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A POSTMODERN HISTORY
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON
DURING THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES

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PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

A postmodern approach to the history of the canon of the New Testament describes qualitatively a different but more meaningful history of the canon of the New Testament than the traditional versions for the *present* human condition. It is important to emphasize that the postmodern approach is the language of the technological society, the language of uncertainty and a distrust in the Truth. It also could be considered the language that makes a history of the canon of the New Testament more relevant for the technological society and the postmodern environment.

PREVIEW

Introduction

The writing of a history of the New Testament canon is a responsibility of the Christian community, because the New Testament is integral and fundamental to the Christian life, and it is important to instill confidence in it. Out of necessity a new history of the canon needs to be written whenever the intellectual climate changes. The postindustrial society has introduced a dynamic new intellectual climate.¹ Postmodernism has challenged the throne of rationality that developed out of the Age of Enlightenment. Postmodernists are disillusioned with the ‘most plausible’, the ‘most probably’, or the ‘most rational’ as an absolute criterion. The intellectual framework of postmodern man expects in the writing of a new history of the canon of the New Testament an understanding of the pluralistic society, an understanding of hermeneutics, an understanding of language, and an understanding of a necessary environment of intellectual uncertainty. The history of the New Testament canon should be viewed from a new perspective. A postmodern approach to the New Testament canon is an answer to this need.

This study is composed of two aspects. The first is the subject dimension, the patristic testimonies to the New Testament canon. This is the history aspect. The second is the technique dimension, the postmodern approach to the historical data. This is the philosophy aspect.

¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press, 1984), accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.investigatingtheterror.com/documents/files/Lyotard%20The%20Postmodern%20Condition.pdf>. Lyotard wrote “Our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (3). A post-industrial society is an information-led, service-oriented society that has replaced the industrial-based society; that is, in the postmodern culture, “service-industries, knowledge-production and information-technology” have become more important than manufacturing goods (Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 196-197, 338).

The Subject Dimension

The first component is the subject. This document will present a comprehensive history of the New Testament canon. The writing of a history of the canon should be based mainly on the patristic witnesses to the books of the New Testament. In one way, it can be seen as a continuation of a promise that Eusebius gave to his readers in *Ecclesiastical History*, “in the beginning of this work, we promised to give, when needful, the words of the ancient presbyters and writers of the Church, in which they have declared those traditions which came down to them concerning the canonical books” (5.8.1). This is an honorable task, as shown particularly by the noble and meaningful works of F. F. Bruce, Casper René Gregory, Bruce M. Metzger, George Salmon, Hans von Campenhausen, and Brooke Foss Westcott. Robert M. Grant has even pointed out, “The early history of The New Testament canon was exhaustively investigated during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth.”²

Several terms need to be clearly defined, ‘canon,’ ‘the Church,’ and ‘patristic’. The word ‘canon’ comes from the Greek word *κανών* meaning “rod,” usually referring to a measuring rod. In secular Greek, this word frequently denoted a carpenter’s rule or a builder’s plumb line. By a simple transference of meaning, it came to mean a general rule, a standard, or a norm. For the first three centuries the word was used mostly for “an inner law and binding norm of belief.” Slowly it came to be used in the Church for a definite and specific decision. A predominate usage of the term ‘canon’ in the early church was to use the word for the “rules” or “rulings” decided by Church councils. Canon Law is the body of ecclesiastical rules or laws for the government of the Christian Church. The word developed further to give the meaning of an authoritative list of books that are acknowledged to embody the rule and standard of the

² Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 10.

Christian community.³ In this study, “canon” primarily means an authoritative collection or list of books acknowledged and accepted by the Christian Church. Likewise, a “canonical” book of the New Testament is any book that was included in the canon. This composition will tell the story of ‘why’ the 27 canonical books in the present New Testament are there: the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles assigned to the Apostle Paul, supposedly God’s prime evangelist to the non-Jewish world (Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, Titus, First and Second Timothy, and Philemon), a collection of seven non-Pauline epistles (James, First and Second Peter, First, Second, and Third John, and Jude), and Revelation.

