

# Did Matthew Know He was Writing Scripture?<sup>1</sup>

## Part 1

*Roland Deines*

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Beitrag geht der Frage nach ob es historisch vorstellbar ist, dass Matthäus sein Evangelium von Anfang an mit der Absicht geschrieben hat, dass seine Adressaten dasselbe als (Heilige) Schrift verstehen sollten. Ausgangspunkt für diese Überlegung ist ein Verständnis von (Heiligen) Schriften, das diese primär als Kondensat von Offenbarung versteht. Dazu wird gezeigt, dass in den biblischen Texten das vorrangige Offenbarungsgeschehen dem Bericht darüber vorausliegt (vgl. Mt 16,16-17). Weiter wird darauf hingewiesen, dass Texte im Altertum nur überdauern konnten, wenn sich

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### SUMMARY

The article seeks to demonstrate the possibility that the Gospel of Matthew was written from the outset with the intention to function as Scripture for those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God revealed by the Father to his people (Mt 16:16-17). The argument is based on an understanding of Scripture as deposit of divine revelation. It first demonstrates that God's revelatory activity, according to the biblical texts, precedes the written

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### RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur cherche à démontrer qu'il est possible que l'Évangile de Matthieu ait été rédigé dès l'origine avec l'intention qu'il fonctionne comme Écriture pour ceux qui croient en Jésus comme le Fils de Dieu révélé par le Père à son peuple (Mt 16.16-17). Il se fonde sur une conception qui voit dans l'Écriture un dépôt de la révélation divine. Il montre tout d'abord que, d'après les textes bibliques, l'activité par laquelle Dieu communique sa révélation précède sa mise par écrit pour en conserver la mémoire. Il note ensuite que, dans l'anti-

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irgendjemand für ihren Erhalt einsetzte und dafür bereit war, Zeit, Energie und Kosten aufzuwenden. Religiöse Texte wurden jedoch nur dann Teil der akzeptierten Tradition einer Gemeinschaft, nachdem und weil sie ihre Fähigkeit bewiesen hatten, auch unabhängig von ihrem primären historischen Kontext das Verhältnis zu Gott hilfreich gestalten zu können. Bevor dieses Verständnis von Offenbarung und Schriftwerdung im 2. Teil an zwei Beispielen demonstriert wird, wird der verbreitete Topos vom „Aufhören des prophetischen Geistes“ in der Zeit Esras und seine irreführende Funktion in der Frage nach dem Abschluss des (alttestamentlichen) Kanons diskutiert.

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memorisation of it. It then refers to the fact that texts and traditions were not preserved in antiquity unless there was a group willing to invest time, energy and costs to do so. In the case of religious texts they became part of a spiritual legacy only if they proved their ability to facilitate meaningful encounters with God beyond their primary historical circumstances. Before approaching the case studies in Part 2 the concept of the 'cessation of the Spirit' in the time of Ezra is discussed as misleading if used as an argument for the closing of the canon.

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quité, les textes et les traditions n'étaient conservées que s'il se trouvait un groupe de personnes ayant la volonté d'investir du temps et de l'énergie dans cette entreprise et d'en supporter le coût. En particulier, les textes religieux n'entraient dans un patrimoine spirituel que s'ils manifestaient leur capacité à contribuer à des rencontres avec Dieu pleines de sens, au-delà des circonstances historiques qui les avaient fait naître. L'auteur soutient qu'il est erroné de s'appuyer sur l'affirmation de « la cessation de l'œuvre de l'Esprit » à partir de l'époque d'Esdras pour en déduire l'idée de la clôture du canon. Dans sa seconde partie, il se livre ensuite à des études de cas.

