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THE FORMATION OF NORMS IN ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY (1ST-IIIRD CENTURY): TRADITION, CANON, DISCIPLINE

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Abschlussvortrag

I would like to begin by saying that preparing a lecture on the subject “The formation of norms in ancient Christianity (1st-IIIrd century): tradition, canon, discipline” was not easy for me. That has to do with the fact that I have my own history with this topic, but I don’t really feel fully at ease talking about my own personal history when my lecture is actually supposed to be about the times of the Roman Empire and Early Christianity. Nevertheless, before I get started, I would like to explain why the lecture title and the topic allocated to me today came as a kind of déjà-vu from my days as an assistant at the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Tübingen. Following these initial biographical comments, which I hope you will allow me, I will come to a rather historical section about the origins of this model in the work of Berlin church historian Adolf von Harnack, before speaking in my third section about the three norms assigned to me by the organisers of this Winter School – “tradition, canon and discipline”.

(1) Preliminary autobiographical remarks

As I said, I would first like to tell you why the topic assigned to me, formulated as it is, is such a déjà-vu from my days as an assistant at the Protestant Theology Department in Tübingen. Back then I was deeply influenced by Tübingen’s Patristics scholars, Luise Abramowski (one of the first women to teach Early Christianity as a professor at a German university) and the New Testament scholar Martin Hengel. By the way, Martin Hengel was also responsible in Tübingen for the close links between the Tübingen faculty and the faculty in Strasbourg. Thanks to this connection, large symposia took place and corresponding congress volumes were published about the “city of God”, “the hand of God”, and so on (in part together with the colleagues from Uppsala).

Back then, in the late eighties and early nineties, the notion that the development of Early Christianity in the first three centuries was decisively marked by three norms was one of the core aspects of the image my discipline has had of Early Christianity. It is also known that this idea of the three norms goes back to the famous Berlin Patristics scholar, Adolf von Harnack. And even if, during my studies, students no longer read the *History of Dogma*, which Adolf von Harnack began publishing in three volumes from 1885 onwards, one central element of its architecture was still fully present: All my lecturers and all my textbooks assumed that a “gnostic crisis” in Early Christianity was overcome by establishing the three so-called “Catholic norms”, namely office of clergy, rule of faith and canon, leading to the establishment of the Old Catholic Church. What was understood as a “gnostic crisis” here was a pluralisation of the rather monolithically conceptualised Christianity of the Antique with the help of elements of oriental religiosity and Greek philosophy which were harnessed by establishing norms.

In preparation for my clerical exam towards the end of my studies in 1988, I used a small textbook from the series “Theologische Wissenschaft”, published by Kohlhammer and written by the church historian

from Göttingen Carl Andresen (and his student Adolf Martin Ritter, revised in 1993). It maintains that “Early Catholicism” entered into a crisis through “Gnosticism”, and “Early Catholicism” attempted “initially to compensate for the divisive tendencies using all possible means”. “That was done with the help of the much-cited, so-called three *Catholic norms* (canon, rule of faith, monarchic episcopacy), which Harnack described as normative for the development of the history of dogma” (27). There follows another statement, which from my perspective today seems to be more an act of theological censorship by a Protestant church historian faced by a very early catholicisation of the church of Jesus Christ, which one – as a Protestant church historian – naturally cannot deem to be a good thing: “And yet, one must not forget that the aforementioned triad [canon, rule of faith, monarchic episcopacy] were not able to solve other imminent problems (scriptural exegesis, Christology, the fight against heresy) due to their Early Catholic origins. If they nevertheless gained importance in the development history, then that has to do with the Old Catholic Christianity, which replaced Early Catholicism.” As a student, I was taught this concept and I internalised it – and I didn’t ask why norms, which in the eyes of Carl Andresen and Adolf Martin Ritter were dysfunctional for core areas in Christian teachings (like Christology) and Christian life (like interpreting scripture), could have fulfilled such a central function in the reconstruction of Early Christianity. After I had completed my exam and was writing my PhD while working as an assistant, I was much more interested – like everyone back then who studied the history of Early Christianity – in examining in detail the so-called “three Catholic norms rule of faith, canon and office of the clergy.” I deliberately sought out opportunities to give lectures about religious office, the rule of faith and the profession of faith, and the formation of the Biblical canon in the Christian Church. And after I had been appointed to my first professorship in Jena, I applied for a fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, the Berliner Institute for Advanced Study, which was set up with Princeton as its role model, to write a “History of norms in Early Christianity”. I intended this to be a comprehensive book dealing with the subjects of religious office, rule of faith and canon. The English words in my subtitle – tradition, canon, discipline – are a little more broadly formulated than the traditional German terms ‘rule of faith’ and ‘religious office’; “tradition” means more than the early, free, but linguistically more conventional formulations *regula fidei* or κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας. And ‘discipline’, of course, refers to more than a threefold office of clergy with initially a monepiscopate and later a monarchic episcopate (to apply the distinction by Ernst Dassmann and Georg Schöllgen) at its head. And then, in the eighties, scholars began in Germany for the first time (and Georg Schöllgen and others can be named in this respect) to dedicate themselves to the emergence of an order that applied to clerical life.