The term ‘the Church’ will be used primarily to refer to the organization that developed into particularly the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. It is recognized that Christianity was not monolithic and took expression in variable ways. It is recognized that there were Christianities in the Christian community that may not have dwelt in the Church or may have dwelt in the Church but did not take the Christian form that became prevalent. While these conditions are recognized, they did not become a major factor in creating the Greek or Latin canon of Scripture, and it should be harmless to say “the Church.”

In the stricter sense the word ‘patristic’ referred to the eminent Christian writers who defended the Christian faith. The most general designation of the word ‘patristic’ can be used to cover all ancient Christian writers. In this composition, the term “patristic” includes all ancient

³ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 289-293; Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament during the First Four Centuries*, 7th ed. (London: MacMillan and Co, 1896), 512-519, <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924029301582#page/n0/mode/2up>, accessed December 29, 2016.

Christian writers up to the middle of the fifth century. In relationship to the New Testament canon the major patristic witnesses are the following:

Irenaeus (ca. 130-200), a bishop of the church at Lyons in France, was the first known patristic writer to make full use of the New Testament. He was one of the first to consider the New Testament as Scripture. His testimony is particularly effective, as he claimed that he had knowledge of the teaching of Jesus' chosen ministers through church leaders associated with or selected by the apostle John.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) was a head of the Catechetical School at Alexandria. Eusebius considered Clement important in revealing the books of the New Testament. Clement was one of the first to title the Christian new Scripture the New Testament.

Tertullian (ca. 160-220) was an influential patristic writer in the North African Church. He is the first well-known Latin Christian writer. He believed that the New Testament is the possession of the Church, to which alone the truth had been handed down by Christ and the Apostles. He was also one of the first, as well as Clement of Alexandria, to title the Christian new Scripture the New Testament.

Origen (ca. 185-254) was a Biblical scholar *par excellence*, not only extremely brilliant but completely honest. He traveled widely and had opportunity to observe how the writings in the churches of Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome were used. He did not create a canon of the New Testament, but he made observations of the local churches' uses of books that claimed to be apostolic. He would refer to writings that had not yet attained universal approval but had proved edifying for certain Christian communities.

Eusebius (ca. 260-340) is deservedly called the "Father of Church History." His *Ecclesiastical History* is the history of the church, chiefly in the East, during the preceding three centuries. One of his concerns was to extract from a prodigious number of authors the use they make of New Testament books. He did not directly create a New Testament canon, but classified certain Christian writings into usage categories.

Jerome (ca. 342-420) was also a scholar unsurpassed in the early Church. One of his greatest achievements was his translation of the Bible into Latin from the original languages. This version became known as the *Vulgate*, the *common* Version, of the Latin Church. Jerome was interested in the books that made claims to be canonical to the Christian community. Also, Jerome provided historical information about many witnesses. The combined works of Jerome and Gennadius, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, is an indispensable history of early Christian witnesses, as it provides biographies of ecclesiastical writers to about the end of the fifth century. In this present work, excerpts from *Lives of Illustrious Men* are often used as background information for particular writers. When this does occur, it should be remembered that Jerome and Gennadius were

writers of the fifth century and thus often expressed in their statements the biases of the fifth century Church.

The compilation of the patristic witnesses produces not only a database (the actual witnesses of patristic writers), but it can tell how often a New Testament document occurred, for what purpose a New Testament document was used, and in what context a New Testament document was cited.⁴

However, the detailed compilation of the patristic witnesses does not provide an important ingredient, a hermeneutics, “how to interpret the history of the New Testament canon.”⁵ A postmodern approach to the canon can seek to understand the Church’s mental perspective of the present New Testament books in the contingency of history from the beginning of the Church to the fifth century. The necessity of hermeneutics is integral and foundational to the postmodern thought.