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## Introduction

The main question asked here is whether it is possible that the New Testament authors thought of themselves as authors of Scripture, or at least as authors of texts they expected to be read alongside, and in the manner of, the existing Jewish Scriptures of their time. This question arises from the simple observation that Matthew's Gospel is clearly written in a biblical style. But does this mean that he intended to write Scripture? I am inclined to give – tentatively – a positive answer even if Lee Martin MacDonald, one of the leading contributors to the current lively and productive debate on Scripture and canonisation,<sup>2</sup> leaves little room for such a possibility among the New Testament authors.<sup>3</sup> I would even suggest that Matthew was not alone among his contemporaries in being aware that he was going to write what could and should be regarded as Scripture, nor was he the first to write in this way. 1 Maccabees (in contrast to 2 Maccabees), certain texts from Qumran and the many apocalyptic and prophetic writings related to the Hasmonean Revolt or the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 exhibit the same biblical style that allows for these newly written books to be placed alongside the existing Holy Scriptures. Is it conceivable, therefore, to imagine someone sitting down, collecting his sources and memories, and after sharpening his quill, to start writing with the intention – or at least the hope – that what he produces will be regarded as Holy Scripture by others, not just at that time but for centuries to come? Should such an endeavour not start with 'a sound like a violent wind blowing from heaven' as in Acts 2:2, when the Holy Spirit appeared on the day of Pentecost? Or at least with the 'soft whisper' (1 Kings 19:12) Elijah experienced when God spoke to him at Mount Horeb? It is, after all, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that marks the categorical difference between mere human writing and inspired Scripture.<sup>4</sup> But even if we allow inspiration or divine guidance to be part of the production process, the question of the nature of inspiration still stands: What does 'inspired' mean? How does inspiration happen? What is the 'historical' element of divine inspiration that one can describe by using an historical approach? This leads to the related question: Why would some authors want to write Scripture in the first place? What is it that might urge them to write not just something spiritual, theological or edifying but actually something that readers are

encouraged to regard in line with existing Holy Scriptures? To approach these questions I want to make three foundational suggestions:

1) Scripture is perceived in Judaism and Early Christianity primarily as a record of an extraordinary revelatory event or experience whereby 'revelatory experience' is understood either as a *communicative act* between God and a person or a group of persons, or as an *event* in which God's active involvement was experienced in an extraordinary way. Here I use the adjective 'extraordinary' to distinguish such an event from the daily experiences a believer might have of God's guidance, governance and help (e.g. the answering of a prayer). The written text is the deposit or memorandum of such an extraordinary event; it is based on and witnesses to this revelatory experience.<sup>5</sup> As deposits of revelatory events such texts can be descriptive (historical narratives), prescriptive (Torah, prophetic and sapiential paraenesis), or responsive (psalms, prayers, laments, liturgies), the latter of which enables direct encounter with the divine from the side of the human partner.<sup>6</sup>

2) From there it follows that the urge to write is based on the conviction – shared by the author and the community receiving such writing – that God has revealed something or someone of lasting importance. Writing Scripture can accordingly be regarded as a *reaction* to God's revelatory *action* and, therefore, as the continuation of the *process of recording* God's actions and that of his people's reactions believed to have started with Moses.<sup>7</sup>

3) Jesus' life and death were perceived among those around him as a revelatory event of a 'biblical' scale, to which the only appropriate response was to bear witness to them in the form of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

A corollary of this understanding of Scripture as deposit or record of revelation is the claim that the idea of a closed canon is somehow alien to the concept of a God who makes himself known through revelation. However, I will suggest at the end why the concept of a canon can become necessary at certain points.

## 1. Revelatory experiences as the beginning of Scripture

The biblical authors themselves give only some hints of what caused them to write, but these are clear enough for the question at hand: Moses was commanded by God to write what he taught him, and the prophets encountered the 'word of God' as something that happened to them in such a way



that they had to preach it and eventually also write it down.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Moses the original author is even God himself. God is described in Exodus 24:12 as the one who has written on the two tablets.<sup>10</sup> The tablets later provided by Moses and supposedly stored in the ark of the covenant, after he had destroyed the first tablets, contained a copy of God's own writing. Leaving aside all historical questions for the moment, it is clear that such a narrative, with God's own writing at the beginning of the *Torah*, would lend authority to whatever was regarded as written by Moses and his successors, the prophets.<sup>11</sup> Hosea 8:12 takes this up when the prophet 'quotes' God with the words: 'I write for him [= Ephraim] the multitude of my instructions (*torati*), but they are regarded as something foreign.' Before the human messenger of God comes to write, God has already written something. It is further noteworthy that before any writing took place God made himself known and accessible to Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel at Mount Sinai etc. by a self-revelatory action. These self-disclosing events or epiphanies precede anything of that which becomes Scripture which consequently testifies to and narrates these events.

The genre of prophetic call stories ('Berufungsgeschichten') can be added here as well. These stories demonstrate a further element of what can be described as an ongoing 'scripturalisation' of the relation between God and his messengers. When Samuel, as a young boy, was called by God to be his prophet, he only heard a voice (1 Sam 3:1-14, cf. v. 1: 'The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread'), and he is not described as writing anything during his whole ministry (aside from the late reference in 1 Chr 29:29). When God called Ezekiel, by contrast, the prophet had to eat a scroll, written on both sides, which was given to him in a vision by a hand outstretched from heaven (Ezek 2:8-3:3).<sup>12</sup> This clearly implies that God is regarded as the author of this scroll and that the prophet needed to fill his belly with God's writing before he could start his preaching (and later also his writing). The prophet Zechariah, who may have been familiar with the prophecies of Ezekiel (see Zech 1:4-6), had a similar vision of a flying written scroll originating with God. It was sent because proper punishment for misdoings in relation to property was not administered among God's people. The heavenly scroll performs God's judgement because the Books of the Law were not applied.<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly the most complete illustration of

