A CANONICAL APPROACH TO THE POSITION OF HEBREWS
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

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Introduction

The task of theological interpretation focuses upon a reading of Scripture that reflects the inspired and authoritative nature of the written Word of God by incorporating a multiplicity of techniques and strategies that seek to produce theology representative of the biblical text’s intention which ultimately finds its proper placement within the life of the church. Among these approaches, the aspect of canon plays an indispensable role for successfully engaging theological interpretation since the primary and supreme object of study is the Bible itself.

When affirming canon, one clear observation is the assertion that the biblical canon is the locus of Scripture. In other words, Christian Scripture is wholly contained in the two testaments which together form one canon. Biblical interpreters regardless of their exegetical and/or theological methods must acknowledge that the Word of God is only accessible by means of entrance into the canon. This is the case even when specific works are dealt with in isolation from their canonical context since the church receives

1Referring upon early church biblical interpretation, Treier sees its key elements as the fundamental paradigm for all contemporary and future discussions regarding the enterprise of the theological interpretation of Scripture. Treier observes that for ancient biblical interpreters such as Augustine this task was entirely theological. In sum, “Christians read the Bible as Scripture, authoritative as God’s Word for faith and life; thus, to interpret Scripture was to encounter God.” Modern day endeavors to recover this practice seek to regain a “churchly reading of the Bible.” As noted above, Treier shows that this “churchly reading” includes a multiplicity of approaches such as exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. See Treier’s final chapter, “In the End, God” for a survey of how each of these disciplines contributes to the theological interpretation of Scripture. Daniel J. Treier, Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 13-14.
and recognizes Scripture as a canonical whole. If Christian Scripture exists in a canonical form, then proper theological interpretation ought to take into account the character of the biblical witness as canon in its analysis of the written Word of God. Moreover, the extent in which the canon serves as a stimulus and/or presupposition for theological interpretation is dependent upon one’s definition of the concept. Nevertheless, neglecting the role of canon as crucial to the interpretive task of Scripture fails to honor the nature of Scripture as it has been providentially preserved and handed down to the church by the Holy Spirit throughout Christian history.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and analyze the position of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament canon in order to demonstrate its interpretive canonical function specifically in its association with the Pauline corpus. This aim will be accomplished in a three-step process. First, a general overview of approaches to the formation of the NT canon will be assessed in order to provide a particular definition of “canon” and to provide a framework for understanding the history of the development of the canon. Second, this paper will review the history of Hebrews’ inclusion in the NT canon in order to evince canonical intentionality in its final form. And third, based upon the letter’s canonical intentionality, this paper will seek to illumine the canonical interpretive possibilities of Hebrews specifically as a part of the Pauline corpus, and generally, in its location within the NT canon as a whole.

A Canonical Approach to the Formation of the NT Canon

Studies in the formation of the NT canon have tended to take the shape of historical reconstruction at the expense of giving due credit to the theological qualities at
work in its generation. In this sense, it seems that the notion that the church did not create the canon is uttered as lip service since in practice the results are otherwise. When one approaches the development of the NT giving history primacy over theological causality, the cause-effect model will undoubtedly reflect an interpretation of canon history that sets a later date to its closing as well as diminishing the ability of the concept of canon to have much, if any at all, hermeneutical and interpretive influence for understanding the NT as canon. In other words, if “canon” is not first a theological claim, then it is unlikely that it will able to exert theological force over the form and scope of its components.

In a recent article, Stephen Dempster categorizes the plethora of scholars on canon into two wings. On the right is the minority view which consists of a small canon which he tags as “maximalism”. On the left is the majority view which promotes a large canon and is understood as “minimalism”. According to Dempster, the basic critiques can be summarized as follows: Minimalists accuse the right of “over-reading” the evidence of canon history by applying later views for the purpose of giving a rationale for canon formation. In essence, the left suggests that the maximalist view is in many ways

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3This seems to be the case, for instance, in studies such as Gamble’s analysis of the NT canon where the NT writings’ status are as “Scripture” is wholly dependent upon their perceived and enforced utility by the church as opposed to their reception based upon the internal nature of the writings. The NT writings become “Scripture” when they are used as “Scripture”. Gamble’s use of language demonstrates that despite his attempt to do justice to the theological and authoritative character of Scripture, his historical method of evaluation inevitably leads him to provide a description of canon history where the canon is the product of the church. Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Meaning and Making* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 18-19.

anachronistic. On the other hand, maximalists charge the left with “under-reading” the evidence which restricts itself to constituting the canon based upon an explicit list of a closed collection. The irony of Dempster’s categories lies in that he identifies the proponents of a wider canon as minimalists whereas those of a smaller canon are labeled as maximalists. This decision, however, is based upon how each group handles the evidence. By analyzing the nomenclature he has chosen, it is obvious which group Dempster prefers, namely, the maximalist viewpoint which carries with it the connotation of one who makes the most of the available research while the opposing position treats it minimally.

When seeking to appropriate the canonical function of Hebrews in the NT, the methodology and conclusions of this paper fall under the maximalist heading. Regardless of the accusation of “over-reading” the elements of the canon’s development, as Dempster notes, the left cannot sustain its critique against the right by stating that they are guilty of applying a “confessional” reading to the evidence, thereby reading invalid presuppositions back into the canon’s history. “No-confession” is a confession; hence, the left have in the same sense a pre-understanding of the evidence which guides their research. What then remains is to identify what is the appropriate methodology for assessing the formation of the NT canon.

