



ALLIANCE
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology 2016
Pre-Conference

Why These Books and No Others? The Canonization of the New Testament

Session 1: The Origins of Canon: Why Do We Have a New Testament Canon at All?

- I. The Eschatological Nature of Early Christianity
 - A. Early Christians Believed God's Promised Redemption had Come in Jesus Christ
 - B. Implications of Christ's Redemption on the Development of the Canon
 1. The Redemptive Activity of Jesus was viewed as the Completion of the OT Story
 2. The OT Pattern Indicates that New Word-Revelation Comes *After* Redemption
 3. The OT Predicted that the New Kingdom will Bring a New Divine Message
- II. The Concept of Covenant in Early Christianity
 - A. The Earliest Christians Viewed the Activity of Jesus Through the Lens of Covenant
 - B. Implications of a Covenantal Orientation on the Development of the Canon
 1. The OT was born into the ANE world where there was a close relationship between covenants and written texts
 2. The OT was patterned after these extra-biblical ANE covenants—and thus also understood the close relationship between covenants and written texts
 3. Christians Would have understood the New Covenant as having Written Texts
 - C. Indications that the New Testament was Covenant Document
 1. Inscriptional Curse (Rev 22:18-19)
 2. Public Reading of Books

3. 2 Cor 3:6, "ministers of a new covenant"
4. Church Fathers' use of "covenant" for NT documents

III. The Role of the Apostles in Early Christianity

A. The Written Word of the Apostles Was as Authoritative as Their Spoken Word

B. Factors that Led Apostles to Put Message in Written Form

1. The Covenantal Heritage of Judaism
2. The Practical Needs of the Apostolic Mission
3. Would the Expectation of Christ's Imminent Return Keep Christians from Writing things Down?

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Session 2: The Origins of Canon: When Were the New Testament books First Regarded as
Scripture?

Introduction: Was Irenaeus the Architect of the NT Canon?

"It is not possible that the gospels can be either more or fewer than the number they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live and four principle winds... [and] the cherubim, too, were four-faced." *—Haer.* 3.11.8

I. Understanding Irenaeus

A. Irenaeus Provides No Indication He is an Innovator

B. Irenaeus is Drawing on Earlier Tradition

II. Contemporaries of Irenaeus

A. The Muratorian Fragment (c.180)

B. Theophilus of Antioch (c.177)

C. Clement of Alexandria (c.196)

III. Predecessors to Irenaeus

A. Justin Martyr (c.150)

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." *—1 Apol.* 67.3

B. The Apostolic Fathers

1. Papias (writing c.125, but referring to c.90)

"The Elder used to say: Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he [Peter] remembered. . . For he was intent on just one purpose: to leave nothing out that he heard or to include any falsehood among them . . . Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could."
Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15–16

2. Epistle of Barnabas (c.130)

"As it is written, 'Many are called, but few are chosen.'" *Barn* 4.14.

3. Ignatius (c.110)

"Paul, who was sanctified, who gained a good report, who was right blessed, in whose footsteps may I be found when I shall attain to God, who in *every epistle* makes mention of you in Christ Jesus." *Eph.* 12.2

4. Polycarp (c.110)

"As it is written in these Scriptures, 'Be angry and do not sin and do not let the sun go down on your anger.'" *Phil* 12.1

5. 1 Clement (c.96)

"Take up the epistle of that blessed apostle, Paul... To be sure, he sent you a letter in the Spirit (pneumatikw/j) concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos." *1 Clem* 47.1-3

C. The New Testament

1. 2 Peter 3:16: "Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you...there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the *other Scriptures*"

2. 1 Tim 5:18: "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"

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Session 3: The Artifacts of Canon: Manuscripts as a Window into the Development of the New Testament

Introduction: Importance of the 'Physicality' of the New Testament

I. The Quantity of Early Manuscripts

A. New Testament Manuscripts: 60+ (2nd and 3rd centuries)

B. 'Apocryphal' Manuscripts: 17 (2nd and 3rd centuries)

C. Implications on the Literary Culture of Christianity:

1. Shows the "bookish" nature of the early Christian faith
2. Shows that Apocryphal texts were not particularly favored

II. Early Manuscript Collections

A. The Gospels

1. Examples: P75, P4+64+67, P45
2. Significance of the Gospel Titles

B. Paul's Epistles

1. Examples: P46, P30, P49+65, P92
2. Significance of the Pauline Titles

C. Other New Testament Books

1. Revelation: P18, P47, P98, P115, and 0308
2. Single books: James (P20, P23, P100), 1 Peter (P125), 1 John (P9), and Jude (P78)
3. P72: Composite Codex, include 1&2 Peter and Jude
4. 0232: Codex including Hebrews plus all the Catholic Letters