prophetic writing is Jeremiah 36. After the first scroll written by Baruch was burnt by the Judean king Jehoiakim, God ordered the prophet to write down everything a second time and, in addition, a word of judgement addressed to the king: 'And the word of YHWH happened to Jeremiah after the king burnt the scroll and the words, which Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, saying: "Take for you another scroll and write on it all the previous words which have been on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim, king of Judea, has burnt. And concerning Jehoiakim, king of Judea, you shall say ..."'" (36:27-29). At the end of the chapter we read (v. 32): 'And Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, had burned by fire; and many similar words were added to them.' This last short sentence is quite revealing: It demonstrates that prophetic oracles were collected and edited according to similarity. It is also noteworthy that this is a passive construction and the subject(s) making these additions is (are) not named which is in stark contrast to the precision with which both Baruch and the King are addressed with name and title in the same chapter. It reveals in an unsurpassed way *how* the word of God as revealed to the prophet and proclaimed by him becomes part of a written collection by a multistage development: Proclamation; first written collection and second oral proclamation; rereading of the text in the presence of the king; destruction of the scroll; rewriting with additions; further additions. Even if nothing in the text indicates that we see here *Holy Scripture* in the making it is nevertheless exactly this: The scroll is the deposit and memorandum of God's word revealed to Jeremiah, and – as can be assumed from the simple fact that Jeremiah is still available today (in contrast to the words of his colleague Hananiah, see Jer 28, but also Ezek 13:1-16<sup>14</sup>) – these words were preserved and studied, because their claim that a revelatory experience of Israel's God stands behind them, was regarded as justified by a wider audience. If a prophetic message or a text about a revelatory experience does not find hearers and readers who 'believe' it (with all its related consequences) it would fall into oblivion very quickly.

The preservation and redaction are further indicative of an understanding that these texts, based on the words of the prophets, were not just seen as a testimony or witness to a past history but intended to become guidance for future genera-



tions as well. Thus in Isaiah 30:8 the prophet is urged to write one of God's messages to him 'for the last day as a witness forever' (similarly also Dan 12:4).

## 2. The acceptance of the testimony of revelatory experience by a community as the beginning of a canon

I have argued in a previous paper that the decisive element for the transgenerational transmission of a message or established knowledge, be it written or oral, was a support group willing and able to provide the required means to preserve this content and pass it on to a future generation.<sup>15</sup> This would very often have involved not just a mechanical act of preservation or transmission but the additional labour of adaptation, interpretation, and – if necessary – even translation. In the case of religious texts, their support is based on their value for the life of that particular religious community which was not only willing to accept the message but also acted to preserve and transmit it. One has therefore to differentiate carefully between texts that display an unbroken chain of transmission – like the canonical texts – and texts which become accessible only through the work of historical and archaeological research. That lucky finds of ancient literature collections like the Dead Sea scrolls or the Nag Hammadi codices include texts which have a scriptural character and lay claim to divine authority/inspiration can obscure the fact that these writings had already lost their support group in antiquity.<sup>16</sup> This might (but need not!) point to the fact that their claimed revelatory quality was not accepted by a large enough social body to sustain them over time. To shorten a long argument, the books that made it into the biblical canon did so because their claim to be the deposit of divine revelation was accepted and, as a result of this, sustained by a large enough and long-enduring community.

But what does 'acceptance' mean in this context, and what might have been the reasons for a text being accepted? If one takes the dispute between the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah as a model, one reason for being accepted by a community is quite obvious: A prophetic announcement that is falsified by later events can hardly make a lasting impact except perhaps as a bad example. The book of Ezra provides a further illustration: It presents itself as a testimony of the fulfilment of God's word through Jeremiah

(Ezra 1:1) which presupposes an understanding of Jeremiah's message (most probably already a book at that time) as a 'word of God' whose fulfilment was to be expected in the future (which explains why it was preserved in the first place). Similarly, the two post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah are justified as true prophets ('they prophesied in the name of God') because what they prophesied (5:1) came true (6:14-15), which is the proof that prophets have been sent by God (Deut 18:21-22; Jer 28:9; Ezek 13:1-16).