A theological understanding of the canon must be recovered. Scholarship

\[\text{Ibid., 49.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Dempster writes, “What is perfectly clear is that everyone has assumptions and that the idea of neutrality in this age of postmodernity is a pipe dream. There is not only the 'tyranny of canonical assumptions,' but also the tyranny of non-canonical assumptions (italics original).” Ibid., 68.}\]
which removes the study of canon formation from the Christian faith inevitably strips the Bible of its theological nature.\textsuperscript{8} When this approach is applied, Scripture as canon becomes a formal rather than a material principle. Thus it is no surprise that minimalists view the attempts from maximalists to engage canon study from the starting point of theological analysis as anachronistic. From their perspective, theological qualifications of the nature of Scripture and canon are designations made in response to its formation. Formal principles are crafted by the church after the canon’s closure and are then applied to the document as if it they were original to it.\textsuperscript{9}

For theologians on the right like Herman Ridderbos, however, the development of the canon is viewed as an anticipated process and product of the material authority of the NT writings as a part of God’s redemptive history.\textsuperscript{10} Directly opposed to the minimalist position, Ridderbos argues for an \textit{a priori} of faith when seeking to know on what grounds the NT exists as canon. To do otherwise, Ridderbos warns that the church


\textsuperscript{9}For instance, Gamble states that the canonical NT writings are not in any way “recognizably unique” in comparison to other early Christian literature. Gamble, \textit{The New Testament Canon}, 13.

\textsuperscript{10}One of the most beneficial and illuminating insights from Ridderbos’ study on the NT canon is the critique of the traditional outlook on its development which narrowly places the formation of the NT into the history of the church whereas its proper context is in the history of redemption. He does not deny that the canon process belongs to the history of the church in part. Although, if one restricts his study of its development to this period exclusively, then Ridderbos remarks that it is no wonder that the “New Testament Scripture appears to come into its own only after the great period of revelation, . . .” The proper historical framework for understanding the nature of the Christian canon that does justice to all that the word “canon” entails is the history of redemption, precisely due to the fact that the Bible’s primary function is a theological one, not historical (Ridderbos, \textit{Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures}, 12-13). The fact that Ridderbos’ scholarly contribution to this field of study cannot be found referenced or drawn upon in three of the more recent and prominent sources on the NT canon from Harry Y. Gamble, Lee M. McDonald, and Craig D. Allert reveals the extreme methodological bias and unfortunate theological diminishment at work in these authors not only in terms of reading canon evidence, but ultimately with respect to how the Bible itself is approached and revered in general.
“would ultimately be basing its faith on the results of historical investigation.\textsuperscript{11} Approaches that elevate history over faith or a theological understanding result in externally guaranteeing the canonicity of the NT by means of an \textit{a posteriori} method.\textsuperscript{12} In this case, the maker of the canon is the church rather than the Holy Spirit and the divine-apostolic character of Scripture.

Reflecting upon the history of canon studies in introductions to the NT, Childs observes that the result of the reign of the historical-critical method in the nineteenth and twentieth century was that “a broad consensus emerged . . . in which the New Testament canon was regarded as a post-apostolic development without any real significance for understanding the shaping of the New Testament itself.”\textsuperscript{13} The post-apostolic stance on the formation of the NT canon does not take into account the theological manner in which the historical communities received, arranged, and situated themselves under the NT writings. Contrarily, Childs sees a “canonical consciousness” at work in the NT’s development from the inception of the Christian church.\textsuperscript{14} Childs expands his use of “canon” to include the entire canonization process alongside its meaning as a norm and a collection which he terms “canonization proper”.\textsuperscript{15} In this way, theological and historical analysis work together in evaluating the formation of the canon as an intricately woven process that cannot neatly separate the reality of the historical factors from the

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13}Childs, \textit{The New Testament as Canon}, 12.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 21, 25.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 25.
theological elements that are both undeniably present in the canon’s development.

Ultimately, the historicist’s approach falls short insofar as it does not fully represent the church’s theological claim that a “special reading” of the Bible is necessary for the sake of hearing the Word of God and determining his will for each and every generation of those who stand in the history of the Christian faith.\(^\text{16}\)

More specifically, with respect to interpreting Hebrews’ canonical function in the NT, the theological impetus for the canon’s formation is crucial. In his article mentioned above, Dempster offers a resolution to the canon debate. He suggests that new evidence should be sought after from within the biblical texts themselves in terms of composition, redaction criticism, and intertextuality. Employing these methods, as Dempster urges, will manifest the details of the process from which “authoritative literature is spliced together to form part of a coherent unity in which it now becomes part of an authoritative collection in which the books are now read together.”\(^\text{17}\) In addition, John Sailhamer offers a three-part model for interpreting the final form of a biblical book: composition, canonization, and consolidation.\(^\text{18}\) In his description of the Hebrew Bible, Sailhamer shows that composition occurred at each stage of the canonical process until a text reached its final form.\(^\text{19}\) The value of studying the compositional

\(^{16}\)Ibid., 37. Childs notes that the irony of his canonical approach is that it is actually the more historical one since his method seeks to explain the development of the NT canon by taking into account the theological significance of the sacred writings and their shaping by the tradents (43). In other words, the fallacy of giving priority to historical analysis of the canon is that of neglecting that the theological dimensions of the canon are in fact a part of its history. This concept agrees with Ridderbos’ assessments.

\(^{17}\)Dempster, “Canons on the Right and Canons on the Left,” 71.


\(^{19}\)Ibid., 31.
elements at work in the OT and NT is that they tend to reveal decisions produced by theological stances from within a particular community. Understanding the theological impact of the formation of the canon as an occurrence at its very beginning silences the left from accusing maximalists of being anachronistic, and it prevents the right from failing to interact at a critical level with the history of the canon’s composition.

Both Dempster and Sailhamer discuss the issues of composition and canonical shaping within the context of the OT canon. The NT, however, has not received equal attention from scholars in the discipline of the canonical approach, notwithstanding Child’s landmark contribution, *The New Testament as Canon*. Christopher Seitz acknowledges this deficiency in his recent publication *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*. He laments that traditionally “the OT is read canonically” while “the NT is read according to historical reconstruction.” For Seitz, a theological understanding of the NT canon must recognize the influence of the formation and character of the OT canon. Supremacy cannot be allotted to sequential-historical analysis of the canon’s history. According to Seitz, this approach is deeply flawed because it fails to understand how the Law and the Prophets functioned as the basic grammar of the Word of God.