I was unfortunately unable to find my letter of application for the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin among my papers. Martin Hengel was the person who suggested to me that I apply, and he himself was a fellow there. I remember well that Martin Hengel was rather critical in his comments about my idea to write a history of the three Catholic norms (and as I don’t have any letters from him from this period at home, I am assuming that he warned me about this on the telephone). He said that what I planned to do was too old-fashioned and not interesting enough for sociologists and other scholars from the humanities. And therefore, I began at the end of the last century to increasingly give up the idea of there being three norms that structured the development of Christianity since the first century. My monograph *Christian Theology and its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire. Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology, which was released in 2007 and has also been translated into English, is an attempt to transfer the classic idea of norms into an approach that explores the development of institutions and examines norms as an element of institutionalisation. I have also attempted to replace the classic model of a gnostic crisis, against the pluralisation of which such norms were applied. My colleague from Bonn, Winrich Löhr, and myself understand Gnosticism as a kind of laboratory experiment by Christian theology and church communitarianisation in a time during the Roman Empire when very many experiments were undertaken. And, of course, every one of these also applied norms.*

So much for my own personal history with this topic – and with that, my autobiographical comments are over. What I would now like to look at is what it really says in Harnack. And, dear listeners in Strasbourg, I ask you kindly to please understand why I will now take the liberty of speaking so long and in detail about a German church historian, and not about a French or English one.

(2) Adolf von Harnack and the three norms

The famous history of dogma by Adolf Harnack popularised the image of the three norms – although it would certainly be worth researching further to find out whether this was not actually established by Ferdinand Christian Baur and Albrecht Ritschl. In the now canonical fourth and final edition of *The History of Dogma* by Harnack from the year 1909, the history of dogma as a discipline is presented first of all because that is what constituted the faith of the first disciples of Jesus and the first Christians. The presentation of Gnosis – Gnosticism as Harnack says – as the first Christian theology and as an acute Hellenisation of Christianity is followed by the first large main section with its historical outline of the emergence of Christian dogma. The basis for its emergence was the “formation of the Catholic Church”. Harnack speaks of an ideal-typical reconstruction based on relevant factors (I, 350). He also objects to the idea that it was “the natural and unintentional product of the times” (ibid.), instead assuming that – influenced by Protestant and anti-Roman sentiments – the process was deliberately guided by church teachers, bishops and the Roman church (I, 351). He specifically names Irenaeus and – as “men of the second generation” – Tertullian and Hippolytus. “Tertullian is to Irenaeus something like Calvin was to Luther” (I, 351). I would like to point out here that Harnack does not question in the slightest whether the main picture of Irenaeus in his model of the development of Early Christianity is not down to the coincidences that happen in the situation in which the histories were passed down. While we do have a very early Greek papyrus from the second century with an Irenaeus text from Egypt, nevertheless the Greek version of his anti-heretic work *Adversus Hareses* is mainly preserved in fragments of a contaminated version and in the oral tradition of Epiphanius, and in a Latin translation from late antiquity. Was the work, therefore, really as widely disseminated in the Christian congregations in the way we assume based on this antique and modern history of editions? Let’s move back to Harnack.

