

COMPREHENDING THE CANON

WHEN WERE THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE WRITTEN AND BY WHOM?
WHO DECIDED WHICH BOOKS WOULD BE IN AND OUT AND WHEN DID
THIS HAPPEN? ARE THERE LOST BOOKS WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN
INCLUDED? COME EXPLORE WITH US THE ORIGINS AND RELIABILITY
OF THE BIBLICAL CANON.



bible
training
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Recommended Resources

- Bruce, F.F. 1960. *The New Testament documents: Are they reliable?* Downers Grove: IVP.
- Kruger, M.J. 2012. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the origins and authority of the New Testament books.* Wheaton: CrossWay.
- Wright, N.T. 2013. *Scripture and the authority of God: How to read the Bible today.* New York: HarperCollins.

1) The authority of the canon

- The idea of a ‘canon’
 - “a general law, rule, principle, or criterion by which something is judged” (Oxford English Dictionary)

“Real history is possible; real historians do it all the time. Real, fresh, historical readings of the Bible, measured rigorously by the canons of real historical work, can and do yield fresh insight.” – Wright
Scripture and the authority of God p113

Biblical and patristic usage of 'canon'

¹¹ See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! ¹² Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to **all who follow this rule (κανών)**—to the Israel of God.

- Galatians 6:11-16

Biblical and patristic usage of 'canon'

- These things, dearly beloved, we write, not only as admonishing you, but also as putting ourselves in remembrance. For we are in the same lists, and the same contest awaiteth us. Wherefore let us forsake idle and vain thoughts; and let us conform to the glorious and venerable **rule (κανών)** which hath been handed down to us
 - 1 Clement 7:2 (+- 95AD)
- This then is **the order of the rule** of our faith, and the foundation of the building, and the stability of our conversation: God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith. The second point is: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - Irenaeus *Demonstration Apostolic Preaching* 6 (+- 180AD)

RESPEK

TROTS

LOJALITEIT

BOYS



“That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.”

– Bertrand Russell *Mysticism and Logic* (1903)

THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

TRADITION

Denominations
Church History
Spiritual Practices
Christian Writings

REASON

Science
Philosophy
Logic

EXPERIENCE

Personal Experience
Emotions
Shared Experiences
Testimonies
Stories of Saints

SCRIPTURE

“The Bible is God’s Word to the extent that God causes it to be His Word, to the extent that he speaks through it;”

- Karl Barth

“Barth believed that the Scriptures are not the word of God, per se, but merely a *witness* to the word of God (Jesus Christ). Revelation is not a propositional statement about God; rather it is an event (*Ereignis*), an encounter, something that ‘happens’ to an individual. Thus, the Scriptures are not the word of God in a static sense, but ‘become’ the word of God when an existential experience occurs”

- Michael Kruger

Canon as historically determined

- Canon-within-the-canon model

“It is a most assured result of *biblical criticism* that every one of the twenty-seven books which now constitute our New Testament is assuredly genuine and authentic.” – B.B. Warfield

“[The authenticity of the New Testament can be demonstrated] by the tests of reliability employed in general historiography” – J.W. Montgomery

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ”

