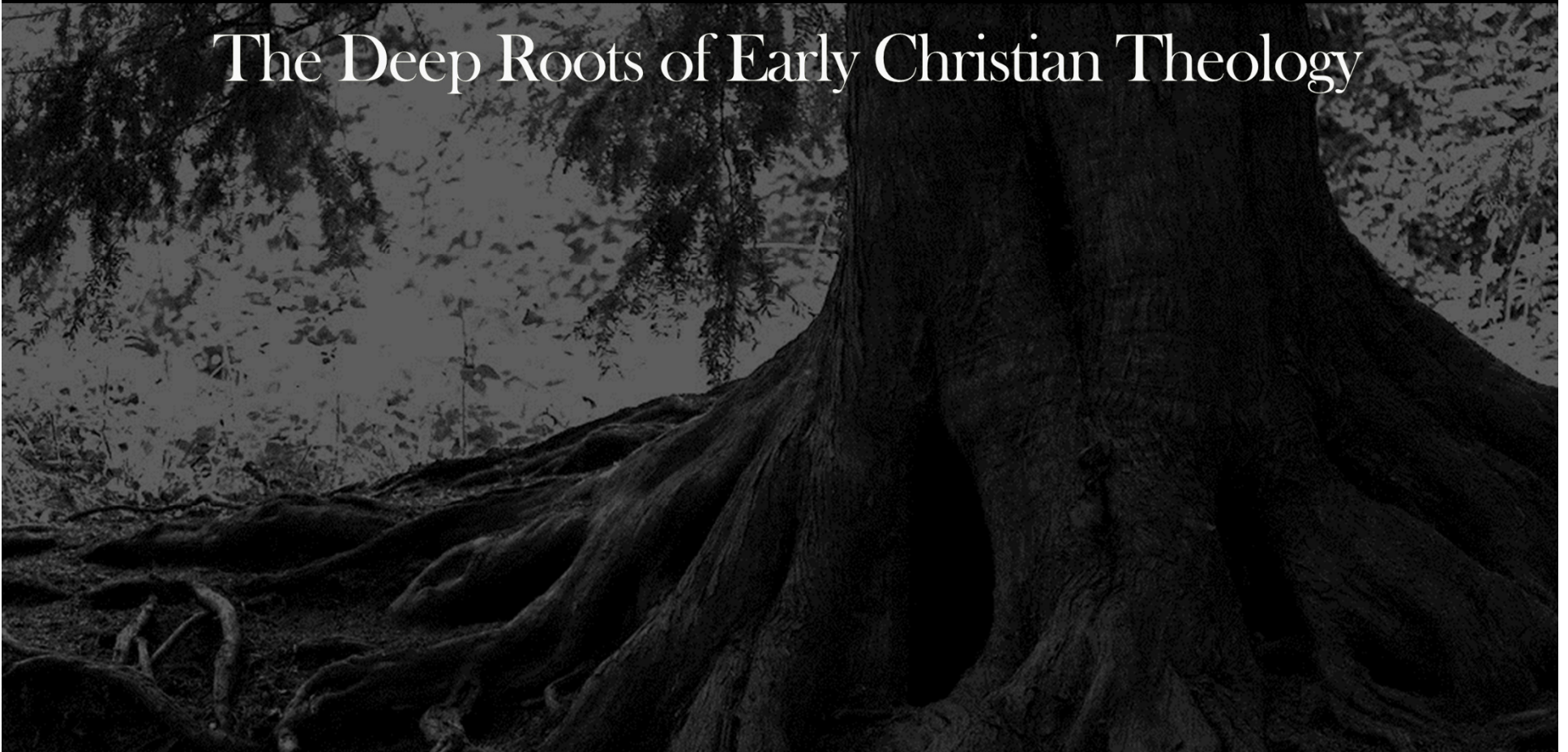




THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# Reconstruction

The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology





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# Reconstruction

## The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

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# The Canonization of the New Testament: Why Not the Gospels of Thomas and Judas?

Mako A. Nagasawa

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry

# Outline

- Introduction
- Part 1: Criteria for Canonicity
- Part 2: The Four Gospels
- Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas
- Part 4: The Gospel of Judas
- Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament
- Part 6: Discussing the New Testament Canon

# Outline

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- Part 1: Criteria for Canonicity
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# Introduction

- Q: The DaVinci Code? The story where Jesus has a son by Mary Magdalene? Does Jesus have a skeleton or two in his closet?
- A: ???
- Q: What about the Gospel of Thomas, which Elaine Pagels writes about? Or the Gospel of Judas, which is being 'rediscovered'?
- A: ???
- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: ???

