

“There Is No Compelling Reason to Accept the Books of the Bible as Special”

I have some comments and questions regarding [your article on the church canon](#)—in particular, the last paragraph. You state that:

“We show that it is true to unbelievers by demonstrating that it is systematically consistent.”

However, there are numerous inconsistencies throughout the bible—in both the old and new testaments—and in particular throughout the gospels and the accounts of the life and death of Jesus—as most non-believers can readily point out. While the inconsistencies as a whole do not negate the viability of the scripture, it does indicate that the canon as it stands is NOT systematically consistent.

You also state that:

“We make belief possible by using both historical evidence and philosophical tools.”

Philosophical, yes—but historical, no. Archeological and historical research has done as much to prove as disprove the scripture—at best a 50-50 balance.

And you also state:

“Once individuals refuse to accept the claim of inspiration that the Bible makes for itself, they are left with a set of ethics without a foundation.”

True—however, it is not sufficient to take the word of one source in regards to origin or inspiration. In other words, just because one book of the bible (a collection of documents

written at very different times and by very different authors) says so isn't sufficient to make it so for the whole. At the time that portion of the bible was written, the whole did not yet exist and the reference to inspiration could only be referring to the work in which it appears.

If that is the argument—then there is no need for philosophical or historical tools to aid in believe. You cannot “have your cake and eat it too” in this case—either use science (history, etc.) to prove the reliability and uniqueness of the canon or base it on faith—one or the other, not both.

It seems to me—that despite an otherwise well researched and argued explanation of the canonization of the current bible—there still is no compelling reason for the current books of the bible to be held in any higher esteem than those of the apocrypha or the writings of early church fathers.

Thank you for the thoughtful response to my essay on the canonization of the Bible. Let me briefly respond to some of your points.

However, there are numerous inconsistencies throughout the bible in both the old and new testaments—and in particular throughout the gospels and the accounts of the life and death of Jesus as most non-believers can readily point out. While the inconsistencies as a whole do not negate the viability of the scripture, it does indicate that the canon as it stands is NOT systematically consistent.

The question of consistency regarding the Gospels has been hotly contested. Perhaps the problem partly lies in defining what we mean by consistency. No one denies that the writers were attempting to give different perspectives regarding the events and ministry of Jesus. My view and the view of conservative theologians is that the teachings of the four Gospels are consistent even though individual details might

differ. Where some see inconsistency and conflict, others see different perspectives of a single or similar event. The Gospels were not written as a history text or as a biographical work in the modern sense, to hold these texts to this kind of standard would be placing unwarranted restrictions on the writings.

Archeological and historical research has done as much to prove as disprove the scripture at best a 50-50 balance.

The role of archaeology and historical evidence in affirming the NT writings is also a complex one. You seem to be arguing that if one places their faith in the teachings of the NT they cannot use historical and archaeological evidence to defend the texts in any manner. While I would agree that neither archaeological nor historical evidence can prove that the teachings of the Bible are theologically true, they can affirm a number of things about the nature of the texts. First, they give us expanding knowledge of the geographical setting of the events that are described. Second, they help us to understand the religious milieu of the time (ex. Nag Hammadi findings). Third, they constrain the attempts of some to mythologize the NT. The discoveries of the Well of Jacob, the Pool of Siloam, the probable location of the Pool of Bethesda, and the name of Pilate himself on a stone in the Roman theater at Caesarea lend historical credibility to the NT text. Certainly the reliability of the NT writings can benefit from positive archaeological and historical evidence.

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The high regard that the church Fathers had for the OT writings did not transfer to the NT texts until the church was forced to respond to threatening issues. Since some had been disciples of Apostles, the urgency to define the canon was not intense. Once given the need to do so in the second and third

centuries, believers held to those writings that affirmed the tradition that had been handed down from the beginning. The place given to the Apocrypha by the early church is another issue which I address in [my essay](#) on those writings.

Thanks again for your comments.

Sincerely,

Don Closson