QUESTION:

Given the criteria used to determine what would go on to constitute the New Testament canon, how is it that Hebrews and the book of Revelation remain part of the canon? I understand that Christians came to believe that they were authored by the apostles which is why they made it into the canon, but we now know that they weren't authored by Paul or John..so why are they still in the NT?

RESPONSE:

Interesting idea!   I sometimes get asked what I would exclude from the canon if given the choice, and I almost always say 1 Timothy (because of what it says about women in 2:11-15, and how the passage has been used for such horrible purposes over the years). But, well, it ain't gonna happen. I don't get a vote.

And that's the problem with Hebrews and Revelation – and all the other books that were admitted when Church Fathers (wrongly) thought they were written by apostles of Jesus (in this case Paul and John). No one is going to give any of us a vote.

By way of background, it's absolutely true that in the early church, when the proto-orthodox and then the orthodox Christian leaders who were making decisions were debating over which books to be included in Scripture, they had several criteria in mind that books had to pass in order to "make it in." A book had to be ancient – going back to the time of the first generation (even a great book, if written last week sometime, wasn't going to be counted as canonical); it had to be widely used (and not just a local favorite); it had to "toe the line" theologically (no heresy allowed!); and – among the very most important considerations, it had to be "apostolic" – i.e., written by an apostle (Peter, Paul, John, etc.) or by someone very, very closely connected with an apostle (Mark, the translator of Peter; Luke the travelling companion of Paul).

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