

I often receive questions about how we got the canon of the New Testament. We have twenty-seven books in it. Who decided? On what grounds? And when? Here is a recent question on the matter.

QUESTION

I have always wondered about the men (only men!) who decided “this one’s in . . . that one’s out!” back in 325 (was it 325?) at Trullan, Rome, Trent and where else? Nicea?

RESPONSE:

The first thing to emphasize is that the most common answer one hears - an answer that seems to have become common sense among people-interested-in-such-things-at-large — is completely wrong. It appears that people have this answer because they read it someplace, or heard it from someone who had read it someplace, and that someplace was a place in particular: Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code! (If you don’t know, I wrote an entire book pointing out the historical mistakes in the book. [title: Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code]. That was a particularly fun book for me to write. Some of the mistakes were real howlers...) Contrary to what Brown says (and claims is a historical fact, and NOT part of his fiction!), the canon of the New Testament was decidedly not, I emphasize, NOT, decided at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE. It was not even discussed there. We have records of what they discussed. This was not one of the topics.

And, related, it was not decided by

The rest of this post is for blog members only. If you want to know the answers — join the blog! It’s dead easy and the fee is extremely reasonable. All the proceeds go to charities helping those in need, so no one loses in this game!

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