and canon's concept. In parallel of the development of papacy, the role of scriptures was relegated to a secondary place.

5.2.2. *The Printer's Influence on the Canon*

The invention of the printer also played an important role in the crystallization of the canon and in the concept of Sola Scriptura. For Luther, this invention was the "summum et postrenum donum, that through which God drives the objectives of the evangelists forward.

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213 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 51.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid, 53.

It is the last flame before the extinction of the world."[216] If Gutenberg did not invent a new list of sacred books or a new concept of canon, he democratized the access to the book and indirectly promoted the version of the Vulgate. "During the remainder of the fifteenth century, 94 editions of the complete Vulgate appeared in all, of which 22 were closely modeled on the Gutenberg Bible."[217] According to Quentin, 438 editions were in use during the sixteenth century.[218] Therefore, it was easier for Luther to preach the Sola Scriptura if it was possible for his listeners to reach one. It is with that objective that he promoted the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages instead of the vehicular one in use. Therefore, the biblical corpus would not be limited anymore to the clergy or to elites, but it would start to be accessible to more and more people. Thus, the notion of interpretation would switch from ecclesial authorities to individuals, especially in Protestantism.

The Roman Catholic Church meanwhile used this invention also to propagate its indulgences and liturgical books. As an example, between 1466 and 1521, 18 editions of the Bible were produced in German, against 85 editions of the missal and 110 the works of Gerson.[219] Yet, it was only the beginning of the spreading of the Bible. The costs and the level of illiteracy prevented a fast diffusion of the Bible.

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216 Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, English ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2005), 159.

217 Ibid.

218 Quentin, *Mémoire cited* in Victor Baroni, *La Contre-Réforme devant la Bible: la question biblique;* doctoral thesis (Lausanne: La Concorde, 1943), 34.

219 Victor Baroni, *La Contre-Réforme devant la Bible: la question biblique;* doctoral thesis, 35.

6. Reformation

6.1. Reasons of the Division

To the question "what was reformation?" Cameron responds that it was the protest of churchmen and scholars, "privileged classes in medieval society, against their own superiors."[220] One of the main reasons of discord between Luther and the Catholic Church was about the notion of humility. In fact, the official church promoted the meritocracy and the salvation through acts and deeds. This notion was well represented through the indulgences. According to Luther, only humble people were worthy to have access to God's grace. In Luther's theology, Christians who reach salvation have to undergo humiliation. This theology is at the opposite of the notion of salvation through good works. For Luther, "humility cannot be a good work".[221] This profound rejection for meritocracy and for indulgences constituted a heresy for the Catholic Church. Even if the goal of Luther was not to create a scission within the Catholic Church, but to correct its drift, the official church excommunicated him and his followers. While Luther was defending his view tooth and nail against indulgences, "traditional concepts of 'authority' came into question."[222] Therefore, the notion of biblical superiority became the heart of the conflicts between Catholicism and Protestants since the reformation,[223] "alongside the theology of salvation."[224]

The Council of Trent which opened on December 13th, 1545 on the convocation of Paul III in reaction to the movement of reformation had to face the issues raised by the reformers. It is on February 8th, 1546 that issues about the concept of canon emerged from the Council. According to Baroni, these issues can be divided in four points:

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220 Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 1.

221 Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the reformation to the present day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 3.

222 Ibid, 136.

223 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 85.

224 Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the reformation to the present day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 136.

I. What are the delimitations of the canon? Reformers did not recognize the apocrypha.

II. What is the place of tradition? Reformers rejected the authority of other books than the Bible.

III. What Bible should be used for study? Reformers advocated for the use of Bibles in their original language instead of Latin translation.

IV. Is the Bible to be interpreted by everyone? Reformers believed that everyone was able to interpret the Bible with the aid of the Holy Spirit.[225]

6.2. Reformers concept of canon

With the birth of Protestantism, the notion of canon took a new shift, however, not only the notion of canon, but also the concepts of pope and authority. According to Bainton, the reformers dethroned the pope on the one hand, and enthroned the Bible on the other hand.[226] Through his rejection of meritocracy, Luther, one of the main figures of reformation, directly rejected papal authority. When in 1518 the Cardinal Cajetan confronted Luther to *Unigenitus*, a bull from Clement VI, he openly rejected it.[227] According to Luther, the authority of one man, i.e. the pope, should never surpass the authority of Scriptures. In that sense, he took the position of the early church fathers concerning authority. Putting the authority of Scriptures above the authority of any man, Luther indirectly accepted the four criterion of the early church for the source of authority. Antiquity, apostolicity, wide spreading and Orthodoxy were the ultimate criterion over the decisions of a single man, or even of the assembly of a recent institution. According to Mathison, the position of Reformers was the one of most of the Early and Medieval Church,

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225 Victor Baroni, *La Contre-Réforme devant la Bible: la question biblique;* doctoral thesis, 94.