Under the title “Consolidation and gradual secularisation of Christianity as a church” (I, 353), Harnack first of all quotes three passages from the *De praescriptione haereticorum* by Tertullian. Here, the North-African author writes that the agreement between the apostolic congregations about the truth of a teaching was decisive, because it then “without a doubt possesses that which the congregations received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God” (21,4). Harnack adds a further quote, which he refers to as a *regula-fidei* formulation because, in it, an avowal is made to the belief in “a God and Lord, the Creator of everything and Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, the son of the Creator and the resurrection of the flesh” and the evangelic and apostolic scriptures united with the Biblical scriptures of the law and the prophets (36,4). Finally, he quoted the demand by Tertullian that heretics should name the “origin of their congregations and the order of bishops,” beginning from the apostles (32,1). Interestingly, he adds to this Latin quote: “Looking at these three text passages, one can see that three norms are to be considered, the apostolic teachings, the apostolic canon or scripture and the guarantee of the apostolic that harks back to the apostolic structure through the organisation of the Church or through the episcopate” (I, 354). Harnack also wrote: “It will become apparent that these three norms have always established themselves in the churches together, i.e., at the same time, and they proceeded from Rome, and the remaining churches subordinated themselves gradually to them. The involvement of Asia Minor is likely, but unknown” (ibid.). It is interesting that Harnack reconstructed precursors for these urban Roman norms, which he also calls “the three Catholic standards” in the same context. The norms had precursors, “1) in short kerygmatic confessions, 2) in the authority of the κύριος

(His words and teachings) and the informal apostolic tradition, as well as in the congregational writings, 3) in the standing of the apostles, prophets and teachers, and/or the “elders” and the leaders in the individual congregations” (I, 354).

I must be honest, and say that I read these passages by Harnack in preparation for this lecture for the first time again in many years, and I was pretty amazed about what they actually say and about what the textbooks of my students years made of them. Harnack writes very clearly that the talk of three norms represents an *idealised abstraction*, and the order of the quotes from *De praescriptione haereticorum* also makes that quite clear. Nowhere there or in Irenaeus or in Hippolytus is there talk of three norms that constitute apostolicity. On the contrary, it is in the one case about *doctrina* and their apostolicity, in the other case about apostolic *doctrina* and their content, and in the last case about what we call *successio apostolica*, that is, the application of the notion of a personal succession of congregation leaders, as often constructed in the antique writings about philosophy and history. One could even formulate it a little more harshly by saying that the Biblical canon as listed based on the main sections of the Bible (the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, the apostolic Writings) is not even discussed as canon, and the rules of faith in particular are not described in the quotations as *regula fidei* or κανὼν τῆς πίστεως seu ἀληθείας, and instead of the complete official order of the clergy or even the church discipline, all there is talk about is the succession of bishops. And one ultimately asks oneself when reading the passage in Harnack, why three passages from Tertullian, that is, a person from the second generation, are cited as evidence, and not Irenaeus, especially when it is maintained that the Roman congregation gradually asserted these norms. By the way, Harnack also explained in a footnote why he described the link between truth and general dissemination as “catholic” and thus the three catholic norms as “catholic” (I, 353 comment 1); he names the phase before that “pre-catholic”, while Ernst Troeltsch refers to it as “early catholic”. What this ideal model of three catholic norms that spread out from Rome has to do with Asia Minor is not explained in the introductory paragraphs, while the fact that these norms had not yet asserted themselves in the Syrian Church in the third century is demonstrated in another footnote in the example of the basic writing of the apostolic Constitutions that Harnack says he found with Achelis in the Didascalia apostolorum (I, 354 comment 1).

To repeat myself, but using other words – in the textbooks that were used while I was a student, this fundamental self-relativization by Harnack, that all he was doing when he identified three norms – the apostolic teachings, the apostolic canonical writings and the guarantee of the apostolic through the church organisation or through the episcopate that stemmed from the apostolic order – was merely to propose a kind of ideal-typical model, was missing completely. The ideal-typical model had become a description of a historical process. What is more, we were also taught that Harnack maintained there had been a deep rupture between the simple message of Jesus and the Catholic Church, between the simple message and its Hellenised reflection in an initially gnostic and then majority church Christian theology. But the talk of “precursors” in Harnack leads to the middle of the very first generation of people who followed Jesus of Nazareth and actually also to Jesus himself. If we remember, precursors for Harnack were *first of all* short kerygmatic confessions that – at least if one follows my teacher Martin Hengel – emerged immediately after the events of Easter, for example, in the form of “God has awoken Jesus from the dead”, and then *secondly*, the authority of the κύριος (His words and teachings), which was already felt by the pre-Easter Jesus from his disciples and then led to the “formless apostolic tradition, as well as ... the congregational writings”, and then *thirdly* the “standing of the apostles, prophets and teachers, and/or the “elders” and the leaders in the individual congregations”, which the reconstructed history of the collection of Pauline epistles by David Trobisch documents.