The Technique Dimension

The second component is the approach to the subject matter. The analysis of the history of the New Testament canon is from a postmodernist understanding of knowledge and reality. The postmodern approach is important, because it provides a platform in which a history, hopefully an exciting history, of the canon of the New Testament can be staged.

There may be an irritating feeling that there is an innate contradiction between postmodern thought and ancient Christian thought. Postmodern thought is a prime language of the postindustrial society. Postmodern thought emphasizes diversity and pluralism and

⁴ Harry Y. Gamble, “The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the Status Quaestionis,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 273-274.

⁵ See John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 15-16; Gamble, “The New Testament Canon,” 273-274.

particularly that there is no capital T in truth. Charles Taylor has called this period of time *A Secular Age*, that is, it is a post-Christian society. It can even be imagined that the third century Christian advocate Tertullian would shout, “What has Heidegger to do with Jerusalem?” It is true that previous histories of the canon of the New Testament use what could be considered a traditional approach. That is, at one time it was with happy enthusiasm that evidences were gathered with the credulous belief that an information edifice could be built that was so solid that the traditional Christian understanding of the New Testament canon could be considered true. Supposedly, if a researcher is completely logical and rational, his research should obtain “the Truth.” Unfortunately in the postindustrial society, this kind of structure has crumbled into disappointment because of the *present* human condition. It is believed that Certainty and Truth cannot be obtained. Truth is not out there somewhere waiting for a tower of Babel to be built so that man can climb up it and grasp the precious treasure of Truth. The most humble mind has as much access to truth as the greatest intellectual mind. Truth is not a problem of the intellect. In the postmodern age, the traditional way that Christians approach this subject is lacking and the technique questioned. At one time, this could have brought horror to the consciousness of the Christian soul, but it need not be so. It is a matter of readjusting. As uncertainty has become recognized as part of the postmodern human condition, the approach to the contingent historical data needs be changed. A tension between Christianity and postmodern thought is understandable. However, it will be shown that Christianity and postmodern thought are not innately contradictory. Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* was emphasizing that the postindustrial society is pluralistic, but one of these options is a viable Christianity.⁶ Thus this composition can be a presentation of the Church’s witnesses during the first five centuries to the New Testament

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 3.

books wrapped in the blanket of uncertainty, or to be more precise wrapped in the postmodern understanding of reality.

The postmodern approach to the history of the New Testament canon in this composition will primarily incorporate Thomas Kuhn's definition of a paradigm, enhanced by Heidegger's hermeneutics as described in his work "The Question concerning Technology."

Kuhn in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* provided the vocabulary of paradigm, paradigm shift, and anomaly with their rich meanings. A paradigm is a hermeneutics (a philosophical or theological interpreter, i.e., the framework to interpret a set of data). The necessity of hermeneutics is the center of the postmodern world. Postmodernists emphasize that the world (even a history of the New Testament canon) must be seen through the assumptions of a hermeneutics or it could be said through a language.⁷ For, there are no so-called uninterpreted raw data. There are no brute facts to be simply and purely seen. There have been many in the postmodern world to explain the same kind of framework, such as Heidegger's enframing, Richard Rorty's final vocabulary, Ludwig Wittgenstein's word games, and Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'phase regime,' but Kuhn's paradigm has an advantage in that it is clearly defined and can easily be mapped to a speculative New Testament canon paradigm.

The structure and rules that govern scientific paradigms as described by Thomas Kuhn will be adapted to describe a New Testament canon paradigm. There are several characteristics of Kuhn's paradigm that should be mentioned. Kuhn was careful to point out that a scientific paradigm is neither right nor wrong. A paradigm is not intended to get closer to the truth.⁸ It is

⁷ Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32-35, Kindle e-book.

⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 161-171, Kindle e-book.

hopefully consistent, but one should not ask about its truthfulness. There is an aspect that can be called truth and sometimes it is called truth, but this is using the term truth in a special way.

Those elements that are consistent within the paradigm could be considered true.⁹ The postmodernists emphasized that there is not an objective exterior structure that everyone can observe as the source of the truth. That is, there are no apodictic or Cartesian “certainties” that can be grasped by a supposedly neutral and autonomous reason. There is not a meta-paradigm or a transcendent structure to which a paradigm can be compared with to validate its truth claims.¹⁰ That is the problem. There is no objective way to determine the relationship of a paradigm to the Truth. There is no such thing as an absolute New Testament canon paradigm (a paradigm that is always applicable in any time period): all paradigms are contingent. A paradigm must always have as its base unproven assumption(s). In the final analysis, one cannot rationally state by the criterion of rationality which paradigm is closer to the truth. In other words, a paradigm is a faith system.

Kuhn emphasized that there can be paradigm shifts (shift from one paradigm to another) as the results of anomalies. Kuhn believed that a scientific paradigm will never explicitly explain all the facts with which one can be confronted.¹¹ In each paradigm used to tell the history of the canon, there may be anomalies that cannot be explained.¹² Anomalies exist but if the paradigm is

⁹ Arthur F. Homes, *Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century: An Essay in Philosophical Methodology* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1969), 200-201; Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

¹⁰ See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 145-146.

¹¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 17-18, 79, 81, 146.

¹² Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 52, 82.

relatively healthy they are not recognized as counterinstances (contradictions).¹³ However, anomalies attack the rules of the unproven assumptions of the paradigm and can seemly contradict the assumptions. Thus, annoying anomalies can subvert an existing scientific paradigm. If the deconstruction is effective and there is an available counter paradigm (with applicable unproven assumptions) to take the place of the ruling paradigm, then there is a paradigm shift and the transition is immediate.¹⁴

In relationship to New Testament paradigms, a paradigm shift is better explained as a product of a change in the unproven assumptions. A New Testament canon paradigm shift is usually initiated by new historical and cultural conditions within the Church. These changes can cause a new set of unproven assumptions. It needs to be asserted again that an old paradigm is never nullified from universal principles or rational principles that are applicable to all paradigms. A paradigm shift is a sign that certain unproven assumptions have been shown to be inadequate: a new interpretation is needed.

Kuhn will be used to describe the general characterizations of a New Testament canon paradigm (in fact, it is the general characterizations of all paradigms). Outside the philosophy of science, paradigms have been adopted across a range of intellectual disciplines.¹⁵ Ian G. Barbour created a religious paradigm.¹⁶ In his book *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, Barbour clearly made the religious paradigm paralleled to the Kuhn's scientific paradigm,

¹³ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 77, 79.

¹⁴ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 77, 150.

¹⁵ Sim, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, 298-299, 333.

¹⁶ Ian Barbour, "The Role of Paradigms," *Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists Series on Philosophy, Psychology, Theology and Journalism* 6, no. 1-2 (2014): 85-97, accessed August 22, 2018, <http://aos.ro/wp-content/anale/FPVol6Nr1-2Art.6.pdf>.

“As in the scientific case, a religious tradition transmits a broad set of metaphysical and methodological assumptions that we can call a paradigm.”¹⁷ He particularly showed that “religious experience is paradigm-dependent,” “religious paradigms are highly resistant to falsification,” and “there are no rules for paradigm choice in religion.”¹⁸ Barbour also mentioned that Hans Küng had applied history paradigms to major changes in the history of Christian thought: the Greek Alexandrian history paradigm, the Latin Augustinian history paradigm, the Medieval Thomistic history paradigm, the Reformation history paradigm, and the Modern-Critical paradigm.¹⁹ There are precedents to create a New Testament canon paradigm in the image of Kuhn’s scientific paradigm.