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21In agreement with Seitz, Charles Hill submits that the initiation of the formation of the NT canon cannot be attributed to external forces. Rather, the impetus for its inauguration and development comes from the “the Scriptures of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, or rather, the God who gave them.” Charles E. Hill, “The New Testament Canon: Deconstructio ad Absurdum?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009): 107. Included within the basic grammar of the Law and the Prophets, Hill adds that the messianic element at work in the OT expects a written record of God’s divine revelation for the new covenant. He suggests, therefore, that one should “speak of the ‘inevitability’ of the appearance of a corpus of NT Scripture (Ibid., 112).” See a more in depth treatment of this viewpoint in Charles E. Hill, “God’s Speech in These Last Days: The New Testament Canon as an Eschatological Phenomenon,” In *Resurrection and Eschatology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.* , eds. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008),
The Law and the Prophets served as a stable and authoritative witness for God’s people, even prior to the canon’s closing; its subsequent affect on the development of the NT was not solely in terms of content, but extended to its canonical shaping and form.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, the same canonical intentionality that exists in the OT can be expected to be present in the NT.

The concept of canon as a norm, a collection, and as the entire process of canonization which includes the features of composition and canonical shaping is the methodological pre-understanding of the NT’s development that will be applied to the history of Hebrews’ placement in the canon, particularly in the Pauline corpus. Moreover, Seitz’s thesis of the OT’s material and formal influence on the formation of the NT canon will serve as the theological and historical framework through which the evidence of Hebrews’ positioning in the Pauline collection will be interpreted. A theological understanding of the canon will allow canonical intentionality to be discernible and canonical functionality to be demonstrable.

**The Migration and Association of Hebrews in the NT Canon**

Hebrews’ placement in the canon deserves analysis since its arrangement in the final form of the NT has not always been the norm. If one wishes to propose that Hebrews following Philemon in the Pauline corpus has a canonical function, then an assessment of its past ordering must be given in order to determine whether or not there is any intentionality to its migration culminating in its final position within Paul’s

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\textsuperscript{22} Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*, 33-35.
collection. Once the historical survey has been conducted, its findings will be evaluated in order to determine the existence of canonical intentionality in its placement so that the validity of pursuing its canonical functionality may be granted.

**Hebrews’ History of Placement in the Canon**

Although there are various slots which Hebrews has filled in the NT canon, this section will focus its investigation upon its three main positions: (1) after Romans; (2) between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy; and (3) after Philemon.

In the earliest manuscripts containing Hebrews it appears following Romans. The Chesty-Beatty Papyrus (P46) dated ca. AD 200 includes the earliest extant manuscripts of Paul’s corpus. Romans takes the initial position in P46 with Hebrews coming immediately afterward.\(^{23}\) William H. P. Hatch observes that the longest letters were grouped together: Romans, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Corinthians. On the other hand, Hatch does not discredit the notion that in addition to length, Romans appeared first due to its importance while Hebrews was ranked second also as a result of its size and its doctrinal weight. Although there are later instances of Hebrews occurring after other letters, what is clear is that it maintained a prominent position in Paul’s writings at a very early date.\(^{24}\)

In nine uncial manuscripts and in at least sixty minuscule codices, Hebrews occurs between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy.\(^{25}\) It divides the letters to the churches

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\(^{23}\)William H. P. Hatch, “The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament,” *Harvard Theological Review* 29 (1936): 133. Since its publication, Hatch’s extensive survey has served as the primary authoritative source for of the history of Hebrews’ position in the NT canon. This section of the paper draws heavily upon his findings.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 134-35. Hatch reveals minor instances where Hebrews follows 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians (134-36).

\(^{25}\)Ibid., 136.
from the letters to individuals. This instance occurs in the Bohairic versions of the Greek NT, Greek manuscripts, and various patristic writers.\textsuperscript{26} In Egypt, the Alexandrian tradition influenced this placement.\textsuperscript{27} Both the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus include Hebrews after 2 Thessalonians. For the east, this order was initially the norm.

The third major placement of Hebrews ends the Pauline corpus after Philemon in four uncial manuscripts and in the majority of minuscules.\textsuperscript{28} The first appearances of Hebrews after Philemon date back to the fourth century. This primarily occurred in the western traditions who previously had not considered Hebrews as canonical or Pauline. However, upon its inclusion, the western church added it to Paul’s collection at the end rather than placing it in the midst of his writings like the east.\textsuperscript{29} Once Hebrews was accepted as canonical in the west, it remained fixed in this position. For example, Jerome was familiar with Greek codices where Hebrews set between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy; however, in honor of the tradition of his western Christian audience, he placed Hebrews after Philemon in the Vulgate.\textsuperscript{30} Likewise, Erasmus in the sixteenth century utilized later Byzantine manuscripts that represented the solidification of this placement; thus, in his edition of the Greek NT, Hebrews appears subsequent to Philemon at the end.

\textsuperscript{26}In his Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle (AD 367)—which is the first list to assign the scope of the NT canon to the traditional twenty-seven writings—Athanasius locates Hebrews between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy. See Bruce M. Metzger, \textit{The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 211-12.

\textsuperscript{27}Hatch, “The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament,” 140.

\textsuperscript{28}Hatch notes that approximately 329 minuscule manuscripts contain Hebrews immediately following Philemon. This reflects the Anthiochan-Byzantine textual tradition. Ibid., 143.

\textsuperscript{29}Gamble, \textit{The New Testament Canon}, 52.

\textsuperscript{30}Hatch, “The Position of Hebrews in the NT Canon,” 139-40.
of the Pauline collection.\textsuperscript{31} Following Erasmus’ monumental publication of the Greek NT, Hebrews’ position after Philemon remained unaltered in the western church and is traceable as the letter’s standard placement throughout the succeeding centuries up to the ordering of the NT in modern day printed English Bibles.\textsuperscript{32}

**Canonical Intentionality and Hebrew’s Association with the Pauline Corpus**

The idea of canonical intentionality is meant to manifest the existence of purposeful canonical shaping and arrangement in the NT. It is the opposite of describing Hebrews’ migration and stabilization in the NT canon as a historical accident. Seitz applies a similar thesis to understanding the division of the Prophets in the OT, particularly the Book of the Twelve.\textsuperscript{33} Seitz views canon formation and association as an achievement and/or accomplishment.\textsuperscript{34} In opposition to the traditional method of historical reconstruction, he believes that undue weight has been given to the necessity of closure for constituting a “canon”.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, Seitz sees that the typical distinction between “Scripture” and “canon” misunderstands a proper definition of canon insofar as it fails to comprehend the fixed authority of the Law and the Prophets and their formative affect on the development of the NT.\textsuperscript{36} Seitz posits the notion of speaking of an “open


\textsuperscript{34}Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*, 32.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 30.
canon” as a valid answer to the query that asks what is the nature of Scripture when it functions as more than edifying Christian literature before the canon is closed.37 The idea of an “open canon” signifies the process of Scripture’s canon formation without dismissing its canonical authority and neglecting to regard its developing intertextual associations. The binding force is the character of all Scripture as the Word of God, that is, divine revelation (2 Tim 3:16-17). This divine quality transmits to Scripture its canonical status prior to its eventual stabilization and closing.38 It is in this light that the history of Hebrews’ positioning in NT canon formation should be interpreted.

