

In my previous post I started to show why it is difficult to use the New Testament itself as evidence that Christianity started out as an original unity, only to come to be fragmented with the passage of time into the second and third Christian centuries.

It is true that the NT is the earliest set of Christian writings that we have, and that most of the books can probably be dated to the first Christian century. We don't have any other books (well, virtually any other books) this early (I don't think the Gospel of Thomas can date to the first century; the one exception to the rule would probably be 1 Clement, which is usually dated to the mid 90s CE, and which is, indeed, a proto-orthodox writing).

The two problems I've isolated with using the NT to demonstrate early Christian unity are that: 1) The reason we have these books and no others from the time is that these are the books that later orthodox church fathers deemed scripture and worked to preserve (so that all other books - whatever they were, whomever they were written by, whatever they said) have been lost to history and 2) The formation of these 27 books into one book itself tamed the diversity found among the books.

I would like to elaborate that latter point before moving, in my next post, to an equally important, and closely related, issue.

Since the Reformation, but especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars of the Bible have noted....

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