III. The Early Christian Use of the Codex

A. Why Did Early Christians Prefer the Codex?

B. The Content of Early Christian Codices

C. "And above all, the parchments" (2 Tim 4:13)

Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology 2016
How Firm a Foundation: The Bible's Authority, Sufficiency, and Clarity
Plenary Session 2
How Do We Know the Bible is God's Word?
Recovering the Doctrine of a Self-Authenticating Scripture

I. What do we Mean When We Say Scripture is "Self-Authenticating"?

A. What We Do *Not* Mean

1. We are not merely saying the Scriptures *claim* to be God's Word (though they do)
2. We are not saying historical evidences/facts are never allowed in the discussion

B. What We Do Mean

1. Scripture bears evidence within itself of its own divine origins
2. The Reformers argued the Scripture bore "divine qualities" or *indicia*

II. Where Do We Get the Idea of a Self-Authenticating Scripture?

A. From Scripture!

1. God is Self-Authenticating

"God swore by himself." Heb 6:13

2. Analogy of General Revelation

"If the heavens declare the glory of God and therefore bear witness to their divine Creator, the Scriptures as God's handiwork must be also bear the imprints of his authorship." –John Murray

3. God's People Recognize the Voice of their Lord

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me." –John 10:27

B. Best Articulated by the Reformers (e.g., Calvin, Owen, Turretin, Bavinck)

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, 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, 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.

III. What are these 'Divine Qualities' of Scripture that Show it to be from God?

A. The Beauty and Excellency of Scripture

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps 119:103)

B. The Power and Efficacy of Scripture

"For the Word of God is living and active...piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow" (Heb 4:12).

C. The Unity and Harmony of Scripture

"[God] never lies." Titus 1:2

IV. Objections to the Self-Authenticating Nature of Scripture

A. How Can These Divine Qualities Really Be There if So Many People Reject the Scriptures?

1. Due to the Fall, the natural man cannot recognize the things of the Spirit
2. One needs the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium spiritus sancti internum*) to rightly recognize God's Word.

B. Doesn't a Self-Authenticating Bible Lead to Subjectivism?

1. No because the Reformed view is based on the objective qualities of Scripture, not an experience with the Spirit.
2. This distinguishes the Reformed view from its imitators (Barthianism, Mormonism)

How Firm a Foundation: The Bible's Authority, Sufficiency, and Clarity

Plenary Session 4

Hidden Gospels: Our Culture's Quest to Rewrite the Story of Jesus

Introduction: Discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas*

I. Our Culture's Fascination with Lost Gospels

- A. Like the time of the Judges, our culture values diversity (so there is no absolute truth)

- B. The study of early Christianity has been affected by the push for diversity
 - 1. Walter Bauer's views of orthodoxy and heresy
 - 2. For modern scholars, there is no such thing as "Christianity" in the earliest stages

- C. Different (and equally legitimate) Christianities leads to different (and equally legitimate) Gospels

Examples include the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Mary, and the recent so-called Gospel of Jesus' Wife

II. The Case for the Canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

- A. The Canonical Gospels are the Earliest We Have
 - 1. All the Canonical Gospels are dated c.50-90 A.D.
 - 2. No Apocryphal Gospel is dated to the First Century

Implications:

- Closer to the events of Jesus, the better
- Eyewitnesses were still alive when the Gospels were published (and thus could challenge their content)

B. The Canonical Gospels Have a Credible Connection to the Apostles

- Who were the apostles?
 1. We have good reasons to connect the Canonical Gospels to the Apostles
 - Example: John. Irenaeus knew Polycarp who knew John Personally.
 - Implication: Gospels contain authoritative, eyewitness testimony
 2. Not a Single Apocryphal Gospel Could have Been Written by an Apostle
 - Apocryphal Gospels bear the names of Apostles for obvious reasons (Thomas, Peter, Phillip, etc.)
 - But, given their late date, none could have been written by an apostle or their companions

C. The Canonical Gospels Lack the Legendary Embellishments of Later Gospels

1. The Canonical Gospels Speak in a Restrained, Manner-of-Fact Manner
 - Scholars have observed for generations that the canonical gospels are quite restrained in the way they tell their story. It is very direct, straightforward.
2. Apocryphal Gospels Often have Extensive Legendary Embellishments
 - Example: Infancy Gospel of Thomas
 - Example: Gospel of Peter

D. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Authoritative from a Very Early Date

1. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Scripture Very Early
 - Irenaeus: Four and only Four
 - Muratorian Fragment: Four and Only Four
 - Clement of Alexandria: Four and Only Four
2. Most of the Apocryphal Gospels Were Expressly Condemned Or Simply Ignored
 - Not a Single manuscript with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
 - Not a single canonical list with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
 - Very few manuscripts (e.g. Thomas has total of 3, whereas canonical are upwards of 2,500).