Even though paradigms are important, it is Heidegger’s hermeneutics that will make the New Testament canon paradigms in this composition different from all other New Testament canon paradigms. It involves a particular vocabulary found in Heidegger’s work “The Question concerning Technology.” Heidegger’s work includes such terms as “revealed,” “revealing,” “concealing,” “brought into the unconcealed,” “concealment,” “unconcealment,” “out of concealment forth into unconcealment,” and similar terms and phrases. A well know drawing made famous by the British cartoonist W. E. Hill will be used to illuminate this influence of Heidegger in the telling of the history of the canon in this composition:

¹⁷ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (Harper SanFrancisco, 1997), 128, Kindle e-book.

¹⁸ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 128.

¹⁹ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 129.



The illustration can be used to describe two possible New Testament canon paradigms of a certain time period. The two paradigms incorporate the same image, metamorphically the patristic witnesses. There may be many ways of interpreting this reality. Plurality is a necessary result of the postindustrial society. Observing the illustration, if one is asked to see an old woman, a paradigm appears which reveals only an old woman. If one is asked to see a young woman, a paradigm appears which reveals only a young woman. The young woman and the old woman cannot be observed at the same time. Neither is superior in its understanding of the image. Neither is higher in terms of content. In this example, the only difference in the paradigms is the search request. The difference is not in the data being seen, but the way the data is revealed. The search request forms a particular interpretation. Each interpretation has a different set of unproven assumptions (there is either an old woman or a young woman in the illustration). Thus a paradigm provides a certain mode of disclosive looking. Some things (or aspects of things) can be revealed only if others are withdrawn into the unrevealed. Heidegger would say that in each paradigm there is the revealed aspect and the unrevealed aspect. Thus a

paradigm is not only a revealing, but just as importantly a concealing in the same happening.²⁰

The postmodernist Jacques Derrida explained that the paradigm chosen is made the center or the ‘presence’.²¹ The paradigm that is centered is the revealing paradigm, the other becomes unrevealed. When a paradigm becomes the center, it excludes and marginalizes that which is not revealed. It is the assumptions of the privileged paradigm that does the revealing, not the data. A complete revealing (no concealing) is no longer interpretative: it is the state of immediacy.²² In this state, Truth is purely seen.

Heidegger’s revealing and concealing can and in some cases will be used to resolve several major concerns in the discussion of the New Testament canon. Heidegger’s vocabulary has an advantage in that it avoids a reliance on indirect indications such as ‘echoes’, ‘allusions’, ‘reminiscences’, ‘traces’, and ‘clear traces’ to bridge the unrevealed. The bridging can introduce interesting discussions and has, but argument from silence (from the unrevealed) is avoided. One of the central concerns of this composition is to see the openness and the revealing of historical data in a Heideggerian way. The data should be in the open, and the unrevealed should be left unrevealed. In other words, there will be no revealing of the concealing.

Heidegger’s vocabulary also has an advantage in that it avoids cause and effect scenarios. For example, often Marcion and Montanism are considered central items of discussion in a history of the New Testament canon. Schneemelcher claimed that one of the important problems

²⁰ Alan G. Padgett and Steve Wilkens, *Christianity and Western Thought: Journey to Postmodernity in the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 80.

²¹ Jim Powell, *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Danburg, CT: For Beginners LLC, 1998), 100; Sim, *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, 316, 366.

²² Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, 20; James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 63-86, Kindle e-book.