226 Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the reformation to the present day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 1.

227 Ibid.

i.e. "that Scripture was the sole source of revelation; that it was the final authoritative norm of doctrine and practice; that it was to be interpreted in and by the Church; and that it was to be interpreted according to the *regula fidei*."[228] However, there is an important difference between the notion of Scriptures of the Early Church and the one of the Reformers. In fact, a frozen canon had been constituted since that time. Therefore, the books that constitute the sole source of doctrine are not necessarily the same any more. Moreover many books were accepted aside from the canon for personal reading. However, Reformation tended to limit this practice.

The fight between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformers emerged from the notion of tradition, but not of tradition that was known in the early church, but of a late notion of tradition in which the pope is the descendent of Peter as of Matthew 16:19. In that sense, Mathison identifies that the conflict was not between scripture and tradition, but between tradition I and tradition II.[229] Therefore, Protestants wanted to come back to the initial notion of tradition, the one in which Scriptures were the ultimate notion of authority over a man. They wanted to come back to the tradition of early times lost by the Roman Catholic Church, crippled in its misguided papal abuses and its notion of "infallibility" denounced by Luther in his *Address to the Nobility* in 1520, where he said about the popes that:

They wish to be the only Masters of the Holy Scriptures, even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of fait; and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, nay, even unnatural ordinances have a place in the canon law, of which, however, there is no present need to speak. For since they think that the Holy Spirit never leaves them, be they never so unlearned and wicked, they make bold to decree whatever they will. And if it were true, where would be the need or use of the Holy Scriptures?[230]

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228 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura,* 85.

229 Ibid, 86.

230 Luther, *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, ed. Charles Michael Jacobs, 73-74.

However, how can scriptures be above the authority of men since they are submitted to interpretation? Here is the point that Catholics raised. According to them, when a difficulty of interpretation appears, or that different opinions arise over a text, an inerrant interpreter, custodian of the tradition and "guarded from error by the Holy Spirit" should assure the right interpretation. This is the role that Catholics believe to be assigned to the pope.[231] On that point, Catholics are right. The notion of Sola Scriptura never can be separated from the notion of interpretation as we have seen earlier. Yet, Protestants are also right when they respond to this point, and when they say that the true sense of Scriptures has "sometimes been grasped by godly, though unlearned, laymen."[232] That means, that the Holy Spirit which for them helps in the interpretation of scriptures, does not act only in ecclesiastics. Education and position in society should not be a criterion to determine the level of inspiration.

However, one could ask if the notion of Sola Scriptura is meaningless, since scriptures are nothing without interpretation. Though revelation dwells in Scriptures, authority does in the interpreter, but a part of the revelation can also dwell in the interpreter. In a sense, the Roman Catholic Church was closer to Paul's thought expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:6 where he said: "For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life."[233] In other words, scriptures are nothing if the interpreter is not filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the official church was wrong when it considered the pope as filled by the Holy Spirit, since some of them lived in debauchery. Nonetheless, Luther was aware that Scriptures needed to be interpreted. In fact, he "appealed to the Spirit to validate and interpret Scripture",[234] when

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231 Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the reformation to the present day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, 1.

232 Ibid, 4.

233 2 Corinthians 3:6, KJV 2011.

234 Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the reformation to the present day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, 5.

"Zwingli added philology, and Calvin adduced plain common sense."[235] Therefore, neither the concept of canon of Luther was wrong, nor the concept of Sola Scriptura. However, this concept should not be understood too simply. Sola Scriptura did not mean for Reformers that the interpreter does not have a role to play, or that the Holy Spirit is not useful anymore, since a canon exists.

Yet another point is important. For Reformers, the official Church "arrogated to itself the power to control, limit, alter, or augment the corpus which it had the right only to preserve and to obey."[236] Therefore, it appears that not only Sola Scriptura was important for reformers, but a delimited and fixed canon to which nothing could be added. Thus, it is possible to argue that the major points of dissension between Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church about the canon were threefold. Firstly, they were due to the limitation of the canon; secondly, to its interpretation; and thirdly, to the importance of tradition (which includes papal authority).