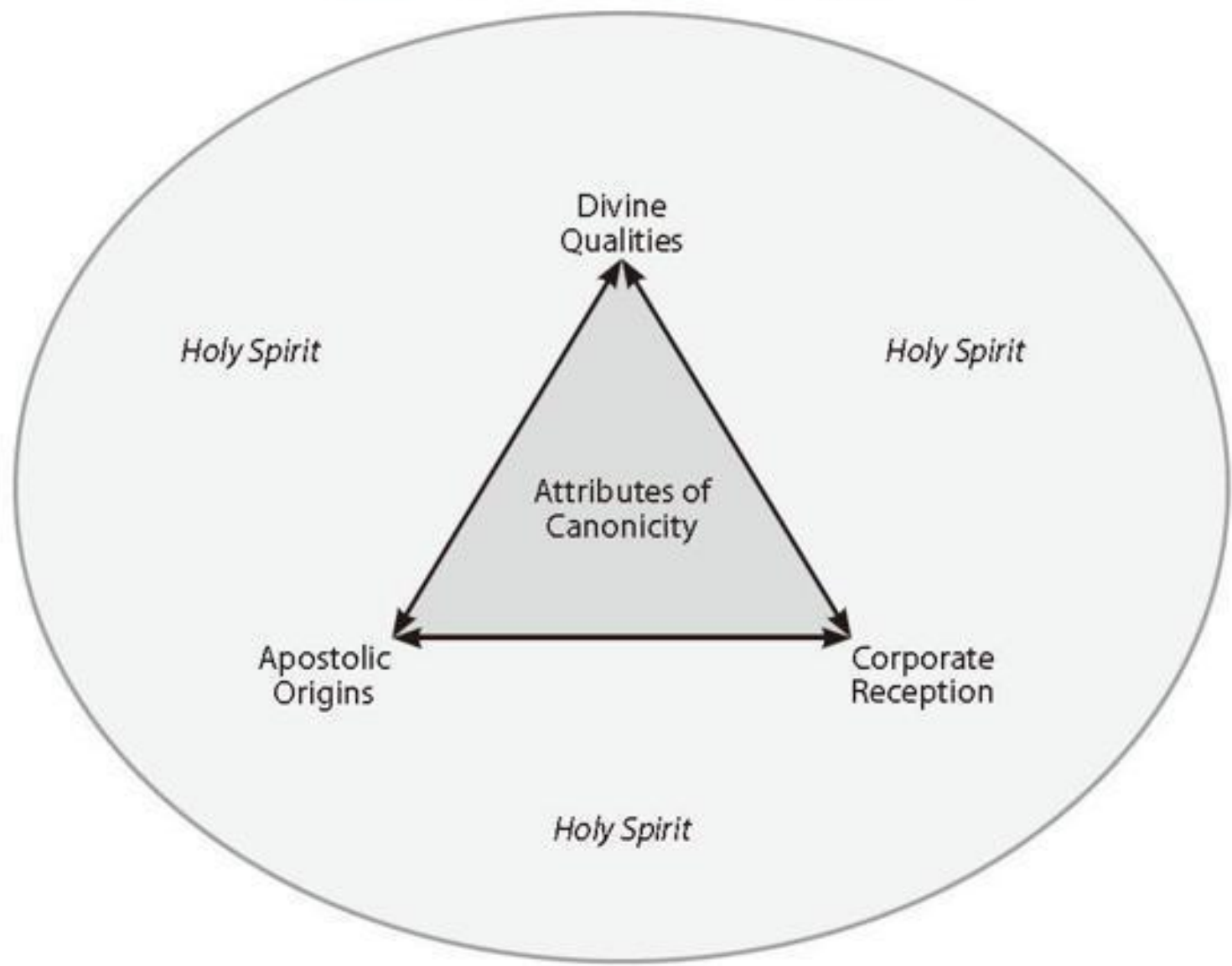
- 1 Clement 42:1-2 (+- 95AD)

“Canonization is recognition of apostolicity, not simply in the sense of the recognition that certain texts are of apostolic authorship or provenance, but, more deeply, in the sense of the confession that these texts [are] grounded in the salvific act of God in Christ which has taken place once and for all”

- John Webster

- Craig Evans

Figure 1. The self-authenticating model



Definitions of 'canon'

- Focus on **corporate reception** -> 'exclusive' definition of canon. Books (formally) recognized by the church.
- Focus on **divine qualities** -> 'functional' definition. Books used as authoritative revelation by the community.
- Focus on **apostolic origins** -> 'ontological' definition of canon. Books given by God as the redemptive historical deposit.

“If the current form of the canon includes the preferred books of the theological winners and thereby represents a loss of great diversity, how, at the same time, can one claim that the canon is composed of contradictory books that reflect great diversity? If the ‘winners’ determined the canon, then why would they pick books from various and contradictory theological camps? One cannot argue that the canon is the “invention”¹⁰⁵ of the proto-orthodox designed to suppress the opposition and then turn around and argue that the canon is a cacophony of diverse theological viewpoints that stand in opposition.

- Kruger *Canon revisited*

“Jesus answered, “**It is written**: ‘Man shall not live on

“What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? .

.. What if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communing to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it?

B.B. Warfield *The inspiration and authority of the Bible*

the two shall become one flesh’?” – Matt 19:3