

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

The First 300 years

“Canonicity of the NT”

Canonicity of the NT

Introduction

1. Definition: “canon” – rule/list

- The *list* of books which are recognized as the *rule* of belief and practice

2. Need for a Canon

- Need for an authoritative, objective, written source for practice and doctrine

3. Essential Issue

- The recognition of authority/inspiration
- Authority determines canonicity not vice-versa

Key Question: “What criteria was used to determine whether a given book was canonical?”

Canonicity of the NT

Popular View

1. “Process of Recognition”

- great number of letters contending for recognition during first 300 years
- once Christianity is legal, there is an great need for a recognized canon
 - Eusebius (330's)—50 Bibles
 - Council of Carthage (397)—selects these 27 books as canonical

2. Criteria

- a.) Authorship
- b.) Orthodoxy
- c.) Wide Acceptance/Use
- d.) Evidence of Inspiration

CANONICITY

Greek Apologist (120-170 A.D.)

1. Justin

-taught in Rome (138-161 A.D.)

-refers to the "memoirs of the apostles" (read in church service)

2. Papias

-taught in Asia Minor (140 A.D.)

-comments on the gospels (*Mark is Peter's interpreter)

3. Marcion

-heretic (140 A.D.); held only to Paul's writings

-lists 10 Pauline epistles (canon based on authorship)

4. Heraclion

-Gnostic heretic (160 A.D.); disciple of Valentinus

-first commentator on the N.T.; smallest details of text divinely intended

5. Muratorian Canon

-Latin document listing authoritative books (170 A.D.)--church at Rome

-Luke (third gospel), John, Acts, Paul's thirteen epistles, Jude, 1&2

John, Revelation

*rejected non-apostolic books

6. Old Syriac and Old Latin Versions

-first translations from Greek (150-200 A.D.)

-present canon except 2 Peter

Canonicity of the NT

Historical View

1. “Immediate Reception”

- from the beginning the church recognized certain writings as uniquely authoritative—the very books that compose our NT
- these writing were widely known and used, and distinguished from other writings

2. Criteria

****ONLY ONE*: APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP**

- A book from the hand of an apostle was immediately received as authoritative
 - The apostles wrote with authority
 - The church recognized the authority of the apostolic office—words were true
 - Not a long process to receive a book, but immediate

Canonicity of the NT

“Non-Apostolic” Authorship

1. Gospel of Mark

- Mark is Peter’s interpreter; the authority of this book derives from Peter (apostolic)
- Mark’ relationship to Peter (1 Peter 5:13)

[The role of an “amanuensis”]

2. Gospel of Luke & Acts

- Luke was Paul’s companion and amanuensis; these books derive their authority from Paul

3. Epistle to the Hebrews

- Three historic options:
 - a) sole authorship of Paul
 - b) sole authorship of one of Paul’s companions (e.g. Barnabas; Luke)
 - c) joint authorship of Paul & companion
- In any case, its authority derives from Paul

4. Epistles of James & Jude

- Issue: several James' and Jude's in NT
- Two possibilities:
 - a) James & Jude who were apostles
 - maybe brothers, sons of Alphaeus
 - Catholic & Traditional Protestant Views
 - b) James & Jude—brothers of Jesus
 - these men were given special “apostolic” status due to their relationship with Jesus (Acts 15; Gal. 1:19; 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:7)

Canonicity of the NT

Value of this Doctrine

1. Objective Criterion

- Not subjective judgment made 300 years after the books were written
- Confidence in the authority of the NT

2. Closed Canon

- Explains why no other books are being added to the NT
- Authoritative revelation is complete

Canonicity of the NT

Greek Apologist (A.D. 120-170)

1. Justin (Rome 138-161)

- Refers to “memoirs of the apostles”

2. Papias (140)

- Comments on the gospels

3. Marcion (140)

- First canon; held only to Paul’s writings
- Rejected by the church as a heretic

4. Muratorian Canon (170)

- Latin document from Rome listing received books
- Missing only Hebrews, James, 1 John, 2 Peter

5. Old Syriac & Old Latin Versions

- First translations from Greek (150)
- Present canon except 2 Peter