What was the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the reformed churches, since every decision had to be taken on the basis of the biblical corpus? The need for inspiration switched from writing and prophecy to interpretation. From 1519, Luther understood the literal sense of scriptures as the only way to understand the sense of what was sought, while before he saw the spiritual sense somewhere else than in the literal interpretation.[237] Therefore, only intellectual capacities were needed for biblical interpretation for him since that time. However, other reformers such Zwingli or Bucer, underlined the importance of the Spirit in biblical interpretation, seeing a twofold sense of Scripture.[238]

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235 Ibid.
236 Ibid, 136.
237 Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 140.
238 Ibid.

Thus, the problem that came to the reformers was to find an infallible way to interpret scriptures since no man was infallible, and that scripture can be authoritative only if its interpretation is correct. Moreover, the fact that the interpretation of Scriptures switched from ecclesial authorities to individuals could be a danger. According to Cameron, there was always a risk to let barely literate people interpret the Bible themselves. In fact, they could "fly off into realms of fantasy."[239] Nonetheless, is it possible to say that it never happened that an educated person "flew off into realms of fantasy"? According to the Renaissance Humanists, it would not be a risk, since those people [barely literate] would "extract from it only moral exhortations and examples of virtues to follow."[240] Erasmus meanwhile "wrote in the preface to his 1516 New Testament that it was desirable for the uneducated to read the (simple) truths of Scripture in their own language."[241] In that sense, reformation imposed 'filters' to protect inexpert interpreters of the Bible.[242] Moreover, reformers argued that scholarly skills such linguistic or historical were needed to establish a correct interpretation of scriptures, and as a consequence, reformers created institutes to form experts and ministers.[243]

Reformers quickly understood the need of education in the exegetical domain. Driven by their insatiable desire to come back to the origins of Christian faith and beliefs, the reformers did not use the Vulgate, which was a translation of a translation, but the texts in their original language. Reuchlin before them already confronted the Church, showing that the Old Testament in use in the Church is far from the original text in Hebrew and that the Latin version is full of dogmas.[244] Laurent Valla meanwhile demonstrated in

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239 Ibid, 142.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid, 143.
243 Ibid.
244 Victor Baroni, *La Contre-Réforme devant la Bible: la question biblique;* doctoral thesis, 41.

Annotationes that the Vulgate differs from the Greek version of the New Testament.[245] The "missed reformer"[246] Erasmus, was one of the theologians the most committed to the primacy of the texts in the original languages over Latin. Therefore, he declared "In fontibus versetur oportet qui velit esse vere theologus."[247]

6.3. Discussions over the Canonical Corpus

If Luther argued in favor of the Sola Scriptura, the books that he included in it are of first importance for a good comprehension of the concept. In his own translation in German of the New Testament that he published in 1522, he clearly makes a difference between some of the books of this New Testament. In fact, while the books from Matthew to 3 John are numerated from one to twenty-three, four books (Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation) are not, and are separated from the previous ones by a space at the end of the list. This is the same sequence that will be chosen in the edition of Tyndales' New Testament, published in 1526, Coverdale's Bible in 1535 and Matthew's Bible in 1537. However, the Great Bible in 1539 has reverted the order of the book to the one we have nowadays.[248] If Luther did not exclude them from the canonical corpus, yet he made a distinction, developed in the prefaces of those books. Although kind toward the book of Hebrews, he said of it, that it has been written "by an excellent man of learning, [...] who was very well-versed in Scripture."[249] Of James, he said that it is "an epistle of straw," Jude is "superfluous" and Revelation "lacks everything that I hold as apostolic or prophetic."[250] The major reason for him not to recognize those books having the same value as others is that he did not find in them a "clear promotion of Christ", which was for him the principal element for the

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245 Ibid, 42.

246 Erasmus' theology was close of the one of Luther, however he never joined the movement of reformation because he did not want to create a schism.

247 translation: Who wants to be theologian should return to the sources.

248 Luther, cited in F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture,* 246.

249 Ibid, 243.

canonization of a book.[251] Therefore, it appears that the concept of canon was for Luther still open to discussions, or that all the books that compose the canon did not possess the same value for him. By this way, his theology was in line with the theology of Augustine, in the sense that he admitted that all the books of the canon did not possess the same amount of authority, and that some were to be preferred to others. However, these books, which are in a sense, set apart, are still integrated to the canon, because both Augustine and Luther, to a certain extent, submitted their own judgments to the one of their fathers.