In its position following Romans, the most immediate observation is that from the earliest manuscript evidence Hebrews was not circulated individually, but rather it stood as an integral part of Paul’s collection. As mentioned above, Hatch does not discount length and theological importance as cause for Hebrew’s prominent placement in the Pauline corpus in P46.39 Further explanation comes from Clement of Alexandria who believed Paul to be its original author while Luke penned the Greek version.40 This reveals early on that the Alexandrian tradition viewed Hebrews’ authorship as Pauline. However, towards the end of the third century, Origen shows signs that the east had uncertainties of Paul as the author of Hebrews. He rejects Pauline authorship based upon

37Ibid., 52-53.

38Combating the consensus for a late canon, Seitz writes, “Early ‘canon formation’ means that it is possible to conceive of canon and scriptural authority in phases prior to closure. The very fact that the canon of the Christian church entails a foundational expansion in the form of two testaments means that the respective scriptures of prophet (OT) and apostle (NT) have gathered to themselves an early canonical authority that involves association and stability alongside dynamic and eschatological elements.” Ibid., 54.


literary and stylistic issues. Nevertheless, as Charles P. Anderson notes, Origen sees the epistle as Pauline.\textsuperscript{41} Furthermore, in accordance with tradition, Anderson points out that Origen claims that Hebrews was “handed down” as Paul’s by the church for good reason which alludes to Childs’ “canonical consciousness,” especially when the church was beginning to grant anonymity to the letter’s authorship.\textsuperscript{42}

One is able to discern canonical intentionality even at this stage of the NT’s formation for two main reasons. First, Paul’s writings were circulated and handed down at an early date as a canonical collection of which Hebrew’s was a central part. Second, Origen’s observations reveal his justification of Hebrews to remain understood as Pauline and to retain its association with his corpus regardless of the uncertainty surrounding the identity of its author. His defense of Hebrews is not an argument for its inclusion into the canon; instead, he labors to explain the reasoning behind its pre-existing presence in Paul’s collection.\textsuperscript{43}

The second position where Hebrews appears between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy proves to an even greater extent the canonical intentionality in its placement. In four of the oldest codices of the canon, dating as early as the fourth century, Hebrews appears directly in the middle of the Pauline corpus, dividing the letters to the churches from the letters to the individuals.\textsuperscript{44} Once again, it is to be remembered that at this

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 431.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 432.
\textsuperscript{44}They are Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus. David Trobisch, Paul’s Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 6-7.
moment in Hebrew’s canon history its authorship is disputed; however, the east continued to pass it down in association with Paul.

Specifics regarding explicit warrants for setting Hebrews between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy are not to be found. Nonetheless, what is clear is that an editor intentionally shifted Hebrews’ placement at an earlier date than the four codices mentioned since their uniformity points to an archetype edition. Unlike the letter’s previous position after Romans, formal features such as length cannot be identified as the motivation for this new location. That Hebrews in this setting occupies a pivotal division demonstrates an understood association existing not only between Hebrews and Paul, but also alludes to an expected effect of reading Hebrews as a bridge between the two major sections of Paul’s writings.

In *The First Edition of the New Testament*, David Trobisch sees the later position of Hebrews following Philemon as a distortion of the original canonical edition of the NT. At the end of his provocative study, Trobisch boldly recommends that the sequence of Hebrews after 2 Thessalonians should be recovered as the correct tradition

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45 From a compositional approach, Trobisch provides an interesting insight that the version of Hebrews found in the earliest manuscripts of Paul’s collection where it appears after 2 Thessalonians is not the original document because of signs of editorial additions. He believes the letter’s subscription in 13:22-25 to be from Paul in order to provide authenticity to Hebrews as well as to support its inclusion in his corpus. David Trobisch, “Das Rätsel um die Verfasserschaft des Hebräerbriefes und die Entdeckung eines echten Paulustextes,” in *In Dubio pro Deo*, ed. David Trobisch (Heidelberg: Wiss. Theol. Seminar, 1993), 322-23.

46 Trobisch offers two assumptions in support of arguing for an archetype for Paul’s corpus: (1) the uniformity of the arrangement of the manuscript evidence and (2) the unlikelihood that two or more editors would order their editions of Paul’s letters in the same way in ignorance of one another’s sequence. Trobisch, *Paul’s Letter Collection*, 24.

for printing modern Christian Bibles. According to Seitz’s concept of an “open canon,” however, this transition is viewed as a witness to the church’s ongoing attempt to discern the epistle’s proper association within the Pauline corpus. It seems that once the church formed a consensus on the ambiguity of Hebrews’ authorship, it loosed the letter from its initial position(s) near the beginning of the collection which can be attributed mainly to structural decisions. With emphasis on the “canonical” in canonical intentionality, these type of editorial changes and migrations in arrangement are made with a canonical consciousness, and therefore, are theologically significant. This idea contributes to the perspective of Seitz as he sees canon formation as an “achievement” of association. The final form is an accomplishment which bears implications for all Christian readers and interpreters who seek to situate themselves under the divine authority of the revealed and written Word of God located in the biblical canon.

The third major position and final form of Hebrews in the NT canon after Philemon began in the west in the latter half of the fourth century. Initially, Rome did not regard Hebrews as Pauline. The epistle does not appear in either the Muratorian fragment or Marcion’s canon. In addition, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Gaius rejected it as Pauline. Moreover, Hans von Campenhausen sees the anti-Montanism of the west as partly responsible for its exclusion due to the rigorism of Hebrews. Towards the end of the

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48 Ibid., 103.