However, the criterion of fulfilment is applicable only to a limited range of biblical texts: Commandments, historical narratives, wisdom literature or psalms cannot be proven right or wrong in that way. One has to look for additional criteria for acceptance and preservation of religious texts, and foremost of these is their *ability to facilitate meaningful encounters with God even after being detached from the primary historical circumstances*.<sup>17</sup> It is the ongoing *impact on a community* of something written-to-be-received-as-God's-word that provides a text with a status that can be labelled as 'potentially Scripture'. The further redactional processes that integrate such a document (e.g. a single psalm, an existing wisdom collection or a historical narrative) into larger collections are part of what it means 'to become Scripture' or the 'canonical process'. The original meaning is thereby not lost but widened, for which reason a text that functions as Scripture is not understood properly as such if it is re-isolated to its assumed original shape and meaning. Therefore canonical exegesis is justified not only on account of theological or ecclesial reasons but on historical grounds as well.<sup>18</sup>

I am confident that, using the framework outlined above, one can describe the historical process that lead to the formation of the Hebrew Scriptures without excluding the divine element within it. I am further confident that on the basis of this assumption it is possible to explain why the time of Ezra was regarded as the closing period for the writing of Scripture: The book of Ezra is no longer a book about what God has revealed but about how to apply revealed knowledge of God to a given situation. Ezra is no longer a prophet but a *sofer*, a scribe, an interpreter of the Law of Moses, the prophetic and the liturgical (Davidic) books.<sup>19</sup> The book itself does not claim to be based on revelation; it is not God's word that happened to Ezra. The same can be said with regard to Chronicles. It is a form of commentary on an



already existing narrative of Israel's kings, it is already based on Scripture and it is not by accident that in Chronicles we find the first clear examples of the use of the Hebrew word *kakatur* or κατὰ τὴν γραφήν, 'according to what is written', as a reference to an older, existing written document that is invoked as a divinely sanctioned authority (1 Chr 15:15; 2 Chr 30:5, 18; Ezra 6:18).<sup>20</sup> What becomes clearly visible from the time of Ezra onwards at the latest is a movement away from *writing* Scripture towards *applying* Scripture to a given situation. This application of Scripture and the accompanying developments – namely final redactions aiming to integrate larger portions of Scripture into more unified master narratives; commentaries or commentary-like writings such as the *peshtarim* or the genre of 'rewritten Bible'; the translation of Scripture (LXX, Targumim) to address an increasing and more diverse audience; liturgical readings and integration into worship patterns; private meditation on Scripture (Ps 1:2; 119; 1 Macc 1:56-57; Sirach Prologue; Acts 8:29); and related to the last two developments: production of copies of Scripture to facilitate such uses – all these related factors finally lead to what is called a canon of Holy Scriptures, that is a list of accepted and recognized books in which one can hear the Word of God.

### 3. The 'cessation of the Spirit' and the writing of Scripture

If the road to an established canon started with Ezra at the latest and – depending on which date for the closing of the canon one regards as likely – came to a conclusion sometime between the second century before Christ and the second century after, how then is it possible to write Scripture after Ezra? The orthodox Jewish answer to this question is: It is not possible at all. This is expressed with the quasi-doctrinal statement that prophecy ceased after this time which meant that divine inspiration, and therefore the writing of Scripture, was no longer possible.<sup>21</sup> But to make such a point one has first to accept something that is not straightforwardly presupposed by all the biblical texts up to this time, namely *that the writing of Scripture is primarily based on inspiration by the Holy Spirit*. I have avoided so far the topic of inspiration (see endnote 3) and I will do my best to avoid it even further. But it must be considered that the two Jewish authors who defined most clearly the idea of inspiration for the cen-

turies to come up to our own time, that is Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, did so with a specific apologetic agenda in mind: They used the theory of inspiration to provide authority to what they wanted to tell their audiences on the basis of the Jewish Scriptures. Connected to the idea of inspiration is, furthermore, a development away from a *God-focused perspective* to a stronger *anthropological* one. In Philo and Josephus the biblical authors, first of all Moses, are turned into the true heroes. The notion of authorship, foreign to a large extent to the Old Testament books, becomes central, and with it the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the biblical authors. It is their superlative virtue, their command of earthly passions and their unrivalled understanding that make them the appropriate writers of God's words. They were attributed with foresight and knowledge far above their contemporaries and successors as a result of God's spirit being given to them. Inspired Scriptures are therefore the result of a perfect match: God's spirit guides the most perfect of all men and the outcome of this, obviously, is the most perfect of all human achievements.<sup>22</sup>