discussed in the histories of the New Testament canon is the assessment of the position of Marcion (d. ca. 160) in the history of the canon.²³ The significance of Marcion for the history of the New Testament is routinely debated, for Marcion made the first known collection of authoritative Christian writings. On account of this extraordinary activity, Marcion may be portrayed as an extraordinary actor in the story of the canon of the New Testament. The scholar J. G. Eichhorn in his *Introduction to the New Testament* (1804-1812) was the first to attribute to Marcion the stimulus to collect a Christian New Testament.²⁴ Adolph Harnack and von Campenhausen even argued that Marcion should be considered the major factor in the creation of the Christian New Testament.²⁵ This discussion will not be addressed, for this is not a revealing proposition, but a debate of the unrevealed (unless Marcion's influence proposition is stamped as an unproven assumption). Instead it will be shown that the dialogue with Marcionism and Gnosticism "revealed" only the creation of an apostolic Scripture. Von Campenhausen argued that Montanism (an apocalyptic movement in the latter half of the second century) was instrumental in the exclusion of books into the New Testament.²⁶ Von Campenhausen's speculation will not be addressed, for this discussion is also in the concealment (unless the Montanist influence proposition is stamped as an unproven assumption).²⁷ Montanism only had a

²³ Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "General Introduction," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 16.

²⁴ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 17-18.

²⁵ Schneemelcher "General Introduction," 23; See Adolph Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament: And the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson (n.p.: Williams and Norgate, 1925), 30-31, 33, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/harnack/origin_nt.i.html, accessed September 24, 2018, Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1972), 148-149.

²⁶ Von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, 221.

²⁷ See David G. Dunbar, "The Biblical Canon," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 338.

revealing of the book of Revelation.²⁸ The only cause that will be considered is what Michel Foucault called “pastoral power.”²⁹ There was inherent in the Christian ministry a pastoral, shepherd-like, and caring ministry. The sacred objective of the Christian pastorate was to guide and nurture each member in the Christian community to attain God’s salvation. It was in response to this unique ministry that the present New Testament was created.

Thomas Kuhn’s definition of a paradigm and Heidegger’s hermeneutics of revealing and concealing will be used to portray a history of paradigms and the paradigm shifts from one paradigm to another. According to postmodernism, there are many ways this could be accomplished, but whatever scheme is selected, they would all show that the Christian Church’s hermeneutics of the books of the present New Testament changed over a period of time. In this composition, a history of the canon of the New Testament is a portrayal of five sequential hermeneutics; the Jewish Scripture Paradigm (ca. 30 CE to ca. 70 CE), the Dominical Scripture Paradigm (ca. 70 CE to ca. 135 CE), the Gospels Paradigm (ca. 135 CE to ca. 180 CE), the Apostolic Scripture Paradigm (ca. 180 CE to ca. 325 CE), and the Canonical Scripture Paradigm (ca. 325 CE to 451 CE). Each paradigm portrays the way that the Church looked at the books of the present New Testament during a particular period of time. A postmodern history of the canon is strongly related to a history of interpretations.³⁰ Postmodern understanding of reality will be expanded more fully in this composition of a history of the New Testament canon.

The difference between the traditional way of presenting the New Testament canon and the postmodern way might be compared to the evaluative contract between the music of Buddy

²⁸ Schneemelcher, “General Introduction,” 24.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 117-190.

³⁰ See Gamble, “The New Testament Canon,” 273-274.

Holly and the Crickets and the music of Bill Haley and his Comets. The traditional way is to *prove* that the music of Buddy Holly and the Crickets is better than the music of Bill Haley and his Comets (or vice versa). This means that a massive dense document would have to be produced in which the artists' styles would be compared, their voices would be compared, and their guitar skills would be compared. There would be a complete quantitative analysis, with the conclusion that the *most rational* analysis proves that the music of Buddy Holly and the Crickets is better than the music of Bill Haley and his Comets. The traditionalists would be ready to debate the validity of this proposition. The traditional model has a firm belief in the rationality of man. There is only one way. The postmodern approach is completely different. The story telling itself is more important. The postmodern way is to *show* (not prove) that the music of Buddy Holly and the Crickets is better than the music of Bill Haley and his Comets. First, Bill Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock' and 'Shake Rattle and Roll' are played, and then Buddy Holly's 'That'll Be the Day' and 'Peggy Sue' are played. If the demonstration does not convince, that is okay (for certainty is not available in this postmodern world), but for some the demonstration will seem self-evident or "it explains everything." The distinction between the two approaches is between proving and showing, certainty and uncertainty.