49 As Seitz describes, “The labor and the methods of association are prodigious and effective; there is nothing casual or happenstance about it.” Seitz, The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets, 91.

50 Anderson, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Pauline Letter Collection,” 433-34.

fourth century, however, the west recognized Hebrews as canonical and attached it to the end of the Pauline corpus. Hatch notes that in the Old Latin codices and in the Vulgate Hebrews follows Philemon, and it retains this place permanently in the western church. This sequence also became the norm in the east in the Byzantine textual tradition as early as the fourth century. As mentioned above, Hebrews’ position after Philemon was solidified in the Byzantine tradition which caused it to become the norm. Bruce Metzger shares that from the sixth century to the time of the printing press in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the Byzantine text was accepted as the primary authoritative form of the NT.

In light of these dynamics in Hebrews’ positioning, what conclusions can be made regarding the canonical intentionality in its final form? James W. Thompson interprets the church’s placement of Hebrews at the end of Paul’s letters and prior to the General Epistles as a sign of the ambiguity of Hebrews’ relationship to the Pauline collection. In this sense, the “intentionality” at work in its location, from Thompson’s view, would be the church’s act of concession of finally granting the letter a canonical status and conveniently attaching it to Paul’s writings nonetheless. What this stance fails to grasp is the significance that the west, who neglected Hebrews as canonical until the

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54 James W. Thompson, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Pauline Legacy,” Restoration Quarterly 47 (2005): 198. Thompson is arguing against the view that ascribes the origin of Hebrews to a Pauline school. His conclusions not only seek to debunk this theory, but also distance Hebrews in general from any explicit and intentional canonical relationship to Paul. According to Thompson, their differences outweigh their similarities, and their similarities are a consequence of growing uniformity between the two theological movements they represent (205-06).
fourth century—while the east had already firmly established the letter as Pauline, scriptural, and canonical—still chose to associate Hebrews with Paul’s corpus. In addition, not only did the church make the conscious decision to include it in the Pauline collection, but also they exerted a deliberate effort to assign it a new and meaningful position. That Hebrews, once finding acceptance in the west, was not then circulated individually or with a different set of writings manifests the canonical intentionality in its placement after Philemon.

As with Hebrews’ setting between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy, no explicit or direct evidence exists as to why Hebrews was placed at the end of the Pauline corpus. The closest instance of clear evidence linking Hebrews to Paul is the indirect hint at a mutual relationship with Timothy in Hebrews 13:23 in the epistle’s conclusion. Childs understands the author of Hebrews to be a co-worker with Timothy which would cause readers from a canonical hermeneutic to associate Hebrews with Paul, especially since the letter was being circulated with Paul’s letters.55 This verse may have contributed to Rome’s decision to add Hebrews to the end of Paul’s writings, however, nothing more than conjecture can be adduced. Nevertheless, it seems more apparent that the mentioning of Timothy in Hebrews’ conclusion would have a greater impact in setting it before 1 Timothy. Either way, Childs is right when reflecting on the indirect link of Hebrews to Paul found in the conclusion that the basic canonical question should be, “What is one to

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55 Childs, The New Testament as Canon, 417. Thompson disagrees with Childs’ vision of how Hebrews 13:22-25 encourages an intended canonical relationship between the epistle and the Pauline collection. He admits that the reference to Timothy in 13:23 is the most explicit evidence for considering an implied canonical association; nonetheless, he says that nothing more should be made of this verse other than that the author of Hebrews and Paul share the same acquaintance in their growing, first-century Christian community (Thompson, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Pauline Legacy,” 205). In light of Dempster’s categories, Thompson’s handling of this textual evidence is an example of a minimalist approach.
make of Hebrews’ relationship to Paul?” Therefore, if the evidence cannot be sufficiently explained by means of formal features, historical causes, and/or intertextual cross-referencing (i.e. Heb 13:22-25), then one must consider that the church’s decision to preserve Hebrews in a specific position in Paul’s collection, while under the knowledge of its non-Pauline authorship, was based upon material intentions, that is, theological canonical reasoning grounded on the letter’s content. This premise then leads the discussion into the process of attempting to demonstrate the canonical functionality of Hebrews in the NT canon permitted by its canonical intentionality and meaningful association with the Pauline corpus.

The Canonical Functionality of Hebrews

The demonstration of Hebrews’ canonical functionality follows from its theological and interpretive role as the end component of Paul’s letter collection. This method seems to be the best means of making sense of the canonical intentionality discernible in Hebrews’ final position. The achievement of Hebrews’ association with Paul cannot simply be explained by historical observation insofar as the case is clear that the early church included and arranged writings into the canon motivated by reasons and factors beyond merely issues such as authorship and usage.56 That canonical intentionality can be discerned in Hebrews’ association with Paul in a manner that is not sufficiently evaluated through application of the historical method, it seems apparent then

56Even Gamble recognizes the validity of intentional canonical arrangement and shaping in the formation of the NT. Regarding the fourfold Gospel, he acknowledges that in almost all of the manuscript evidence of the canonical NT, the Gospels are placed first. He asserts that their priority cannot be due to literary chronology. Instead, the cause of this tradition is due to the “preeminent importance of their subject, Jesus, who was the focus of the church’s faith, its point of origin and persistent reference. Moreover, the tradition of his words and deeds had served from the beginning as the primary authority of the church’s faith.” Gamble, The New Testament Canon, 78.
that Hebrews retained a place among Paul’s corpus most likely on theological grounds. It is from this point that an attempt will be made to understand the possibilities in which Hebrews may have been intended to be read in its canonical setting both in its association with Paul and in its relationship with the NT as a whole.