It also seems to me a matter of importance that the three norms in Harnack – at least in their introduction based on Tertullian in the section I spoke about – are actually only the mechanisms for the North-African

writer that guaranteed the apostolic would be passed on reliably to further generations. Everything we associate with that, i.e., the normative limitation of the institutional and doctrinal pluralism in the Christian Church as opposed to a critical pluralism in so-called gnostic groups, is modern ideal-typical modelling by Harnack and his teachers Ritschl and Baur. Here, it is also true that my textbooks oversimplified what was formulated in Harnack with the occasional *caveat* (or to use a more contemporary phrase, with the occasional disclaimer). Contradiction is seldom: However, I must presumably mention the largely forgotten and recently deceased Zurich Patristics scholar Hans-Dietrich Altendorf, who spoke of the three norms as a confusing abstraction (Markschies, *Imperial Christian Theology*, 215 Fn. 1) and by doing so agreeably set himself apart from the multitude of colleagues who have simply repeated the model.

If, however, this is how it is with the model of the three norms, then one can presumably ask – and quite rightly so – whether these three norms are really sufficient to characterise the Christianity (or better: the Christianities) of the second and third century.

I asked this question in the aforementioned monograph about the institutions in 2007 and in 2015, so I must now repeat myself a little.

(3) What do we stand to gain with the model of the three norms?

I assume not much needs to be said about the simple fact that the use of the term “norm” in Harnack, and in the textbook tradition, which oversimplifies and popularises his ideal-typical model of three norms, is left more or less hanging in the air in theoretical terms, as it does not establish or even explain a clearly profiled definition of what a norm actually means, or about what contents said norm should refer to. For example, are they social norms or legal norms, ethical norms, or religious norms, or are they language norms? The answer to that question must probably be that, when Harnack presented his three norms, he was basically referring to all five dimensions of establishing norms. But this means, of course, that we must complement any talk about “norms” by adding a social-scientific theory of the institution, a juridical theory of the legal regulation, a descriptive theory of the status of philosophical standardisation, and one of everyday religious practices in a life lived in reference to rules and regulations.

In my monograph, I examined only one of the classic three norms (namely, the notion of a canon of biblical writings, but not rules of faith or religious office). Nevertheless, I could of course have asked the question – bearing in mind the passages Harnack quoted from Tertullian’s *De Praescriptione haereticorum* – as to whether the apostolic succession is not also one of the characteristic norms (and not only the bishop’s office or a hierarchy differentiated into three or more offices). And I could have included in my (admittedly already very thick) monograph the studies I published together with Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent on rules of faith and confessions of faith. Instead, in this monograph, I remained simply within a social-scientific research tradition and did not address all other dimensions of the term “norm”. I took my definition of “norm” from a Dresden research group, which received funding for a special research area at the Technical University titled “Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit” (“Institutionality and Historicity”; SFB 537). There, institution was not understood in the classic tradition of the German humanities, to which Theodor Mommsen and Adolf Harnack were also bound, that is, as fixed social facilities like authorities, courts, schools or universities (exactly as applied in the English language), but were rather seen them as “social arrangements that, outwardly and inwardly, successfully suggest and bring forth stability and permanence” and in which, in particular, “the foundations of an order that guide action and influence communication are also always symbolically expressed.”¹ In my

¹ G. Melville/P. von Moos, Geleitwort, in: dies. (Hgg.), *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne, Norm und Struktur. Studien zum sozialen Wandel im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* 10, Köln u.a. 1998, V.

book, I understand “norm” in exactly this sense as the foundation for an order that guides action and influences communication. Symbolically these foundations are expressed in the liturgy in Christian worship, for example when baptism questions are asked, or in the Apostle catalogues edited by Schermann, or in the famous succession lists of the bishops of Rome, Alexandria or Antiochia, as one finds them in Eusebius, but which have also been handed down separately.