Observations

The conclusion likely to be drawn or obtained from this composition is that the postmodern approach to the history of the canon of the New Testament describes qualitatively a different but more meaningful history of the canon than the traditional versions for the *present* human condition. The key phrase is "for the *present* human condition." It is hoped that a postmodern interface with the ancient Christian documents (the modern with the ancient) will instill a new or a fresh insight of these remarkable documents and just as importantly a greater

appreciation for what the Church has done in the flow of history. It is important to reemphasize that the postmodern approach is the language of the postindustrial society, the language of uncertainty and a distrust in the Truth. It also could be considered the language that makes a history of the canon of the New Testament more relevant for the postindustrial society and the postmodern environment.

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

The Jewish Scripture Paradigm (ca. 30 CE to ca. 70 CE)

Christianity has gained by the issue; for it is an unspeakable advantage that the books of the New Testament are now felt to be organically united with the lives of the Apostles—that they are recognized as living monuments, reared in the midst of struggles within and without by men who had seen Christ, stamped with character of their age, and inscribed with the dialect which they spoke.

—Brooke Foss Westcott

The first history paradigm is called the Jewish Scripture Paradigm. Ante-Nicene literature often calls the period of the Jewish Scripture Paradigm “the Age of the Apostles.” Normally a study of a paradigm would entail a three-step analysis. The first step defines the assumptions of the paradigm. By definition all paradigms have assumptions. They are the revealers. The Jewish Scripture Paradigm has unique assumptions. The assumptions of the Jewish Scripture Paradigm are especially important as they are shared with all the New Testament canon paradigms, for they are the resultants of another paradigm. The second step is a detailed compilation of the patristic witnesses to the books of the present New Testament during the period of time of the paradigm being discussed. It contains the revealing/concealing of the books of the present New Testament according to the assumptions. The third step is an analysis narrated by a Heideggerian-like structure called “the essence of the New Testament.” The purpose of the structure is to generalize and to correlate the revealing of books of the present New Testament during each New Testament canon paradigm. Its goal is the complete telling of the New Testament canon. The essence of the New Testament ties all the New Testament canon paradigms together to tell a story, one that has influenced humanity for centuries.

The Jewish Scripture Paradigm, ideally, should be told in this format, but it has a concealing aspect that cannot be overcome. It does not have patristic witnesses to the books of

the present New Testament. It is all too early. Thus the story of the Jewish Scripture Paradigm will be told first by revealing its assumptions (with a postmodern explanation of the importance of assumptions), and then a revealing through the essence of the New Testament (with a fuller definition of the essence of the New Testament).

Assumptions

The heart of a New Testament canon paradigm is the throbbing of non-proving, but intractable and intransigent, assumptions. Postmodern thinkers consider this a fundamental construct of paradigms. There are no apodictic certainties that can be grasped by a supposedly neutral and autonomous reason. In every paradigm there must be assumptions that cannot be proven.¹ The postmodernist Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* described this as a ‘problem of legitimation’.² A paradigm cannot legitimize itself. There is no way one can legitimize or justify one’s paradigm against another, for a hermeneutic paradigm has no authorization of legitimization other than itself,³ which to those outside the paradigm means it has no legitimization. Any sense of legitimization is seen only through the performativity of the paradigm. Does the paradigm perform as it was designed to do so? Is it sufficient to understand a knowledge domain? If the paradigm works for the community using the paradigm, it will continue to exist.

It is the assumptions that determine the hermeneutics of a paradigm. Assumptions activate revealings and concealings. Rorty’s ironic paradigm makes the assumption that no

¹ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), loc 510-520, Kindle e-book.

² Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 8; See James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 65-69, Kindle e-book.

³ Powell, *Postmodernism for Beginners*, 25.