6.4. Protestant Concept compared to History

Since God gave his commandments written on tablets to Moses, religious writings forever took an important part of both Jewish and Christian faith. Even if history remains unclear concerning the development of the concept of canon, its delimitations and interpretations, this concept never ceased to undergo evolutions. Thus, the Protestant Orthodox concept that the canon is inspired by God is in line with the theologies of Early Christians and with the one of Jesus himself, even if the notion of authority was not limited in early Christianity to the sole biblical corpus. However, as we have seen, it was neither for Protestants, even if the expression Sola Scriptura might suggest.

Methods of interpretation established by the reformation are not the ones which have been used everywhere, by everyone and at all times, but a brief study of historical interpretations of the biblical corpus shows that exegetical methods never ceased to vary at all times. However, the concept that the canon should forever be normative and should never be changed is not founded on something other than a reaction to the Roman Catholic abuse of authority. For the author, the concept of canon drawn by the reformers is a response to the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church. As the Apologist fathers did in the past, they

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[250] Ibid.

[251] F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture, 244.*

supported that no theology can be drawn out of certain texts, in order to avoid heresies. It is impossible to argue that the biblical canon that Protestant Orthodoxy has inherited from its fathers is complete, perfect and self-sufficient only according to a historical study.

The biblical corpus remains contextualized in a period of time and so has limitations in a world in perpetual evolution. The notion of perfection behind the canon will forever remain on the sole source of faith. However, its evolution tends to demonstrate a certain coherence that goes in the sense of Christians' faith. At least, history does not show that the concept of canon established during reformation is in contradiction with the faith of early Christians. The procedures that lead them to emphasize the need of a written canon were the same that lead the Apologist fathers to emphasize the need for a harmonized corpus of religious books more than a thousand years ago.

CONCLUSION

The biblical corpus, was and still is considered by some people, as if it had always existed. However, neither Jesus nor the apostles argued for the creation of another canon than the Jewish one. The Septuagint and the oral teachings seemed to be sufficient for them. The constitution of a new written canon, complementary to the first one, as we have seen, came out naturally in response to the needs of the Early Church. Later, the concept of this canon has been submitted to evolution, still in order to respond to the needs of the Church. However, the list of books that compose the canon has not changed or has changed very little in almost two thousand years.

Nowadays, Protestants use Jesus sentences when he appeals to the scriptures in John 10: 35 or Matthew 5:18 in order to demonstrate the validity of the New Testament as a Holy single inspired book.[252] In the same way, they use the sayings of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16. However, this exegesis is questionable, because nothing within the New Testament can support the idea that the 27 books that nowadays compose the New Testament are valuable and trustworthy. If 2 Peter 3:16 and the expression "the other Scriptures" shows that Paul's writings were already considered as 'canonical' around 64 C.E.,[253] there is no clear demonstration from God, that Christians should use 66 books as the pillar of faith, more than 65 or 67. Therefore, why not limit the New Testament to 26 or 28 books? Two possible responses can be given to this question. The first possible response is that the canon is not adapted and should be questioned. The second possible response is that Christians should believe God to have acted on the thoughts and the acts of men in order to preserve what he

[252] James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1983), 10, 11.

[253] Edwin A.Blum, "2 Peter," in The *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. XII, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 288.

wanted to communicate to humanity. The difficult discussions that took place over the canonization of certain books is the proof of the implication of the Church fathers concerning this matter. Therefore, one should be at ease to see that the freezing of the canon has not been the result of the decision at one place and by one man, but the result of time and of different events disconnected from one another.

From Luther, the canon is for Protestants "the central criterion for faith", and "the central source for doctrine."[254] While before the birth of Protestantism, scriptures emerged from faith and doctrine. Now the doctrine has to emerge from scriptures. Unconsciously, the biblical canon became considered as if it had always existed. For Protestant Orthodoxy, religion has to be entirely controlled and subservient to Scriptures.[255] Hence, nothing could be done without finding a biblical source, for such or such practice or belief. This concept of canon lead to analyze more and more Scriptures, and underlined the importance of the choice of such or such scripture for the composition of the biblical corpus. The reformers concept of canon was close to the one of the early church. By their concept of canon, they corrected the view of the Roman Catholic Church who came to consider the Church, i.e. a man (the pope) as the infallible source of authority for the constitution of faith. This authority of the church was taken from a misuse of the Bible, based on the single verse of Matthew 16:18. Reformation annihilated in a certain extent the notion of hierarchy established in the church since the establishment of a centralized dominion of a pope, and partially replaced scriptures above the authority of men. However, the authority of men will never completely be discarded from Christian life, since no interpretation is possible without the actions of men. Nonetheless, reformers encouraged an individual and enlightened reading of scriptures in order that a hierarchy does not make abuse of it, and this, through the development of teaching within the Church.