The Significance of Hebrews’ Ambiguity

Much uncertainty has surrounded the origins and details of Hebrews. The ability to assign a fixed historical setting to the epistle with a definite author, audience, and occasion has proved to be an insurmountable task for biblical interpreters as it pertains to developing a consensus view on any of these areas. This reality tends to leave the relationship of Hebrews to the NT in obscurity. The letter becomes isolated from its canonical context, and therefore, its interpretive value in association with Paul’s corpus is eclipsed. From a canonical approach, however, the ambiguity of Hebrews on these matters actually enables the letter to function in viable relationship to Paul’s collection and in coordination with the General Epistles. The significance of Hebrews’ ambiguity that supports its canonical functionality can be shown from two critical areas of investigation: its audience/occasion and its title.

First, the traditional view believes that Hebrews was addressed to Jewish-Christians who were battling relapse into Judaism. The second major position is that of Gentiles who had a high regard for the OT, but interpreted much it only metaphorically. Yet Childs takes the critical work in defense these proposed resolutions as evidence of the broadness of Hebrews’ interest, revealing that the author did not pen it in a

“vacuum”. The identity of the audience plays into the purpose behind the letter’s creation. However, in this case, due to the vagueness of its setting, Hebrews’ addressees are best determined by the apparent purpose of its content rather than applying the typical method of illuminating the overarching message of a work based upon the context of its recipients. Because the ambiguity of Hebrews forces the interpreter to treat it in this framework, the letter’s theology eliminates either of these two options from reigning. Childs rejects the traditional view since nowhere in the epistle does the author engage contemporary Judaism. The ultimate cause for concern appears to be the temptation to abandon the Christian confession rather than to avoid relapse into Judaism.59

Since the exact historical milieu of Hebrews remains elusive, the interpreter must take his cues from the letter itself for identifying its function in the canon. The particularity of Paul’s writings is juxtaposed with the vagueness of Hebrews’. As Childs has shown, the central concern is not guarding Jewish converts from returning to Judaism, but rather the primary focus is that of expounding the relationship between the old and new covenants as a word of exhortation to his readers to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Heb 10:23, ESV).”60 In other words, based upon analysis of the main theological interest of Hebrews’ content, it seems that the best possible identification for its intended recipients in its canonical

58 Ibid., 413. Childs goes on to infer, “Yet no one key to interpret the letter has been produced, nor has it been possible to interpret the content of the letter successfully apart from its own unique theological message.”


setting would be any Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, who as a participant in the history of God’s redemption has stake in understanding the relationship between the old and new covenants in light of Jesus Christ. This way of perceiving the canonical functionality of Hebrews in relation to Paul, especially in its placement at the end of his corpus, would aid canonical readers from whatever background on how to view the continuity and discontinuity of the two covenants through its own substantial and broad treatment which, on the other hand, Paul deals with in a much more particular and polemical fashion.

Second, the title “to the Hebrews” is a sign of canonical shaping which serves to impart to Hebrews a specific function in association with the Pauline corpus and within the entire NT canon. In all extant manuscripts Hebrews has the same title. This feature must also be interpreted in light of the fact that Hebrews is always included in the Pauline collection. Trobisch argues that this points to a deliberate attempt by the editor to place Hebrews under the apostolic authority of Paul. The formulation of Hebrews’ title follows the format of Paul’s letters which are all named according to their addressees. In contrast, the titles of the General Epistles reveal the names of their authors.61

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61 Trobisch, Paul’s Letter Collection, 25-26. Robert Wall differs from Trobisch and Childs insofar as he understands the purpose of the title to link Hebrews more so with the General Epistles rather than Paul. Because the early church perceived Paul as the missionary to the Gentiles, Walls interprets “to the Hebrews” to refer specifically to the Jewish-Christian mission with which the General Epistles are directly concerned. Robert W. Wall, “The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon in the New Testament,” in The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism, Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemico, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 76 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 179-80. Wall’s interpretation, however, falls on two grounds that have already been highlighted in this paper. First, his view does not see a deliberate distinction between the wording of the names of Paul’s letter collection and the General Epistles. If in fact Hebrews’ title is a later addition, then following the format of Paul’s writings, the name is intended to create a definite association between Hebrews and Paul. Second, Wall’s suggestions do not reflect the fact that for the entirety of Hebrews’ canon history the letter was always circulated with the Pauline corpus. There is no known evidence of it ever being grouped with the General Epistles.
Moreover, Childs illumines the possible canonical function of Hebrews’ title by arguing that it is not meant to allude to a specific historical referent such as Hebrew speaking Jewish Christians.\(^{62}\) Instead, the title generalizes the audience by simply referring to anyone who remains situated under the old covenant and is struggling to reconcile the two dispensations which have both been spoken into existence by the same Word of God. Even for those who are converts but not adherents to the old covenant, “to the Hebrews” broadens the implied addressee to those who are now “spiritual Hebrews” by means of the new birth as taught by Paul (Rom 9:1-8). Thus, in light of these features, the canonical functionality of Hebrews is that at the end of the Pauline corpus, it extensively deals with an overarching question looming over Paul’s writings and presents it to a broader Christian audience that is not bound by time or ethnicity.

**Hebrews and Hermeneutics**

According to Graham Hughes in his seminal work, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, the writer of Hebrews has worked through the subject of “hermeneutics” more than any other NT writer.\(^{63}\) The context for this assertion is the magnitude of references, citations, allusions, and interpretation of the OT present in Hebrews. Beyond all other issues pertaining to Hebrews’ theology and message, the relationship between

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\(^{62}\) Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 414. This would also be the case in light of the consensus that the title was not original to the document but was added most likely early in the second century. Although it is left to speculation, by this point in Christian history, it seems that the motivation to name the letter “to the Hebrews” would be determined by a more holistic context that takes into account the integrity and exposition of the Christian faith for a broader canonical readership rather than being directed by a narrowly defined group of Jewish-Christians who retained their mother-tongue, which Childs notes, had faded out of importance by the second century.

the old and new covenants dominates the letter’s overall aim.\textsuperscript{64} If Hebrews does in fact have a canonical function in association with the Pauline corpus, then its reason for doing so is most likely discernible by means of the central focus and goal of the letter itself.\textsuperscript{65} Typically, past attempts to investigate the writer of Hebrews’ practice of interpreting the OT in light of the NT have revolved around in depth explanation of exegetical methods and interpretive strategies. Hughes, however, offers a different approach for estimating the significance of Hebrews for hermeneutics, that is, the author’s theology of revelation and Scripture.