It is clearer to me today than it used to be, that Harnack’s model of precursors to the three norms and their “catholic” full form is naturally also a sign or a consequence of a classic teleological historiography of the Christian Church historiography, which leads – as part of a one-way hermeneutic street – back to one’s own religious denomination and its specific norms. If truth be told, it only looks as if a direct one-way street leads from the Aramaic-speaking and towards the ancient congregation in Palestine that oriented itself towards the Temple of Jerusalem, and to the first tentative attempts to form an urban congregation outside of the union of synagogues in the metropolises of the antique, and on further to the large Greek-speaking Hellenised congregations with a developed hierarchy and educational facilities that were orientated towards contemporary educational institutions. The more one releases oneself from this traditional model for the reconstruction of the history of Early Christianity, the clearer it becomes that the supposedly archaic phases of Early Christianity, just like Judeo-Christianity, in truth lived on joyfully, indeed very innovatively and vibrantly, and were not replaced by the respectively “higher” phase – in this case by the Hellenised heathen Christianity². The more one takes leave of the traditional model, the more attentive one becomes for the colourful diversity of institutional contexts within which Early Christians varied in theological reflection, and for the diversity of the norms that guided their actions and lent structure to their stability. Ultimately, it was already clear for quite some time – namely, in the more recent debates about “orthodoxy” and “heresy”, mainly discussed in the USA in the critical reception of Walter Bauer’s famous monograph – that the classic model of three “Catholic norms” basically only continued the antique majority church view of the development of the Christian church, especially as brought to us by Irenaeus and Tertullian. As such, the introductory quotes from Tertullian in Harnack are very appropriate, although a discussion of the problematic nature in the relationship between the modern ideal-typical model and the antique stylisation of the history was missing.

If one, like myself in 2007 and in 2015, takes seriously the social-scientific definition of norms in the context of fluid institutions that suggest stability, then one cannot present a norm without describing its function in the institution and within the framework of the institution for which it is foundational, bearing in mind that the norm is also central in suggesting the institution’s stability. However, one must also always ask about the symbolic communication of this norm – which is what I did in reference to the canon in my book.

It would, of course, be highly interesting to take a similar look at the other norms as well – whether those named in today’s title ‘discipline’ and ‘tradition’, or Harnack’s classic model with ‘religious office’ and ‘rule of faith’. I can’t do this here today, because there is enough material there to fill another two monographs, and it would require an extensive examination of the works of Wolfram Kinzig on confessional formulae and, above all, a more in-depth look at the works that present the famous threefold office as a model alongside many other forms. I have, after all, already published a piece on these problems of stylizing the idea of an “apostolic succession” as an idea that was characteristic in the Early Christianity of the entire pre-Constantine era. Harnack already realised that the Syrian traditions, for example as they have been handed down in Jerome and Epiphanius, counter this.

² So meinte Dieter Lührmann schon 1972, dass beide genannten „Traditionsbereiche *nebeneinander*, nicht zeitlich *hintereinander*“ liegen und „die Grenze zwischen beiden Bereichen nicht starr ist, sondern sehr viel durchlässiger vorgestellt werden muß, als es bisher üblich ist“ (ders., Erwägungen zur Geschichte des Urchristentums, EvTh 32 [1972] [452-467] 459).

However, what consequences does such a sociologically based understanding of norms entail for a discussion of the classic norms? I would like to talk about this looking at the canonisation of the Christian Bible, and in doing so, speak more about what I wrote about this fourteen and six years ago. It is clear, of course, that describing a historical process in general, and especially when this is the history of the canonisation of the Christian Bible, “cannot limit itself to the careful description of individual ‘dots’ backed up by source documents – one also needs the imagination and the courage to draw the lines between these dots” (as Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen already stated in the last comprehensive German monograph on the canonisation of the Christian Bible). In my monograph, my aim was first of all to expand on the sources base and to bring in papyrological sources besides the texts of the “great theologians”. These included the inventory lists of Early Christian libraries or books that were sent among congregations, but also the results of statistical analyses of antique papyrus collections (such as the ones found in Oxyrhynchus). If I was writing today, I would pay much more attention to the prospects for action that are linked to norms in general, and which also naturally play a role in the norms pertaining to the Biblical canon. Not only the famous thirty-ninth Easter letter by Athanasius, which Jens Schröter and I provide in the “Antique Christian Apocrypha” for the first time from the Greek fragments and the Coptic translation, aims – exploiting the episcopal authority of its author – to impose a certain precision to a not always precise norm (namely by listing canonical and non-canonical Biblical books), and intends to move people to act in a certain way in their handling of biblically authorized texts. David Brakke described this communication strategy with letters excellently, thus describing an interpretation perspective that naturally also applies for synodal texts like the corresponding passages of one provincial synod in the Phrygian town of Laodicea in the middle of the fourth century, as it equally applies for other lists of canonical books of the Christian Bible.