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254 James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority*, 2, 3.

255 Ibid, 11.

By the fact that some cosmological and anthropological writings within the Bible are today obsolete, or the fact that the Biblical corpus does not talk about recent and crucial ethical issues, it is clear that Scriptures are not self-sufficient, since scriptures are conscribed in a certain time and culture. The reason of such limitation is that even if the biblical authors had been inspired for writing, God designed them for direct and practical needs of men.[256] It is here that interpreters and exegetes have to enter into action. In a sense, Protestant Orthodoxy has been right defending the theology of Sola Scriptura and putting it on a pedestal. It was in line with the theology of the first Christians, who used the same procedure to avoid heresies. However, if general truths about Christ, morality, sin and salvation are eternal, at the condition that they be well interpreted, some statements contained in the canon are simple contextualization of both God's servants sayings and of Jesus' teachings for a certain period of time.

In light of the elements that we have seen, some questions should be raised. Since the notion of inspiration has never been believed to be reserved to the first Christians, why should not we give as much credit to new writings as to the ones that compose the New Testament? If the concept of canon has always been through evolution in order to avoid heresies, should we not contribute to make the concept evolve as it did for so many years in order to avoid modern heresies? To these questions, the author responds that the Bible is a sufficient source to respond to any heresies, and that contextualization to actual problems is the role of exegetes. Moreover, would we be safer with a new canon or with better interpretations and exegesis? What are the guarantees that a new or "better" canon would be interpreted by all correctly? It is customary to say that laws are made to be circumvented. Consequently, the author believes that no matter how the canon would be, it would never avoid heresies and dissensions. In fact, dissensions and heresies are not necessarily the result

[256] Bernard L. Ramm, "Scripture as a Theological Concept," Review & Expositor 71 no 2 (Spring 1974): 153.

of a weakness of the canon, but can be the result of the weakness of the interpreter. Yet, to what canon should an exegete refer? To the one of Luther, to the one of Nazianzus, or to the one of Athanasius? To that question, the author would use the reasoning of Augustine and would say that the exegetes should refer to the books that are accepted by the greater number of churches and by those of greater authority. In order to avoid heresies today, the best solution should be that Christians gather together and decide on a harmonization of their exegesis, rather than creating a new canon.

Even if the context in which the biblical books are used today is different from the one in which they have been written down, they are still considered as authoritative and infallible by most Protestants. However, the diversity of interpretations of the scriptures demonstrates that the biblical corpus is not the only and supreme source of authority for Christians. In fact, since their existence, the Scriptures have had to be interpreted and explained, and this, not only in the field of theology. Thus, even if someone claims not to be influenced by anything else other than by the Bible, he is by the people who explain to him what the Bible is or what it says. In the case someone would have discovered and read the Bible by himself, the other source of authority would be himself or the society around him who influenced his way of thinking. In fact, every result of interpretation is dependent on our social and cultural background. Because the authors of the biblical corpus were writing in a specific cultural and social context, as soon as the reader is foreign to this cultural and social context, thus he needs explanations or an intellectual work in order to discover the intended meaning of the writings of the biblical corpus. Therefore, the authority shifts from the text itself, to the interpreter of the text. Moreover, even if a text is explained, a part of the interpretation remains on the person who receives the explanations. Consequently, each Christian is an interpreter of the canon, and that is one of the reasons of the permanent dissensions of views and of comprehension about God within the Church.

For these reasons, and in line with the theology of Erasmus, should it not be taught to Christians to limit their personal readings of the Bible only to simple concepts? The position of the author is that in light of such a complex history of the development of the concept of canon, every Christian should receive a formation in exegetical principles, as every minister of Scriptures should. In fact, the lack of knowledge of some of them may lead to authoritative abuses and to the growth of dissensions within the Church. The Roman Catholic abuses in biblical interpretations may appear in Protestantism if these biblical interpretations are done without a minimum of knowledge and wisdom about exegetical principles. In that sense, reformers have been exemplary and consequently, their initial efforts of teaching should be followed by Ecclesiastics today.

Nevertheless, God always accommodates to human limitations,[257] and as Augustine preached it, are not love for God and our neighbors enough, not to have to use scriptures? Should not the regula fidei prevail over the biblical canon's disputations?

[257] For more development about the theory of accommodation, see Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: an Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008).

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