Hughes takes the letter’s prologue (Heb 1:1-4) as the foundational text for understanding the manner in which the author expounds the continuity and discontinuity of the two covenants.\textsuperscript{66} The same God has spoken in the prophets and now definitively in the Son. This concept is the basic formula for the author’s doctrine of revelation. He does not suggest that one must extract the writer’s particular exegetical method in order to treat this interrelationship in the same manner as he does; rather, determining and aligning oneself with Hebrews’ doctrine of the Word of God will enable the reader to rightly interpret all Scripture as “Christian” Scripture.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64}This point takes into account the uniqueness and great importance of Hebrews’ portrait of Jesus Christ as the great high priest. Even here, the problem of the two covenants decreed by the One Speaking God holds preeminence insofar as it through this lens that the author of Hebrews performs the theological interpretation of Scripture (under the stimulus and/or presupposition of canon) and works out his form of high Christology.

\textsuperscript{65}Despite Barnabas Lindars’ justified position that no direct literary links exist between Hebrews and the rest of the NT, he does not pursue the letter’s canonical and theological relationship to Paul and the NT any further than its sharing in the common Christian confession of faith which is the underlying bond for the entire NT canon. Barnabas Lindars, \textit{The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews}, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 119.

\textsuperscript{66}Hughes, \textit{Hebrews and Hermeneutics}, 5.

\textsuperscript{67}Ken Schenck provides a helpful analogy of the way that the author of Hebrews uses OT
The second major factor of Hebrews’ doctrine of revelation is that its theology of the Word of God is rooted in a longitudinal “revelation history.” The nature of the Word of God in this respect keeps Christians, so to speak, on both sides of the covenants on the same continuum. This aspect causes Hughes then to ask the key hermeneutical question in Hebrews: “[H]ow in one context can the scriptures of the Old Testament function so immediately as a vehicle for the Word of God while in other contexts the covenant which those same scriptures enshrine is unceremoniously dismissed as outmoded?” However, as Hughes shows, the Word of God transcends God’s redemptive history on an eschatological trajectory. It is not, therefore, as if the OT is regarded as obsolete in terms of its status as Scripture (i.e. the Word of God), but rather that its cultus context is rendered outmoded. The writer of Hebrews finds himself ...

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68 Hughes, Hebrews and Hermeneutics, 6.

69 Ibid., 35.

70 In Sacred Space, Marie Isaacs notes that Hebrews’ understanding of the OT as inspired Scripture to be self-evident. There is no formal defense of its divine nature, but it is assumed and employed. That God is the supreme author of the scriptures allows the author of Hebrews to freely attribute its citations to God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or the human authors. But what is certain is that for this writer “Judaism’s Scriptures are no dead letter, but a living word of God.” Marie E. Isaacs, Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 73 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 68. Furthermore, Isaacs makes an interesting distinction stating that Hebrews’ doctrine of Scripture is determined by its character as the Word of God whereas its hermeneutics is directed by its Christological confession. These two qualities validate the inspiration of the OT along the same lines as that of the New. They both serve as witnesses to Jesus Christ (69). In opposition to the view promoted by Hughes, Schenck, and Isaacs, Dan O. Via sees the OT Word as inefficual due to historical distance and contemporary unfamiliarity; therefore, the author brings his Christological presuppositions to bear upon the OT and describes Christ’s identity by means of culturally-relevant images and metaphors. Dan O. Via, “The Letter to the Hebrews: Word of God and
reconciling the old form of the Word of God with that of the new and final divine address in the Son.\textsuperscript{71} The dialectic occurs not when one employs a specific exegetical method on the text; instead, it happens when movement is made from the past to the present form of God’s Word, thereby discerning and listening to “what the scriptures have to say about themselves.”\textsuperscript{72}

The primary canonical functionality of Hebrews then would appear to pertain to its ability to serve as a hermeneutical framework for addressing the problem of the relationship between the old and new covenants which was not an issue that Paul didactically exhausted in his writings.\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, in canonical perspective, Childs keenly observes that throughout the maturation of the NT canon, this issue would have developed into more of a scriptural concern with respect to how future generations of Christian readers interpreted the continuity and discontinuity between the OT and NT.\textsuperscript{74}

From these observations two main elements of Hebrews’ interpretive canonical association with Paul are discernible. First, in response to those who still remain

\textsuperscript{71}In addition, much like how the canonical approach of Childs understands “canon” in the sense of how faith-communities caused the time-conditioned writings of the Bible to be made available to future generations of readers. So also it seems that the author of Hebrews, who recognizes the OT as Christian Scripture and as the Word of God, is about interpreting it in a way that proves its transcendence and allows it to serve as an encouraging word to the his contemporary community of faith, demonstrating its eternal relevance and indispensable contribution to Christology and the Christian life.

\textsuperscript{72}Hughes, \textit{Hebrews and Hermeneutics}, 56.

\textsuperscript{73}Childs, \textit{The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul}, 254-55.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 250.
uncertain regarding the continuing application of the cultic and ceremonial aspects in the old covenant after reading Paul’s exposition of the gospel, then Hebrews positioned as the end of his collection offers a lengthy, substantial treatment of this subject that is complimentary to Paul’s theology, yet retains its own discrete voice.75 Second, Hebrews possibly was meant to function as a canonical corrective for rightly reading Paul’s understanding of the OT as Christian Scripture. If by the end of his corpus there remained any doubt as to the Hebrew Bible’s eternal character as the Word of God, the author of Hebrews labors to demonstrate that both covenants have been decreed by the One God.76

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75 One might respond that Paul offers a sufficient amount of teaching regarding the obsoleteness of the old covenant that would not leave the reader with any doubt as to its fundamental incompatibility with the new covenant. While this point is granted, the canonical function of Hebrews in relation to Paul would be handling the material beyond the scope within which Paul explores it. In other words, Paul’s explanation of the relationships between the old and new covenants in light of Christ is mainly articulated through judicial motifs and terminology such as “justification,” “righteousness,” and “freedom from the Law and slavery to sin”. Paul’s treatment of this dialectic is primarily conceptual and in general whereas Hebrews exposits this relationship with extended particularity, interacting with a multiplicity of specific examples and passages from the OT. Thus, the author of Hebrews addresses explicitly and directly the status of theological issues such as the sacrificial atonement, the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood, cultic/ceremonial practices, living by faith, and the proper interpretation of the types and figures set up in the old covenant that were meant to point to the coming Messiah and the eternal kingdom that is to come. The closest that Paul comes to a detailed engagement with the problems presented in the old covenant is probably Colossians 2:16-23. Condensed in this passage is a brief excursus pertaining to those elements of the old covenant that have now become obsolete in light of Christ’s inauguration of the new covenant. Much like how the author sets up his typological contrasts in Hebrews, Paul writes, “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (ESV; cf. Heb 8:5; 10:1).”