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# Part 1: Criteria for Canonicity

- Authorship
  - Who wrote this? When?
  - What evidence do we have for authorship?
- Historical Use
  - Did the Christian community broadly come to use this?
  - Do we have physical manuscript evidence?
  - Like a “Hall of Fame”
- Content
  - Claim to fulfill the Old Testament story
  - Jewish background, language, and ideas



# Part 1: Criteria for Canonicity

<b>Biblical, Judaic</b>	<b>Hellenistic</b>
Our physical bodies are good	Our bodies house the immortal soul, which wants to return to its source
Hope for resurrection and the renewal of the physical world	Hope for disembodiment, the separation of soul from body
Caring for the poor is important	Caring for the poor is not important because the body is not important
Sexual ethics are important and derived from God's story	Sex itself is a distraction (Stoicism); sexual ethics are not that important, except for inheritance (Greek paganism; Epicureanism)
Death is the enemy of God's good creation; God will overthrow it	Death is inevitable; no human comes back from the dead (Homer)
Our story is linear, based on God's pattern of promise and fulfillment	Our story is circular and repetitious; nothing is new

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# Part 2: The Four Gospels: John

<b>Genesis</b>	<b>John</b>
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1)	In the beginning was the Word (Jn.1:1)
Seven "days"	Seven Miracles Seven Discourses Seven "I am" Statements
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen.2:7)	Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn.20:22)

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: John

Genesis		John	
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1)		In the beginning was the Word (Jn.1:1)	
	7 Miracles	7 Discourses	7 "I am" Statements
1	Water to wine (2:1)	Second birth (3:1 – 21)	Bread of life (6:35)
2	Nobleman's son (4:46)	Living water (4:1 – 42)	Light of world (8:12)
3	Invalid man (5:1)	Son and Father (5:16 – 45)	Door (10:7)
4	Multiply bread (6:1)	Bread of life (6:22 – 71)	Good shepherd (10:11)
5	Walk on water (6:16)	Children of God (8:12 – 59)	Resurrection, life (11:25)
6	Blind man (9:1)	Good shepherd (10:1 – 38)	Way, truth, life (14:6)
7	Lazarus (11:1)	Upper Room (13:1 – 17:26)	True vine (15:1)
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen.2:7)		Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn.20:22)	

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: John

- Factual History
  - Jesus' life, death, bodily resurrection
- Literary Allusion
  - Genesis 1 – 2
- Theological Implications
  - Jesus is God, retelling the story of creation
  - New creation, new humanity

## Part 2: The Four Gospels: Matthew

- When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving instructions (Mt.11:1)
- When Jesus had finished these parables (Mt.13:53)
- When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.19:1)
- When Jesus had finished all these words (Mt.26:1)

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Matthew

Creation	Israel	Jesus
<p>Mount Eden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waters: rivers diverge (Gen.2:10; Ezk.28:13 – 14)</li><li>• God commanded humanity (Gen.2:15 – 17)</li></ul>	<p>Mount Sinai</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waters: Israel comes through the Red Sea (Ex.14 – 15); waters flow from the rock (Ex.17)</li><li>• God commanded Israel (Ex.20)</li></ul>	<p>Mountains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waters: Jesus is baptized (Mt.3)</li><li>• Sermon on the Mount: Jesus commands the heart (Mt.5 – 7; Jer.31:31 – 34)</li></ul>

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Matthew

Creation	Israel	Jesus
<p>Mount Eden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• God commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply (Gen.1:28), to spread the garden (Gen.2:10 – 17) with Him in partnership</li></ul>	<p>Mount Nebo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moses died on mountaintop, overlooking the new garden land but not able to go with Israel (Dt.34:1 – 5)</li></ul>	<p>Mountains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jesus gave Great Commission on a mountain, promising to be with his disciples (Mt.28:16 – 20)</li></ul>



# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Matthew

- Factual History
  - Jesus' life, death, bodily resurrection
- Literary Allusion
  - Pentateuch
- Theological Implications
  - Jesus is Israel, retelling the story of Israel
  - New covenant, new heart, new humanity

