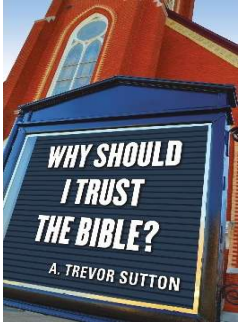


Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible? **A. Trevor Sutton**

Session Five – Claim: A small group secretly picked Bible texts

Elder, Dave Reitz , presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Parlor tricks are fun as long as they stay in the parlor. However, you do not want your doctor to do sleight of hand... You do not want your banker to do sleight of hand... There are countless other places – auto repair shop, dentist, grocery store, subway – where you do not want sleight of hand to happen. Parlor tricks are fun as long as they stay in the parlor.

Claim: A small group in the early church picked the books of the bible behind closed doors.

Juicy scandals can draw a crowd... Open and honest deliberation, on the other hand, causes people to yawn... Books and documentaries, scholars and researchers have tried hard to turn the Bible into a scandalous scheme concocted by the Church. They claim that the biblical canon came together secretly and illegitimately. This story line, though erroneous and untrue, certainly draws a crowd. (92)

Read typical claim from 92-93 and discuss – have you heard this claim? Where?

Read actual events from 93 and discuss – does this seem to align with what can be verified textually and archaeologically?

These Christian texts circulated across vast geographic spaces. During the first century, the apostle Paul's letters began to circulate as a collection. During the second century, the four Gospels began to circulate as a collection. These texts then began to circulate collectively rather than individually... Although there were other texts present during this time, the Christian communities recognized them as inaccurate. The church freely and openly discussed whether these texts ought to be used in worship and catechesis. (93)

Example of this from Serapion of Antioch in 190AD with Gospel of Peter. (94)

The formation of the biblical canon was openly discussed and entirely transparent... The church utilized different categories when classifying various texts:

Homologoumena: These texts were unanimously included in the biblical canon. There were no disputes or disagreements as to whether these texts deserved to be in the Bible based on author, content, and widespread usage among congregations...

Antilegoumena: These were texts that some disagreed about in regards to their canonical status. There were some church leaders or congregations that did not consider these texts a part of the biblical canon because there were questions about author, content, or usage among congregations...

Heretical: There was unanimous agreement that these texts were not fit to be included in the biblical canon because they were incorrect, inaccurate, or part of an entirely separate religious community. (95)



Determining the biblical canon was not a closed conspiracy. Rather, it was a deliberate dialogue that took place over many generations. There are a few crucial highlights in the canonization process that are worth knowing:

Early Church Writings. The early church was geographically diverse with various communities dispersed across hundreds of miles. As a result of this dispersion, church leaders used letters and other writings to communicate across the various Christian communities. These texts provide evidence of the active and open conversations that took place regarding which books were included in the biblical canon...[Eusebius, ca. 325AD; Athanasius, 367AD; and church meetings in Hippo Regius, 393AD, and Carthage, 397AD; all confirmed 27 canonical NT texts]

The Council of Nicea... It has been alleged that this was when the Church determined which books were to be included in the Bible and which books were to be burned. In actuality, this council convened at the request of the Roman Emperor Constantine I to discuss debates about the divinity of Jesus that were introduced by a theological movement known as Arianism. This council resulted in the creation of the Nicene Creed. No record or evidence exists indicating that an extensive discussion took place on which books should be included in the Bible and which books should be excluded...

[Perhaps discuss why, with no historical evidence, this theory developed. - RM]

Codex Sinaiticus... Dating back to about AD 330-360. This text contains many books of the Old Testament and New Testament together. Although it is fragmented as a result of age, the text does provide firm evidence that the majority of the biblical canon was set fourth by the fourth century.

Jerome's Vulgate. This is a Latin translation of the Bible composed in AD 382 at the request of Pope Damasus I... One striking feature of the Vulgate is that it labeled a group of texts "apocryphal" since they were included only in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) and were excluded from the Hebrew text. By doing this, Jerome separated these texts from the rest of the biblical canon and determined them to be of secondary status. (95-97)

What is apparent from these highlights is that the formation of the biblical canon was not top-down, authoritarian, or isolated to a single moment in history. There were no backroom negotiations as to what books were in and what books were out. There is no single moment at which point the canonical books of the Bible were once and for all determined. (98)

If time allows, see Matthew 7:15-22, Galatians 1:8, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 Peter 2:1-3... false teachers were a known problem from the very beginning, not a useful invention for a consolidation of political power.