The key text for the concept of inspiration and its limitation to a period in the past is Josephus' *Against Apion* 1.37-44.<sup>23</sup> Josephus did not write much about the prophets' inspiration or that of any other biblical author besides Moses, to whom God 'dictated' (ὑπαγορεύειν) what he should write (*Ant.* 3.84; see also 4.183, 193; and 4.118, 121-122 about Balaam's inspiration), such that he wrote the laws 'based on the dictate and teaching of God' (*Ant.* 17.159; cf. 3.213). It is clear, however, that Josephus saw the biblical authors as gifted not just with the ability to look back into the past but also into the future. He was further convinced that what God had revealed to them could now be found as trustworthy reports in their books.<sup>24</sup> The limited number of inspired books among the Jews is a further argument of their reliability in light of the contradictory and therefore numerous books which were current amongst the Greeks (*Ag. Ap.* 1.15-27). The apologetic angle is clearly visible: The biblical books and their authors are more reliable than Greek and Roman historians and authors, because only the former were empowered by God's spirit. Josephus allows for a kind of time-transcending mechanism that enabled Moses and the prophets in his succession to write precise history about the events long before their time, but also about events that lay in the future.<sup>25</sup> The superior quality of the Jewish writ-



ings is for Josephus further evinced by the fact that whereas no Greek ‘would suffer ... on behalf of his own writing’ (1.44), Jews had proven their willingness to die for their unchanged and unaltered ‘writings’ on many occasions, because they ‘regard them as decrees of God’ (τὸ νομίζειν αὐτὰ θεοῦ δόγματα, *Ag. Ap.* 1.42-43). This last qualification is made after Josephus has presented his readers with the list of 22 books of Jewish Scriptures, clearly indicating that all of them need to be understood in this way as ‘decrees of God’.<sup>26</sup>

The problematic aspect of these fascinating passages from Josephus is not so much that he increased the element of ‘dictation’ within the Sinai-revelation but that in *Against Apion* he treats all 22 books of the Hebrew Bible in the same way as ‘decrees of God’ and insinuates that the inspiration of Moses is the model for all other authors of Scripture as well. This leaves hardly any room for human testimony to God’s revelation beside the faithful repetition of what was dictated, and this model is not at all able to capture the plurality of genres and perspectives preserved in the Hebrew Bible. One can see how easily such an understanding of verbal inspiration lends itself towards the notion of infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, and one can also understand why James Barr insisted against such a perception of Scripture on the grounds that the biblical texts present themselves less as the direct object of God’s dictate but rather as human testimony and response to ‘the acts of God in history’.<sup>27</sup> But this is not so much the point at issue here. It is rather the consequence which Josephus draws from his canonical concept:

From Artaxerxes to our own time every event has been recorded, but this is not judged worthy of the same trust, since the exact line of succession of the prophets did not continue (*Ag. Ap.* 1.41).

This passage is regularly taken as evidence that Josephus held to the opinion of the cessation of the Spirit, although Barclay has shown in his commentary that this is not necessarily the case.<sup>28</sup> The opinion of the cessation of the Spirit is clearly expressed for the first time only in the rabbinic literature, where the statement ‘With the death of the last prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the holy spirit departed from Israel, but the Bath Qol was available to them’ can be found more than once.<sup>29</sup> The consequences are obvious: When inspiration by the Holy Spirit is seen as the main element in the formation of Scripture, it is evi-

dent that no Scriptures (and therefore no future canonical books) could be written after Ezra. This seems to be a powerful argument against all those attempts made by authors or groups in the later Second Temple Period to claim divine authority for their writings. But the pure fact of so many Scripture-like writings after Ezra (and even Josephus himself can be described as attempting to continue or imitate the prophetic historiography and to write with a prophetic claim of authority<sup>30</sup>) tells us that the concept of the cessation of the Spirit was either not yet formulated or, at least, not accepted by many groups within Judaism, one of these being the followers of Jesus. Indeed D. Moody Smith describes this period ‘as the Age of Scripture – scripture being written as well as fulfilled – and not just for nascent Christianity but for Judaism as well’.<sup>31</sup>

Dr Roland Deines is professor of New Testament at the University of Nottingham (UK)

## Endnotes

- 1 I thank Peter Watts (Nottingham) for his many helpful comments and editorial support for this article. The article is based on my contribution to the FEET conference in Berlin in 2012.
- 2 It is not possible to give here an exhaustive overview of this debate; the following titles provide a first glimpse into questions and contributors: Jean-Marie Auwers and Henk Jan de Jonge (eds.), *The Biblical Canons* (BETL 163; Leuven: University Press, 2003); Craig Bartholomew et al. (eds.), *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); John Barton and Michael Wolter (eds.), *Die Einheit der Schrift und die Vielfalt des Kanons / The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon* (BZNW 118; Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2003); Michael Becker and Jörg Frey (eds.), *Qumran und der biblische Kanon* (BThSt 92; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009) – for a concise introduction to the discussion and a substantial bibliography see in this book J. Frey, ‘Einführung’, 1-63; David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Ivan Z. Dimitrov, James D.G. Dunn, Ulrich Luz and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (eds.), *Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht: Zweite europäische*



- orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz im Rilakloster vom 8.-15. September 2001* (WUNT 174; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (eds.), *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser (eds.), *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (3rd updated and corrected ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark Guides for the Perplexed; London, New York: T&T Clark, 2011); Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002); Mladen Popovic (ed.), *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (JSJSup 141; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010); Einar Thomassen (ed.), *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010; for a helpful review see Tomas Bokedal, *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 63 [2012] 692-697); Luc Zaman, *Bible and Canon: A Modern Historical Inquiry* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 50; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008).
- 3 Lee Martin McDonald, 'Wherein Lies Authority? A Discussion of Books, Texts, and Translations' in his *Exploring the Origins of the Bible*, 203-239 (205). Support for my position can be found in D. Moody Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000) 3-20 and Martin Hüneburg, 'Das Matthäusevangelium als heilige Schrift. Vom Anspruch eines Textes', *Quatember* 71 (2007) 144-155, both of whom strongly defend the assumption that Matthew wanted to write Scripture. For Paul as an author of Scripture, see Francis Watson, 'Gospel and Scripture: Rethinking Canonical Unity', *Tyndale Bulletin* 52 (2001) 161-182. Watson mentions in passing, dealing with Galatians, that 'Paul here testifies to the gospel by way of a written text of his own, whose claim to scriptural or proto-scriptural normativity is everywhere overwhelmingly evident' (167). I make a similar case with regard to First Thessalonians in my article 'Revelatory Experiences as the Beginning of Scripture' (forthcoming).
- 4 The concept of inspiration by God's spirit as characterisation of *all* biblical writings is fully developed in the first century AD with Josephus *Against Apion* 1.37-38 as key text along with 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20-21. The idea of prophetic 'inspired' historiography can be traced back as far as 1 Chr 29:29-30 (see also 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19), but the idea of God's spirit guiding the prophets (see e.g. Num 11:17, 25, 29; 27:18; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Isa 34:16; 59:21; 61:1; 63:11; Ezek 11:4-5; Dan 5:11-12; Micah 3:8; Zech 7:12) and other 'authors' of the Jewish Scriptures like David (see 2 Sam 23:2-3; 1 Chr 28:12; for Solomon see 1 Kings 3:24; 5:9-14) is occasionally found already in the Bible and accepted within the Early Christian literature from early on. But the fact that God placed his words in the mouths of the prophets needs not to be mixed up with the inspiration of the prophetic books; cf. also Jonathan Whitlock, *Schrift und Inspiration: Studien zur Vorstellung von inspirierter Schrift und inspirierter Schriftauslegung im antiken Judentum und in den paulinischen Schriften* (WMANT 98; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002) 56-67.
- 5 This description does not exclude a longer tradition history before the witness of an event was written down and received its final form, which in the case of Old Testament texts could happen centuries after the event itself; see H. Gese, 'The Biblical View of Scripture' in Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* [ET by Keith Crim of *Zur biblischen Theologie*, München: Kaiser, 1977] (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981) 9-33. The situation is different in the New Testament, where eyewitnesses played a crucial role and the gap between the revelatory event and its fixation as foundational tradition (which very quickly turned into texts) is extremely short.
- 6 A different tripartite division is suggested by Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* [ET by D.E. Orton of *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Ein kanonischer Entwurf*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001] (Tools for Biblical Studies Series 7; Leiden: Deo, 2005) 6-7, who divides the OT canon into a first part, where God is mainly depicted as acting (Torah), a second where he is mainly speaking (Prophets) and a third (Writings) where people speak to God.
- 7 Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* Band 1 (München: Kaiser, 1957), ET *Old Testament Theology* vol. I: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962) 355-356, and more often. A highly readable collection, which contains a kind of vademecum of von Rad's thoughts about God as present and active in Israel's history, is his *God at Work in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980).
- 8 Revelatory language can be found throughout the New Testament: ἀποκαλύπτειν (*to reveal*, literally *to uncover*) and ἀποκάλυψις (*revelation*) is used in this sense in Mt 11:25, 27 par. Lk 10:21-22; Mt 16:17; Lk 2:32; Rom 1:17-18; 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:10; Gal 1:12, 16; 3:23; Eph 1:17; 3:5; Phil 3:15; 1 Pet 1:5, 12; Rev 1:1 (for personal 'inspiration' in a time of crisis see Mt 10:26); of similar importance is φανερώω (*to make known, to reveal*): Jn 2:11; 3:21; 7:4, 16-17; 9:3; 17:6; Rom 1:19; 3:21; 16:26; 2 Cor