However, to include more intensely the dimensions of power and authority in a history of the canonization of the Christian Bible than I did in my monograph and in the practically monographic main introduction in the “Antique Christian Apocrypha” in the section about canonisation from the year 2012 is, however, not really a novel aspect of central interest to today’s topic. In consideration of “norms” as a topic of interest, in this last section I would mainly like to take a critical look at one central aspect of Harnack’s ideal-typical model, which so many colleagues have included in textbooks, thus perpetuating it, as it were. The model aims to explain a restriction to plurality that limited diversity with the help of norms as part of an anti-gnostic reaction (occasionally also an anti-Marcionite reaction). I believe that establishing norms – if one understands it from the very beginning in social-scientific terms as providing the foundations for an order that guides action and influences communication within the context of many social orders and their institutional stability suggestions – has a great deal to do with the stabilisation of plurality and not only with harnessing or restricting it. And that is something one can study in the history of the canonisation of the Christian Bible. My erstwhile Heidelberg colleague and New Testament scholar, Gerd Theißen, published a small monograph that did not attract much attention titled “The Religion of the First Christians. A Theory of Early Christianity”. Theißen aimed with this book, in connection with a series by Heidelberg Academy of the Sciences, to provide a description within the realm of religious history – that is, one not decisively shaped by an internal Christian perspective – and an analysis of the Early Christian religion. While Theißen followed the model of Baur, Ritschl and Harnack, and while he even sees Christianity in the second century as having been shaken by three crises – the “Judaic”, the “Gnostic” and the “Prophetic” crises – he nevertheless understands the formation of a canon of the Christian Bible and its increasing specification in the tradition of Christian Baur as a “commitment to plurality”³. According to Theißen, the canon preserved and limited a growing plurality in Early Christianity, which Heidelberg’s New Testament scholar explains as a grouping of four

³ Theißen, Religion, 356.

basic currents – Paulinian Christianity, Judaeo-Christianity, Synoptic Christianity and Johannine Christianity – each of these with two different forms.⁴ Theißen understands the canon as a ritual form of expression, “to the extent that it includes the books that are read in worship.”⁵ On a side note, almost a hundred and thirty years ago, Theodor von Zahn explained – long before the social sciences became more interested in the orientation of social orders and norms towards action and thus clearly setting himself apart from his favourite rival Harnack – his understanding of a canon of Biblical books in Christianity. And even if the names of Ferdinand Christian Baur and Theodor Zahn are not mentioned in Theißen’s book, and presumably no direction line of tradition can be drawn between them, it is surprising to what extent impulses from conflicting ideas, that is, from Baur, Harnack and Zahn are picked up on by Theißen. The fact that such syntheses of originally incompatible concepts on the history of the canon are now possible is also presumably a result of the general intellectual situation in the post-modern age, which the philosopher Jürgen Habermas already described many years ago as the “new complexity”. However, if in this way classic dichotomies among previously strongly opposing positions can be dismantled, then there is a better chance that we will be able to describe historical reality in a more appropriate manner than has been possible with the alternative models that have been applied to date. And if, on top of that, one achieves clarity about the fact that, over a very long period, we have been able to establish very different forms of the one single norm of a Biblical canon, and that individual well-known theologians like Origen had very different forms of a canon than a rural congregation in Upper Egypt did, whose priests could not read and could recite by heart one single Gospel (which we know from the ordination testimonials on papyrus published by von Gregor Schmelz), then, as the famous example of the canonisation shows, it would seem that the differing norms of the Christian institutions of the second and third century did not limit plurality in the way they are presumed to have done. In this light, they become even more so possible ways to preserve plurality and to counteract the harnessing and inhibiting of plurality.

I am naturally very aware that I have not spoken about religious office and rule of faith, and not about discipline and tradition either. But I have at least presented a few methodological expectations concerning how these Early Christian norms can be addressed (and about how not to speak about them). And I have shown that the curious – in Harnack described as an ideal-typical – limitation to the three norms is only convincing when one develops the model (as Harnack does) as an ideal-typical reconstruction based on Irenaeus and Tertullian. One can do this, of course, but the two authors do not represent the entirety of Early Christianity from the third century, even if they have become easily accessible in very good editions. But you, Ladies and gentlemen, are perhaps glad that my lecture ends here and you can much better inquire, think and write everything that is missing from it on your own. After all, that is how a good winter school or summer school should work – by providing the participants with food for thought. Thank-you very much for your patience today with both my history of thought and with my own attempts to think!

⁴ Theißen, Religion, 348-354.

⁵ Theißen, Religion, 367.