

The Formation and Basis of the New Testament Canon

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Week 3

3. Important but Underwhelming Agreement: The Church's Original Process of Deliberation and Subsequent Questioning in the Modern Period

- a. Earliest Apostolic Fathers
- b. Catalysts toward greater definition
- c. Steps toward greater definition
- d. Significant consensus: Formal lists and church councils
 - iv. Athanasius of Alexandria's Easter letter in AD 367
 - v. Augustine
 - *On Christian Learning* 2.13
 - Synod of Hippo (393) and Third Council of Carthage (397)
 - Sixth Council of Carthage (419)
 - vi. Jerome
 - vii. Council of Trent (1545-63)
 - viii. Belgic Confession (1561)
 - ix. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)
- e. Summary reflections

f. Later re-questioning of the canon

i. Renaissance (15th-16th C)

ad fontes

ii. Reformation (16th and early 17th C)

sola Scriptura

iii. The European Enlightenment and beyond (18th C to today):

(a) Critiquing the claims found in Scripture based on what is rationally believable or not, including its claims about itself

(b) Denying the unity of the NT's own teaching and therefore its ability to provide a norm for our thinking

(c) Denying the inherent uniqueness of Scripture compared to other texts and so valuing extrabiblical books equally or even above biblical ones

(d) Claiming that the canon itself and the very notion of having a canon were subsequent, extrinsic developments foreign to the earliest church and created by the church later due to subsequent contingencies

iv. Summary Observations

4. Sufficient Grounds: The NT's Self-Attestation and Our Full Assurance

a. Definitions: Nature of the Canon, proper foundations of belief, and the role of evidence

i. Nature of Canon

- Belgic Confession VII: "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the **Only** Rule of Faith." "the doctrine thereof is **perfect and complete** in all respects... Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule..."

- WSC 2—“The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is **the only rule** to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.”

ii. The function of evidence concerning an ultimate authority

(a) What does the canon rest on, objectively speaking?

- WCF 1.4—The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

(b) What is the basis for our knowing that, and (c) what additional evidence also helps corroborate that?

- WCF 1.5 We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture [universal attestation; synodical or conciliar pronouncements], and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God) , the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation [cp. rule of faith], the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

b. Scriptural self-testimony

i. Preliminary comments: The nature of the evidence

(a) Importance of the question:

(b) General observations on its express articulation:

(c) Procedural Note

ii. The cumulative weight of several lines of teaching