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Luke

1. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus prays for disciples; disciples have sorrow. 22:39-46
  2. Prophecies fulfilled: Judas and Simon Peter betray Jesus. 22:47-62
  3. Jesus reveals himself obliquely as the Son of God. 22:63-71
  4. Two people (Herod and Pilate) stuck in sin, not understanding Jesus' identity. 23:1-25
  5. Simon of Cyrene witnesses and shoulders the Cross. 23:23-26
  6. Women, the daughters of Jerusalem, signifying Israel's despair. 23:27-31
  7. Jesus crucified. 23:32-34
  8. Unbelieving Jews: The rulers of the Jews sneered at Jesus. 23:35
  9. Unbelieving Gentiles: The soldiers mock Jesus. 23:36-38
  10. Unbelieving Revolutionary: Hurls curses at Jesus. 23:39
  - 10'. Believing Revolutionary: Believes Jesus, receives "paradise" 23:40-43
  - 9'. Believing Gentiles: The centurion praised God. 23:44-49
  - 8'. Believing Jews: Joseph, a member of the council, cares for Jesus' body. 23:50-52
  - 7'. Jesus buried. 23:53-54
  - 6'. Women, who had followed Jesus, signifying the church's hope. 23:55-24:11
  - 5'. Simon Peter witnesses the empty tomb. 24:12
  - 4'. Two people experience paradise/new creation, understand Jesus' identity. 24:13-35
  - 3'. Jesus reveals himself as the risen Messiah. 24:36-43
  - 2'. Prophecies fulfilled: Moses, Prophets, Psalms testify to Messiah. 24:44-49
  - 1'. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus blesses the disciples, mission to world; disciples have great joy. 24:50-53

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Luke

“Paradise Regained” and Luke 24

Two people, possibly a couple

Walking with Jesus

Not recognizing him

They are told God’s Word,  
they understood and gained true knowledge

Eat what Jesus encouraged them to eat

Their eyes were opened

They focused on Jesus

Reunited with God

Clothed with power from on high  
(the Holy Spirit)

Are encouraged to have eat with God often

Commanded to spread over the earth to  
proclaim Jesus’ rule over it

“Paradise Lost” and Genesis 3

Two people, a couple

Walking with God

Knowing Him

They disobeyed God’s word  
and ‘gained wisdom’

Eat what was forbidden

Their eyes were opened

They focused on themselves

Fell into separation from God

Recognized they were naked,  
then they clothe themselves

Could not eat with God as freely as before

Lost their ability to proclaim their rule over  
the earth

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Luke

- Factual History
  - Jesus' life, death, bodily resurrection
- Literary Allusion
  - Genesis 1 – 4
- Theological Implications
  - Jesus is a new Adam, new humanity
  - New humanity, new creation, new mission

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Mark

Eden Guarded	Israel	Jesus
<p>God as flaming sword between the cherubim (Gen.3:24), guarding way back to Mt. Eden</p>	<p>God as pillar of light and fire eventually rests between the cherubim (Ex.25:17 – 22), retelling the story of God meeting Moses alone on the top of Mt. Sinai. Eventually placed on Mt. Zion.</p>	<p>Jesus has divine light and fire (Mk.9), retelling God meeting Moses and Elijah on Mt. Sinai; God tears the veil of the temple on Mt. Zion (Mk.15:38 – 39)</p>



# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Mark

<b>As Jesus Nears Death and Resurrection</b>	<b>Motifs of Passover and Yom Kippur Appear</b>
Jesus gets nearer to the cross at Gethsemane; the disciples fail (Mk.14:32 – 50)	On Passover, a young man flees naked after leaving behind the linen garments (Mk.14:51 – 52), suggesting that Jesus is a Passover Lamb sending him free, or a high priest sending a scapegoat away.
Jesus gets nearer to the cross at the trial by the chief priests; Simon Peter fails (Mk.14:53 – 72)	On Passover, Barabbas is released and goes free (Mk.15:1 – 15), suggesting again that Jesus is a Passover Lamb sending him free, or a high priest sending a scapegoat away
Jesus crucified and forsaken to Gentiles; Jesus dies (Mk.15:16 – 37)	The curtain of the Temple torn in two; the way to God's cleansing is open; Jesus proclaimed to be God's Son (Mk.15:38-39); Jesus wrapped in linen like a Jewish high priest (Lev.16:4) and buried (Mk.15:40 – 47) but rises (Mk.16:1 – 8)

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Mark

- Factual History
  - Jesus' life, death, bodily resurrection
- Literary Allusion
  - Leviticus 16 which echoes Genesis 2 – 3
- Theological Implications
  - Jesus reopened Eden through his human body
  - New cleansing, new heart, new creation

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Summary

- They are Hebrew narrative literature
  - Literary properties and techniques are known
  - Organize Jesus' history into clear literary themes
    - Real history
    - Literary reasons for inclusion or omission of historical details
    - May exclude details, but do not invent anything
    - For bibliography of literary analysis, see...



# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Summary

- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*
- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*
- Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature*
- Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*
- Robert Alter, *Genesis*
- Robert Alter, *The David Story*
- Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*
- Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant, and Through Peasant Eyes*
- Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Judaism*
- Margaret Barker, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John's Gospel*
- Margaret Barker, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament*
- Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard*
- J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*
- J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Book of Samuel*
- J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*
- Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*
- Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*
- Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*
- Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*
- Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel*
- Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*
- James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*
- Tremper Longman III, *A Literary Interpretation of the Bible*
- Tremper Longman III and L. Ryken, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*
- Brian G. Morgan, *From Shadow to Reality* (paper)
- Brian G. Morgan, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (paper)
- John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*
- John H. Sailhamer, *Old Testament Theology*
- Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*
- Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*
- Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2 volume set – particularly useful for Luke-Acts!
- N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Studies in Pauline Theology*
- N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*
- N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*
- N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

# Part 2: The Four Gospels: Summary

- Fitting climax to the Great Story
  - Jesus engaged with the Old Testament
  - They engage literary themes from the Old Testament
    - Especially new creation, new humanity, new covenant
  - They bring to a climax literary themes developed in the Old Testament
    - Resurrection (new creation, new humanity) is the climax of those themes

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# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 1. These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded. And he said, 'Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.' 2. Jesus said, 'Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all.'

# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 3. Jesus said, 'If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty.'

# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 12. The disciples said to Jesus, 'We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?' Jesus said to them, 'No matter where you are you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.'

# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 13. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Compare me to something and tell me what I am like.' Simon Peter said to him, 'You are like a just messenger.' Matthew said to him, 'You are like a wise philosopher.' Thomas said to him, 'Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like.' Jesus said, 'I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended.' And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, 'What did Jesus say to you?' Thomas said to them, 'If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you.'

# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 29. Jesus said, 'If the flesh came into being because of spirit, that is a marvel, but if spirit came into being because of the body, that is a marvel of marvels. Yet I marvel at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty.'
- 37. His disciples said, 'When will you appear to us, and when will we see you?' Jesus said, 'When you strip without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet like little children and trample them, then [you] will see the son of the living one and you will not be afraid.'



# Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas

- 114. Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.'

# Part 3: Criteria for Rejecting the Gospel of Thomas

## 1. Authorship

1. No historical attestation
2. Extremely dubious

## 2. Historical Use

1. Only found in Nag Hammadi library in Upper Egypt
2. Usage by Christian community missing
3. Indian Christianity:
  1. Claims Thomas as founder (52 AD)
  2. But no record of the Gospel of Thomas
  3. Pantaeus of Alexandria (died 200 AD) says he met Christians in India who used the Gospel of Matthew (in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.10)

# Part 3: Criteria for Rejecting the Gospel of Thomas

## 3. Content

### 1. Not in agreement with Old Testament

1. Jewish Messiahship
2. Physical bodies
3. Female gender
4. New creation

### 2. No death and resurrection narrative

### 3. Not even a narrative, just isolated sayings

1. Israel affirms history; gnostics do not
2. Like Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*, but only Aragorn's monologue (distorted) from *The Return of the King*
3. Like T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*: a reflection of despair over the story of the West
4. Philosophy disembodied from materiality and disconnected from history

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# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas



- “...It certainly makes for odd bedside reading. ‘The Gospel of Judas’ isn’t actually a gospel by Judas, or, really, a gospel at all in the sense that we might expect: an account of the life of Jesus, from birth to death and rebirth. It is, instead, a mystical riff on a life already assumed to be familiar. It begins just before Jesus’ last Passover in Jerusalem, as the disciples are offering a prayer to God over the dinner table.