- 2:14; Col 1:26; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 Jn 1:2; for further terms see H. Balz, 'Offenbarung IV. Neues Testament', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 25 (1995) 134-146 (134-135); relevant passages include further Mt 13:10-17, 35 (Mk 4:10-12; Lk 8:9-10; 10:23-24); 17:1-13 (Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36, see also 2 Pet 1:17-21); Jn 1:1-18; 3:12-13; 5:19-30 etc.; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:1-6; Eph 3:3-10; Col 1:25-28; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:10-12; 1 Jn 1:1-3; Heb 1:1-2 (cf. with reference to God's revelatory actions in the past 3:7-10). For the Gospel of Matthew see especially Frances Shaw, *Discernment of Revelation in the Gospel of Matthew* (Religions and Discourse 30; Oxford, New York: P. Lang, 2007 [no attempts are made in this study to connect revelation with Scripture writing]), and for John's Gospel, Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 2.120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 344: 'Truth is revelation and revelation is the manifestation of the reality of God's saving work in the world through the Word', and 345-357, his chapter on 'Revelation of Truth in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ'. A fairly comprehensive overview of revelation in the New Testament according to the individual books is provided in Marco Frenschkowski, *Offenbarung und Epiphanie* Vol. 1: *Grundlagen des spätantiken und frühchristlichen Offenbarungsglaubens* (WUNT 2.79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) 351-403; see further H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* Vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) 172-239; and, especially for Paul, Markus N.A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2.36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990). An impressive combination of biblical scholarship and systematic theology is Michael Welker, *Gottes Offenbarung: Christologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2012).
- 9 For the imperative 'write!' given to Moses and the Prophets, see Exod 17:14; 34:27; 31:19; Isa 8:1; 30:8; Jer 30:2; 36:2-4, 27-28; Ezek 24:2; 43:11; Hab 2:2, cf. also Jer 25:13 where God binds himself to the words Jeremiah has written at his command. See also R. Deines, 'The Term and Concept of Scripture' in Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange (eds.), *What is Bible?* (CBET 67; Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 235-281 (271-273).
  - 10 See also Exod 31:18; 32:15-16, and Stephen G. Dempster, 'Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon' in Evans and Tov, *Exploring the Origins of the Bible*, 87-127 (92-94, 98-99).
  - 11 See Deut 18:15. The text is not to be understood primarily as a messianic promise (even if read as such in John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37) but as the legitimization of the chain of prophets after Moses during Israel's history; the people of God will never be without the living word of God. A good discussion of Deut 18:15 in light of the Christian misuse of the passage can be found in R.W.L. Moberly, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Pope Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth*' in A. Pabst and A. Paddison (eds.), *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth* (London: SCM, 2009) 97-108. For Mosaic authorship as element of tradition history see Gese, 'The Biblical View of Scripture', 21.
  - 12 G.W. Anderson, 'Canonical and Non-Canonical' in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 113-159. Anderson provides helpful observations on the elements within the prophetic texts which point towards written preservation based on the divine character of their genesis.
  - 13 For intertextual references of Zech 5:1-4 to Jer 36 and Ezek 2:9-3:3, see Holger Delkurt, *Sacharjas Nachtgesichte: Zur Aufnahme und Abwandlung prophetischer Traditionen* (BZAW 302; Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2000) 226-235. The question remains whether there is a connection between the heavenly scroll executing judgement and the record books that were kept in heaven according to Exod 32:32-33; Mal 3:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21; 12:1; Ps 87:6; 139:16; Acts 10:4; see also the frequent references to a related heavenly 'book of life/the living' in Isa 4:3; Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27. For a recent discussion see Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses, 200 B.C.E.-200 C.E.* (JSJSup 152; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012).
  - 14 Ezek 13:9 mentions 'a book of the House of Israel' in which the false prophets shall not be enlisted. The commentators (e.g. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* [Hermeneia], Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979, 294) discuss whether this is a reference to a citizen list (like in Jer 22:20; Ezra 2:62) or the 'book of life' which is kept in the presence of YHWH (see previous endnote). It might be possible to see in the book instead a list of the 'prophets of Israel' who are regarded as 'true' prophets and therefore a first form of a canon list. The threat would then be that the false prophets will not become part of Israel's hallowed tradition.
  - 15 Deines, 'Term and Concept of Scripture', 273-278.
  - 16 For a list of 'books' mentioned in the Hebrew Bible but no longer extant, see McDonald, 'Canon', 785.
  - 17 Deines, 'Term and Concept of Scripture', 279.
  - 18 See *inter alii* A. Behrens, 'Kanon: Das ganze Alte Testament ist mehr als die Summe seiner Teile', *Keryma und Dogma* 53 (2007) 274-297, and, without doubt most prominently, Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* 2 Vols. (London: SCM Press, 1992; reprint in one volume



- Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011); Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*.
- 19 The Law of Moses is mentioned in Ezra 3:2; 6:16-18; Neh 1:7-10; 8:14-18; 9:3; 10:30; 13:1; the prophets in Ezra 1:1; 5:1; 6:14; Neh 9:26, 30, 32 (whereas contemporary prophets are despised, Neh 6:10-14); the Davidic legacy for the cult in Ezra 3:10-11; Neh 11:23; 12:36, 45-46. On Ezra's 'office', see Ezra 7:6, 10-12, 21, 25-26; Neh 8:1-6, 9, 13; 12:26, 36; for Nehemiah as founder of a 'biblical library' in Jerusalem see 2 Macc 2:13. For literature and further discussion see my 'Term and Concept of Scripture', 277-278.
  - 20 For a full list of scriptural quotes or allusions in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles see Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (JAJS 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) 215-224.
  - 21 For a comprehensive treatment see now L. Stephen Cook, *On the Question of the 'Cessation of Prophecy' in Ancient Judaism* (TSAJ 145, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
  - 22 Already the *Letter of Aristeas* 121 highlights the extraordinary knowledge of the translators of the Torah (see also 187-292) and the exact translation is a satisfying final product because of their scholarly scrutiny (310-311), not yet the result of divine inspiration. It is Philo, a century or more later, who introduces this element. In his view, the 'most eminent Hebrews ... wrote in a prophetic manner and as though under divine motivation ... as though one inspiration dictated invisibly in each' (*Mos.* 2.32, see also 2.37, 40). Christian authors starting with Justin were keen to use and further increase the miraculous elements in support of their use of the Septuagint, see Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of the Canon* (London, New York: T&T Clark 2002), 25-28, 36-41. For Josephus on the excellency of Moses see *Ant.* 2.267-268; 4.328-331 (on Moses), for Philo see *Mos.* 1.1-4; 2.1-11, 25-52; *Opif.* 1-2; *Praem.* 52-56 etc. A full treatment of the relevant passages is Helmut Burkhardt, *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Basel: Brunnen, 1988) 171-213; cf. Helmut Burkhardt, 'Inspiration der Schrift durch weisheitliche Personalinspiration: Zur Inspirationslehre Philos von Alexandrien', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 47 (1991) 214-225.
  - 23 See my fuller discussion in 'Term and Concept of Scripture', 269-271.
  - 24 See for example *Ant.* 4.303 about Moses' prophetic writings for the future; *Ant.* 10.35; 11.5-7 about Isaiah; *Ant.* 10.180-182; 11.1-2 about Jeremiah; *Ant.* 10.210; 11.337 about Daniel; and *Ant.* 11.35 about the Twelve Minor Prophets.
  - 25 For prophetic historiography as a peculiar element of the Jewish world see J.M.G. Barclay, *Against Apion* (Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 9; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 28.
  - 26 Cf. *Ant.* 1.13: The history of 5000 years is 'revealed through the sacred writings' (τὰ δηλούμενα διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων).
  - 27 So in one of his earliest publications, a review of J.K.S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (Methuen, 1957), *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958) 86-93 (88). See further James Barr, *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1994) 20-32, 124-130, and more often in his numerous writings. To refer positively to Barr means not to accept everything he has written about Scripture but to pay heed to his cautioning in these questions. From a very different angle, namely the study of medieval theology, the former Pope Benedict XVI argued similarly in favour of a distinction between revelation as a divine act and Holy Scripture as condensation of the received revelation; see Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, *Aus meinem Leben: Erinnerungen (1927-1977)* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998) 84.
  - 28 Barclay, *Against Apion*, 31, sees the motive in Josephus' statement rather as an attempt 'to emphasize, by comparison, the unimpeachable authority of the 22 books'. For a defence of the traditional view see now again Cook, 'Cessation of Prophecy', 123-148.
  - 29 Cant. Rab. 8.9 § 3. These and other texts are cited in Cook, 'Cessation of Prophecy', 5-9.
  - 30 See Whitlock, *Schrift und Inspiration*, 159-162.
  - 31 Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?', 16.