



# The Question of Canon – Pt. II

*How do we decide what it is?*



# Different views of Canon

- Historical-Critical model
  - Roman Catholic model
  - Canonical Critical model – we will cover this very little this as it differs very little from the Roman Catholic Model.
  - Neoorthodox/existential model
- \*The assumption of all these is that “canon” is something that is imposed upon a collection of books by people or a community, and not the other way around.



# 1 – Historical-Critical Model

- The community declaration of the right collection of books **defines** what “canon” is.
- Before an official declaration of the right collection, the right collection didn't exist.

# 1 – Historical-Critical Model

- **Obvious problem – How could a community be obedient to a God, if they and they alone picked what he said, did, and commanded?**
  - ***This makes people, not God, the causative agent.***
- **“In order to recognize a certain book to be Scripture in the first place, an early Christian would have needed to be able to say another book in his library was not Scripture.”**
  - **It follows to say that as soon as people began to use some books and not others, they were ostensibly closing the canon.**

## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- **All authority in Roman Catholic theology is presented by the Roman Catholic church as being derived from these three sources:**
  - **1. Scripture**
  - **2. Tradition –**
  - **3. Magisterium – (the church's authority of teaching and interpretation)**
- **The problem is that, ostensibly, the Magisterium defines the previous two.**

## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- “[Scripture] exists because the church exists.” – Karl Rahner, Catholic Theologian and author of Vatican II.
- “The Scriptures have only as much force as the fables of Aesop, if destitute of the authority of the Church.” - Roman Catholic cardinal Stanislaus Hosius, papal legate to the Council of Trent.

## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- “As Rahner puts it, we ‘derive the essence of the Scripture from the essence of the church,’ and therefore the Scripture is ‘derivative’ from the church and ‘an act of the Church.’ This sentiment is echoed by Peter Kreeft, who argues that the church ‘caused’ the canon because it preceded the canon: ‘The first generation of Christians did not even have the New Testament.’ Hans Küng states it more directly: ‘Without the Church there would be no New Testament.’”

## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- It would be wrong to *exclude* the human aspect, because if no one receives any particular book, then speaking of a “canon” is meaningless *to us*.
- “One Catholic conception of the church-canon relationship views the church not as creating or constituting the canon, but merely as recognizing the authority of the canon that was already there.”



## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- One Roman Catholic apologist pointed out that there was no inspired “table of contents” that God had provided.
- If such a thing existed, wouldn't the Magisterium have to declare it to be inspired first?
- Still putting people and their ability to know something as the determinative factor.

## 2 – Roman Catholic Model

- **“The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity . . . Newton did not create gravity but recognized it.” - J.I. Packer.**
- **This makes the rather obvious logical mistake analogous to that of a soldier who, receiving orders through the mail, concludes that the letter carrier is his commanding officer. Those who transmit, collect and distribute the message are not in the same league as those who write it in the first place. – N.T. Wright.**

- Packer, J.I. and Wright, N.T., as quoted by Michael J. Kruger (2012-04-05). Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books (Kindle Locations 881-3, 92-5). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.

# 3 – Canonical-critical model

- The church collectively decided on particular books to reflect what they believed to be representative of the gospel
- This is compelling because it tries to consider a historical model in which the ideas come first.
  - “Canon as function antedates canon as shape.”<sup>1</sup>

● Sanders, James, as quoted by Michael J. Kruger (2012-04-05). Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books (Kindle Locations 981-982). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.

# 3 – Canonical-critical model

- It fails because it still puts the people above the ideas.
- The bible is clear that “God’s word always makes God’s people”, and not the other way around.
  - The ideas make the people.
  - The gospel transforms. *People do not conform the gospel into something that they believe transforms.*

## 4 - Existential/Neoorthodox Model

- “Christians do not experience God in the Scriptures because they are canonical; rather they are “canonical” because Christians experience God in them.”<sup>1</sup>
- This has the virtue of making the fact of some metaphysical experience that which compels people in the early church to use some books while rejecting others.
  - “Bible constitutes itself the Canon. It is the Canon because it imposed itself upon the church as such.”<sup>2</sup> – Karl Barth

● Michael J. Kruger (2012-04-05). Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books (Kindle Locations 1114-1115). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.  
● Barth, Karl as quoted by Michael J. Kruger (2012-04-05). Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books (Kindle Locations 1148-1149). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition

## 4 - Existential/Neoorthodox Model

- This has the problem that it makes the experience of Scripture superior to Scripture itself.
- “the texts are authoritative not in virtue of any property they may have.” – Karl Barth
- Truth itself becomes a transient property, something that only exists concretely and canonically when someone experiences it.

# A 5<sup>th</sup> view of Canon

- “If we are to be balanced, it seems we need three aspects to our definition of canon: canon as reception (exclusive), canon as use (functional), and canon as divinely given (ontological).”
- We see people receiving it as authoritative.
- It accomplishes its purpose.
- It has divine qualities.
- It is true regardless of whether or not people receive it or recognize it.

# Tautology

- “The most traveled roads in Europe are the best roads; that is why they are so heavily traveled.” – Arthur Darby Nock<sup>1</sup>
- It is the simple truth to say that the New Testament books became canonical because no one could stop them from doing so.” – William Barclay<sup>2</sup>

• 1 As quoted by Metzger, Bruce. *The Canon of the New Testament*. (Oxford University Press: 1987), 287.

• 2 Ibid.





# Self-Authenticating Canon

- The reality is that though we may believe that certain books were chosen by the early church, the reality is that the early church recognized certain books as Scripture – and, therefore, canonical – immediately and almost universally.
- The early church also excluded a great number of books from the category of Scripture immediately and almost universally.



# Self-Authenticating Canon

- They applied criteria, but often that criteria was dependent upon notions of authority contained in the books themselves.
- This is only a problem, if we think – as with the four views we just looked at – that people are the ultimate authority.
- If we think that God is the ultimate authority, and that he is a speaking God who communicates through His word, then that authority is natural and visible.



# Unity and Diversity

- The Scriptures themselves warn of a diversity of opinions. The fact of diversity is not denied within the church, it is acknowledged, defined, and demonstrated.
- Spiritual forces seek to undermine and destroy the church and everyone in it.
- As Jesus was much harder on those within religion, the New Testament consistently warns of dissenting voices within the church, while encouraging engaging the world with the truth.

# Internal Reasons

- 2 Peter 3:16 – A group of Paul’s letters are asserted to be of parallel authority with the Hebrew scriptures.
  - Letter begins with a claim to apostolic authority, readers would take it as such.
- 1 Timothy 5:18 - authoritative citations in parallel
  - Deuteronomy 25:4
  - Luke 10:7
  - “...for the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves to be paid.’”

# Internal Reasons


- “that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,” – 2 Peter 3:2.
- “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” – 1 Corinthians 14:37
- “who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant...[contrasted and connected with Moses and the]...old covenant,” 2 Corinthians 3:6, 14

# Internal Reasons

- “For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable...It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,” Hebrews 2:2-3
- Paul repeatedly asserts that his letters should be publically read.
  - Repeated assertion of apostolic authority.
- Paul would have known that he would have been placing his writings along side those being read in synagogue.

# External Reasons

- Vastly too many to mention
  - Repeated references to New Testament documents as authoritative
  - Authority, in part, because they are apostolic or
  - Because the message is from an apostle or is eyewitness testimony
  - Despising pseudonymity
  - Four Gospels then Luke in earliest attestation and manuscripts
  - Early rejection of Tatian's harmonization
  - *kata Markon, euangelion kata Lukan* – “according to”
  - Early numbering of Paul's letters

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