## JESUS LAUGHED

*In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.*By Adam Gopnik  
April 9, 2006

# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas

- “Watching them, Jesus laughs. ‘Why are you laughing at us?’ the nettled disciples ask, and Jesus says that he is laughing not at them but at their strange idea of pleasing their God. (One of the unnerving things about the new Gospel is that Jesus, who never laughs in the canonic Gospels, is constantly laughing in this one, and it’s obviously one of those sardonic, significant, how-little-you-know laughs, like the laugh of the ruler of a dubious planet on ‘Star Trek.’)

## JESUS LAUGHED

*In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.*By Adam Gopnik  
April 9, 2006

# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas

- “The disciples are furious at Jesus’ condescension, except for Judas, who thinks he knows what the laughter signifies. ‘I know who you are and where you have come from,’ Judas says, standing before him. ‘You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo.’ Apparently startled by his insight, Jesus tells Judas, ‘Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the Kingdom.’

## JESUS LAUGHED

*In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.*By Adam Gopnik  
April 9, 2006

# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas

- “The true mystery, as Jesus unveils it, is that, out beyond the stars, there exists a divine, blessed realm, free of the materiality of this earthly one. This is the realm of Barbelo, a name that gnostics gave the celestial Mother, who lives there with, among others, her progeny, a good God awkwardly called the Self-Generated One. Jesus, it turns out, is not the son of the Old Testament God, whose retinue includes a rebellious creator known as Yaldabaoth, but an avatar of Adam’s third son, Seth. His mission is to show those lucky members of mankind who still have a ‘Sethian’ spark the way back to the blessed realm. Jesus, we learn, was laughing at the disciples’ prayer because it was directed at their God, the Old Testament God, who is really no friend of mankind but, rather, the cause of its suffering.



## JESUS LAUGHED

*In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.*By Adam Gopnik  
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# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas

- “What gives ‘The Gospel of Judas’ a peculiar pathos is the sacrificial role that Judas must play in the divine story. Jesus is going back to Barbelo, and to get there he must ‘sacrifice the man that clothes me’; that is, his mortal body. The only way to do this is to accept his own death, and he urges Judas to become the agent of it. (Presumably, self-slaughter would not get him back.) But Judas has reason to worry that if he obeys his Lord he will be stuck with a bad reputation forever. ‘In a vision,’ he says, ‘I saw myself as the twelve disciples were stoning me.’ Jesus assures him that though ‘you will be cursed by the other generations . . . you will come to rule over them.’

## JESUS LAUGHED

*In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.*By Adam Gopnik  
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# Part 4: The Gospel of Judas

- “At the end, he supplies Judas with a beatific vision of a luminous cloud, and, in this Gospel’s one truly poetic note, tells him, ‘Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star.’ Judas accepts the bargain—temporal libel in exchange for eternal luminosity—and agrees to turn Jesus over to the high priests. The Gospel’s very last lines have an extraordinarily modern feeling of Hemingwayesque understatement, achieved perhaps inadvertently, by textual omission: ‘They approached Judas and said to him, ‘What are you doing here? You are Jesus’ disciple.’ Judas answered them as they wished. And he received some money and handed him over to them.’”

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# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Luke – Acts
  - “they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word...” (Lk.1:1 – 2)
  - “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31)
  - “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word... The word of God kept on spreading...” (Acts 6:5 – 7)
  - “those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)
  - “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ...” (Acts 10:36)
  - “Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.” (Acts 11:1)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Luke – Acts
  - “And I [Simon Peter] remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 11:16)
  - “A woman named Lydia...was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)
  - “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.” (Acts 20:27)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Paul, Galatians
  - “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a *different gospel*; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the *gospel of Christ*. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a *gospel contrary to what we have preached to you*, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a *gospel contrary to what you received*, he is to be accursed!” (1:6 – 9)
  - “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was *publicly portrayed* as crucified?” (3:1)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Paul, 1 Corinthians
  - “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you *the testimony of God*. For I determined to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ, and him crucified*.” (2:1 – 2)
  - “For this reason I have sent to you Timothy...and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as *I teach everywhere in every church*.” (4:17)
  - “But to the married I give *instructions, not I, but the Lord*...” (7:10)
    - Compare to: “But to the rest *I say, not the Lord*...” (7:12)
    - And: “But *in my opinion* she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God” (7:40)
  - “And so *I direct in all the churches*.” (7:17)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Paul, 1 Corinthians
  - “So also *the Lord directed* those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” (9:14)
  - “To those who are without law, [I become] as without law, though not being without the law of God but under *the law of Christ.*” (9:21)
  - “Now I praise you because you remember me *in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*” (11:2)
  - “If one is inclined to be contentious, *we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God*” (11:16)
  - “*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread...*” (11:23 – 25)



# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Paul, 1 Corinthians
  - “The things which I write to you are *the Lord’s commandment*.” (14:37)
  - “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For *I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received*, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” (15:1 – 4)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Orality in Paul, Ephesians
  - “Now this *I say*, and affirm *together with the Lord...*” (Eph.4:17)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Writing
  - The writers of the Gospels wrote
    - To preserve the memory of Jesus' teachings and actions
    - To present Jesus as the climax of the story of the Old Testament
    - To be continuous with the literary tradition of the Old Testament

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Writing
  - The writers of the Epistles viewed their own writings as authoritative for the Christian community because of their connection with Jesus and their explanation of Jesus
    - Paul repeats the teachings of Jesus (see above)
    - James quotes from the teachings of Jesus, overlapping with Matthew 5 – 7 over 20 times.
    - John viewed his task as passing on what was given to him (1 Jn.1:4 – 5ff.)
    - Peter viewed his own writings as possessing more authority and clarity than the Hebrew Prophets (1 Pet.1:10 – 12). So did Paul (Eph.3:4 – 5)
    - The author of Hebrews urged his audience to receive his exhortation (Heb.13:22)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Writing
  - Paul attests that Jesus' teachings, in some written form (Luke), are "Scripture"
    - "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 Tim.5:18, calling both Dt.25:4 and Luke 10:7 "Scripture")
    - I assume Paul refers to Luke's Gospel, as it is the only place it is found

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Writing
  - Peter called Paul's writings 'Scripture'
    - "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Pet.3:15 – 16)
  - John
    - Implicitly considered Revelation to be "Scripture" (Rev.22:7; 18 – 19; see below)
    - Said reading his Gospel would help bring readers to spiritual "life" (Jn.20:30 – 31)
    - Said the Spirit helps disciples remember and retain Jesus' teaching (1 Jn.2:24 – 27)
  - Luke
    - Endorses Paul as a missionary leader and, implicitly, as a writer
    - Attests to earlier attempts at writing (Lk.1:1 – 4)

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Rapid Circulation Intended
  - Matthew
    - “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...” (Mt.28:19 – 20)
    - “And Jesus said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” (Mt.13:52)
      - Center of Matthew’s Gospel, the center of a large chiasm
      - This statement refers to *physical* reproduction of the *written* Gospel by a *scribe* who has become a disciple of the kingdom

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Rapid Circulation Intended
  - John
    - “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.” (Jn.20:31)
    - “Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book... I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” (Rev.22:7, 18 – 19)



# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Rapid Circulation Intended
  - Paul
    - “I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.” (1 Th.5:27)
    - “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon of the church at Cenchrea...” (Rom.16:1)
      - At least three house churches (Rom.16:5, 10, 11), possibly more
    - “And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” (Col.4:16)
    - “To the saints at \_\_\_\_\_” (Eph.1:1)
      - Best and oldest manuscripts have a blank addressee
      - Also, the contents of the letter do not address a specific problem
      - Likely Paul meant this to be a widely circulated letter
      - Likely intended this letter to come to the Colossians via Ephesus and Laodicea

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Further Repetition, Circulation
  - Ignatius of Antioch
    - Wrote seven letters written just before his martyrdom in Rome (between 110 – 117 AD) with quotations, though not by name, from: Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians
    - Early collections of New Testament letters and Gospels are generally recognized to have existed in such centers as Antioch

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Further Repetition, Circulation
  - Polycarp of Smyrna
    - Born 69 AD, became bishop of Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey), martyred 155 AD
    - Wrote one letter with ~100 quotations and allusions to Christian writings, though not by name, including: Matthew, Mark, Luke – Acts, John, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, 3 John
    - Polycarp's protege, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, quoted from all later canonized New Testament material except Philemon and 3 John

Symbol	Opinion of Authority
✓	accepted; true; scriptural; or quoted from very approvingly
✓	possible approving quotation or allusion
✗	acceptable, but only with changes
?	dubious; disputed; or useful for inspiration
✗	spurious (in the classification of Eusebius)
✗	false; heretical; heterodox; quoted from very disapprovingly
.	not mentioned or quoted from; opinion unknown