76 In The Church’s Guide to Reading Paul, Childs understands Acts and Hebrews as the framers of the Pauline corpus while Romans and the Pastoral Letters were shaped to be its introduction and end. Indeed, Childs’ insights into both of these possible canonical realities are noteworthy; however, it seems that a more accurate conception of Hebrews’ interpretive role in Paul’s letters would be that which Childs assigns to the Pastorals. Admitting the persuasiveness of Childs’ argument, two observations are presented for consideration. First, in light of Hebrews’ canon history, unlike Acts, the epistle always filled a slot in Paul’s letter collection. No manuscript evidence seems to point to Acts circulating as a core component to the Pauline corpus as does Hebrews. Moreover, neither does textual tradition reveal Hebrews ever being grouped as a part of Acts and the General Epistles. That Acts serves as an opening to Paul’s writing seems a fair assessment since it eventually separated from the General Epistles and preceded the Pauline letters. Second, reflecting upon the prescript of Romans, Hebrews as the end of Paul’s corpus may be dealing with a theological issue greater than the assurance of a Pauline legacy and the character of a pastoral ministry. Although it would require substantial exegetical analysis, there appears to be possible cross references between Romans 1:1-6 and Hebrews 1:1-4 such as the comparison between Paul’s “gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son,”
What is obsolete is not the OT, but rather the old covenant. Hebrews, therefore, warns new covenant Christians to be careful not to diminish or to dismiss the OT’s nature and relevance as the true and abiding Word of God.

**Hebrews as a Canonical Coordinate**

On a broader scope, the canonical functionality of Hebrews in relation to the NT as whole can be understood as its ability to serve as a “canonical coordinate”. Wall proffers this stance as an interpretation of the letter’s final position in the Pauline corpus. As a coordinate, Hebrews connects the Pauline collection with the General Epistles and brings them into what he calls a “canonical conversation”. As mentioned above, Wall understands the referent in the title “to the Hebrews” to be a specific community of Jewish-Christians. Although this is unlikely, what is certain is that Hebrews’ title and the letter’s overall goal read in its canonical setting allow “Hebrews” to refer to either Jewish or Gentile Christians. As a canonical coordinate then, the canonical conversation which Hebrews would create between the two groupings of apostolic letters would be linking the Gentile mission of Paul with the Jewish-Christian mission of the General Epistles. Converts and readers of both collections would share the same need to grapple with the overarching issue of what to make of the old form of God’s dealing with his

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and Hebrews’ “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” In conclusion, to speak of Hebrews simply as a canonical framer does seem to do justice to the fact that Hebrews inherently belongs to the Pauline corpus whereas Acts does not.


78 Ibid.

79 See n. 60.
people testified to in OT Scripture in view of the work of Jesus Christ.

Wall’s suggestion of Hebrews’ canonical function as a canonical coordinate may actually be more akin to the effect of a contextual reading of Hebrews’ position in the NT canon. Although Wall sees the epistle’s placement at the end of the Pauline corpus as a sign of the early church’s ambivalence towards it, thereby impelling them to use it “to look both ways” between Paul’s letters and the General Epistles, Hebrews itself seems to have more of a deliberate relationship with Paul rather than the General Epistles. The best evidence for seeing Hebrews as an intentional bridge into the General Epistles is the canon history of the Catholic letter collection which formerly followed Acts and preceded Paul’s writings. Nevertheless, the benefit of a canonical approach is that a contextual reading of Hebrews as a canonical coordinate is in fact a result of its canonical status. In other words, since Hebrews does in fact fall before the General Epistles in the canon, then it remains for the church to discern the canonical effect of reading Hebrews as an undeniable divider and/or connector between the two major letter collections of the NT.

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80 Sailhamer defines contextuality as “the notion of the effect on meaning of the relative position of a biblical book within a prescribed order of reading.” John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 213. Contextuality is not attempting to determine canonical intentionality of the arrangement of the canonical order. This concept is relevant to the discussion of Hebrews as a canonical coordinate since this function is most likely due to the effect of reading the context of Hebrews situated between Paul and the General Epistles rather than trying to identify the intention behind placing it prior to James. As a brief note, contextuality is not what this thesis is arguing in the previous discussions besides this section regarding the canonical functionality of the Hebrews since it is believed that the canonical intentionality of Hebrews’ position is what enables the biblical interpreter to discern how it was meant to function at the end of the Pauline corpus.


82 Childs, *The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul*, 255.
Conclusion

The focus of this paper is to discern the canonical intentionality and to demonstrate the canonical functionality of Hebrews’ position in the NT canon, particularly in its association with the Pauline corpus. Since the exact origins of Hebrews remains hidden, the interpreter must work primarily from the letter itself in order to determine the church’s reasoning for circulating it with Paul’s letters and for placing it in its specific canonical setting, especially when it may have been more convenient to situate it elsewhere in the NT.

The task of theological interpretation is an indispensable and unavoidable aid for the reader of Hebrews in its canonical context for the purpose of understanding its interpretive role as a part of the Pauline corpus; in addition, this enterprise is only made possible within the bounds of a particular conception of “canon” which gives priority to a theological understanding of the term. This paper has only touched the surface of applying a canonical approach to Hebrews’ position in the NT canon; therefore, its findings should not be considered as exhaustive. Rather, it is best viewed as the groundwork for more in depth (e.g. exegetical analysis) and future endeavors on this matter.
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