

6—Closing the Canon

“The Story of the Church”

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Grk (*kanōn*) rule; an authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture

1. The development of the Canon of Scripture

- A. Paul’s letters we’re by the end of the 1st century (2 Peter 3:16)
His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures.
- B. Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp quote the words of Paul and Jesus, but do not yet call them “scriptures”
- C. Marcion (140) offers the first Christian canon, which includes 10 epistles of Paul and a version of Luke; rejects the Hebrew Bible
- D. Justin Martyr (150) refers to the “memoirs of the apostles”
- E. Irenaeus (180) proclaims the four-gospels to be scripture
- F. The Canon Muratori (200) has all but Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John; included Wisdom of Solomon, Revelation of Peter
- G. Origen (253) leaves out James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John

2. The Council of Nicaea (325) debates the Trinity without a settled canon

- A. Eusebius (324) adds 1 Peter, rejected 2 John, Jude
- B. Athanasius (367) publishes a list of all 27 modern books in his Easter letter, declares the bible “canonized” (leaves out Esther, includes Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah)

3. The Church Fathers used five criteria in considering a text:

- A. Apostolicity—does it come from an apostolic authority? (Gal 1:1)
- B. Orthodoxy—does it agree with sound doctrine? (1 Thess 6:3-4)
- C. Antiquity—is it authentic historical text? (2 Thess 2:15)
- D. Inspiration—is it inspired by the Holy Spirit? (2 Tim 3:16)
- E. Usage—is it broadly in use by the Church? (1 Cor 7:17)

4. Later traditions add back in some deuterocanonical books

- A. Deuterocanonical books in the Septuagint (Greek) but not Masoretic (Hebrew) bible
- B. Unified Church, Council of Rome (382) adds Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Sirach, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom; additions to Esther, Daniel, and Baruch
- C. Orthodox Church, 2nd Council of Trullan (692) adds Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, 3 & 4 Maccabees
- D. Ethiopian Orthodox Church adds Jubilees, Enoch, 1-3 Maqabyan (81)

5. Protestant Reformation goes back to the originals

- A. Martin Luther (1522) rejects all deuterocanonicals; moves Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & John, and Revelation to the back of the bible
- B. Catholic Church, Council of Trent (1545) reaffirms their list
- C. The Church of England, Thirty-nine articles (1563)
- D. Calvinists, Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)
- E. Greek Orthodox, Synod of Jerusalem (1672) reaffirms their list

6. Scripture vs. Tradition

- A. Catholic view: the canon was determined by an active process of the church—tends to minimize how biblical tradition is
- B. Protestant view: the church acknowledged passively what was inherently authoritative—tends to minimize how tradition has influence the exegesis of scripture