	Ignatius of Antioch	Polyeap of Smyrna	Marcion	Tertian the Assyrian (of Syrian Church)	Valentinus	Justin Martyr of Rome	Muratorian Canon	Irenaeus of Lyons	Clement of Alexandria	Tertullian of Carthage	Origen of Alexandria	Eusebius of Caesarea	Codex Sinaiticus	Athanasius	Dionysius the Blind of Alexandria	Latin Vulgate	Peahita (Bible of Syrian Church)
Date	110	140	144	150	150	160	170	180	190	200	225	324	~350	367	380	384	400
Matthew	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mark	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Luke	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts	✓	✓	✗	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Romans	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Corinthians	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Corinthians	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Galatians	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ephesians	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philippians	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colossians	✓	.	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Thessalonians	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Thessalonians	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Timothy	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Timothy	.	✓	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Titus	.	.	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philemon	.	.	✗	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hebrews	.	✓	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
James	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Peter	.	✓	.	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
I John	.	✓	.	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II John	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✗	✓	.
III John	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✗	✓	.
Jude	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
Revelation of John	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.

Modified by Mako A. Nagasawa from Glenn Davis, <http://www.ntcanon.org/table.shtml>.

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Date	110	140	144	150	150	160	170	180	190	200	225	324	~350	367	380	384	400
Gospel of Thomas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Truth	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Twelve	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Basilides	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Egyptians	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	✓	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Hebrews	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Matthias	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Traditions of Matthias	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Preaching of Peter	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	✓	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of Andrew	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of Paul	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of John	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Epistle to the Laodiceans	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓
I Clement	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	✓	✓	.	?	.	.	.	.	✓	.
Epistle of Barnabas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	✓	.	.	✓	.
Didache	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	.	?	.	✓	.
Shepherd of Hermas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	?	?	✗	✓	?	.	✓	.
Apocalypse of Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	.	✓	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.

Modified by Mako A. Nagasawa from Glenn Davis, <http://www.ntcanon.org/table.shtml>.

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Further Repetition, Circulation
  - Four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, and Hebrews sometimes attributed to Paul
    - Within the first half of the second century, across five major cultures (Jewish, Greek, Roman, North African, Syrian) and four languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac), there was already a near-consensus view about this material
    - In other words, the core of the New Testament canon was in place early
  - The letters of 1 Peter and 1 John were also broadly accepted, with James winning broad acceptance a bit later.

### Disputed Books of the New Testament

The table below shows which of the disputed New Testament books and other writings are included in catalogs of canonical books up to the eighth century.

#### KEY TO BOOKS

Heb. - Epistle to the Hebrews  
 Jas. - Epistle of James  
 Jn. - Second and Third Epistle of John  
 Pet. - Second Epistle of Peter  
 Jude - Epistle of Jude  
 Rev. - Revelation of John  
 Shep. - Shepherd of Hermas  
 Apoc. - Apocalypse of Peter  
 Barn. - Epistle of Barnabas  
 Clem. - Epistle of Clement



**Y** indicates that the book is plainly listed as *Holy Scripture*;  
**N** indicates that the author lists it in a class of *disputed* books;  
**M** indicates that the list *may* be construed to include the book as Holy Scripture;  
**X** indicates that the book is *expressly rejected* by the author.  
**S** indicates that the author does not mention the book at all, which implies its rejection. See notes on the authorities and books following.

1. Greek & Latin	Date	Heb.	Jas.	Jn.	Pet.	Jude	Rev.	Shep.	Apoc.	Barn.	Clem.
Muratorian Fragment	170	S	S	M	S	Y	Y	X	N	S	S
Origen	225	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	S	S	S	S
Eusebius of Caesarea	324	Y	N	N	N	N	N	X	X	X	S
Cyril of Jerusalem	348	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Cheltenham list	360	S	S	Y	Y	S	Y	S	S	S	S
Council of Laodicea	363	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Athanasius	367	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Gregory of Nazianzus	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Amphilocius of Iconium	380	Y	N	N	N	N	N	S	S	S	S
Rufinus	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Epiphanius	385	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Jerome	390	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Augustine	397	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
3rd Council of Carthage	397	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Codex Claromontanus	400	M	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S
Letter of Innocent I	405	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	X	S	S
Decree of Gelasius	550	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Isadore of Seville	625	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
John of Damascus	730	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
2. Syrian	Date	Heb.	Jas.	Jn.	Pet.	Jude	Rev.	Shep.	Apoc.	Barn.	Clem.
Apostolic Canons	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	Y
Peshitta Version	400	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Report of Junilius	550	Y	N	N	N	N	N	S	S	S	S

Michael D.  
 Marlowe,  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon5.html>.

# Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament

- Christian Traditions: Further Repetition, Circulation
  - Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation
    - Perhaps the Christian writings that were the most Hebraic were either slower to be disseminated abroad and/or more slightly difficult for the Greek and Latin Christians to understand
  - They won broad acceptance, however, not too long after the Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John
  - Significantly, the greatest bishop-theologians accepted them
    - Polycarp of Smyrna (69 – 155)
    - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202)
    - Cyril of Jerusalem (315 – 386)
    - Council of Laodicea (360)
    - Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373)
    - Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389)
    - Epiphanius of Salamis (310 – 403)



# Outline

- Introduction
- Part 1: Criteria for Canonicity
- Part 2: The Four Gospels
- Part 3: The Gospel of Thomas
- Part 4: The Gospel of Judas
- Part 5: The Writing and Canonization of the New Testament
- **Part 6: Discussing the New Testament Canon**

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - Jesus' "loose" view of organization was remembered. Referring to an independent exorcist that was not part of the band of twelve disciples, Jesus said, 'He who is not against you is for you.' (Lk.9:49 – 50; cf. Mk.9:38 – 50). Apparently this confused the disciples who thought that this exorcist should 'report' to them. Jesus did not want the disciples to think that formal organization is what guarantees unity or success. Even more important is the fact that Mark and Luke carry the saying into the life of the early church. Why would a Gospel writer circulate that statement if the early church had all kinds of authority questions about which leader they were going to follow?

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The apostles had a collective, not an individual, authority. The apostles didn't "carve up the world" and set up hierarchical "realms" that were impermeable to one another.
    - Peter (in 1 Peter) addressed the Galatians after Paul did
    - John (in Rev.2) addressed the Ephesians after Paul did
    - The author of Hebrews writes from Italy all the way to the Jewish Christians in Judea
    - The late first century work 1 Clement was apparently written from the elders at Rome to the church at Corinth
    - Other patristic writings demonstrate this dynamic all the time

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The apostles had a collective, not an individual, authority. The apostles didn't "carve up the world" and set up hierarchical "realms" that were impermeable to one another.
    - No "realms" of individual jurisdiction.
    - No debates of, "Don't step into my part of the organization."
    - No early Christians say, "You're not my apostle."
    - Apostolic authority was a collective authority shared together.
    - The church was a flat organization, permeable to itself.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The apostles' way of managing themselves was decentralized: They do not give any evidence that they "reported" to Simon Peter (they were not centrally organized). Simon Peter appears to be a spokesperson for, but not an authority over, the other apostles. No central leader sent Barnabus and Paul out from Antioch; Barnabus and Paul parted ways on their own discretion. Paul respects the other apostles as colleagues and checks on himself, but he doesn't refer to their formal authority over him.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The need for a council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 gives evidence of a decentralized community. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used, and the decision making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - House church governance seems fairly decentralized, e.g. Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, Philippians, etc. Local elders (1 Timothy, Titus plus scattered references in Heb.13, 1 Th.5, 1 Pet.5) are subject to the apostles but otherwise work independently, respecting other churches.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The process of writing the New Testament and its canonization were both decentralized. The apostles do not appear to have consulted each other before writing.



# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - The need for subsequent church councils in Nicaea, Chalcedon, etc. is also evidence. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used, and the decision-making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?
- A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization.
  - Later competition between Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch suggests that there was no clear understanding of church hierarchy. Edessa's independence (i.e. the Syrian Church) is also revealing. At the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, denounced John the Faster (Patriarch of Constantinople) for his assumed title of "Universal Patriarch." In A.D. 606, Boniface III claimed he was "Universal Bishop" over all the churches, though this was never actually true.

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: So wasn't the canon a tops-down move?
- A: Not really; it was a bottoms-up development. More like a grass-roots community consensus. Or like a "Hall of Fame."

# Part 6: Discussing the New Testament

- Q: But the Greek, Latin, and Syrian branches of the church had different New Testaments, didn't they?
- A: There were slight differences, but only with regards to 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Not much hangs on those books alone. The core of the New Testament was set. The Syrian church developed into East and West, and the Western Syrian church adopted the 27 books of the Greek and Latin New Testaments. The Eastern Syrian church continues with 22 books.