

Many people (most people?) don't realize that the collection of the books into the New Testament did not take a year or two. It was *centuries* before there was any widespread agreement about which books to include and which to exclude (why include the Gospel of John but not the Gospel of Thomas? Why include the Apocalypse of John but not the Apocalypse of Peter?).

Yesterday I started to explain how it all happened. In this post I finish the task, by explaining the grounds on which the decisions were made and something of the historical process involved. I've always thought this topic was unusually interesting - it was my first passion in my graduate school days (and the first topic I ever wrote a scholarly article on).

Again, this discussion is taken from my Introduction to the Bible, published a couple of years ago.

The Criteria Used

The "orthodox" church fathers who decided on the shape and content of the canon applied several criteria to determine whether a book should be included or not. Four criteria were especially important.

1. *Antiquity*. A book had to go back to the very beginning of the Christian movement or it could not be accepted. If a really good and important book that was fully informed and "true" were written, say, last year, that would not be good enough for it be part of Scripture. The canon of Scripture ...

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