The Bible: What it is and How we got it

RCF Academy

Lesson 3: Canonical Models

Historical-Critical Model

- Most indicative of exclusive definition
- Sees the selection of canonical books as purely human decision of the church
- Establishment of a canon was a creative act of the church to combat heretics
  - Marcion (85 AD - 160 AD) rejected the Old Testament and most of the New. Attempted to create his own canon to align with his own doctrines
- Makes the sharp distinction between "canon" and "scripture"
  - Not a question of what books SHOULD be in the canon, but what ARE in the canon.
- Walter Bauer, German theologian during WWII.
  - Claimed that there were a wide diversity in early Christianity and that each had their own scriptures. The group with the most converts decided what the canon contained
- Faults
  - Wrongly gives too much credit to human institutions
  - Makes a distinction between canon and scripture

Roman Catholic Model

- Rejects "sola scriptura" which declares scripture as the SOLE authority of our faith and practice
- Three divisions of authority
  - Scripture
  - Oral tradition
  - The Magisterium (Final authority)
- "The first paragraph states: "With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed."(4) This paragraph appropriately confirms and is provided for in the Church's universal legislation, in canon 750 of the Code of Canon Law(5) and canon 598 of the Code of the Canons of the Eastern Churches."

Roman Catholic Model

- Council of Trent's conclusion
  - "And it has thought it meet that a list of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest a doubt may arise in any one's mind, which are the books that are received by this Synod. They are as set down here below: of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first book of Esdras, and the second which is entitled Nehemias; Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidical Psalter, consisting of a hundred and fifty psalms; the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch; Ezechiel, Daniel; the twelve minor prophets, to wit, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of the Machabees, the first and the second...But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema."
- Faults
  - Believes the scriptures authority is derived from the church

Canonical-Criticism Model

- Close representation of the function definition
- Claims the canon is the final collection of books that constitutes and FUNCTIONS as a religious norm for a community
- This camp criticizes the Historical-Critical model::
  - "if one approaches the text only on the basis of historical-critical methodologies, then meaning is restricted to the original context that produced the sublayer of tradition and has no lasting significance for ongoing ecclesiastical communities".
- Individually, the books had purpose to their immediate audience, but collectively they had meaning to the church universal

Canonical-Critical model

- The normative state of the canon
  - Final form of the NT canon is what unites all divergent groups
  - Final redactors of NT intentionally shaped the content to speak to future generations.
- Faults
  - This view places inspiration within the communal media rather than at the individual apostolic level.
  - There is also no indication that the church viewed itself as having the same authority as the Apostles.
  - It has no explanation as to what closed the canon and keeps it closed.

Neoorthodox Model

- Popularized by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann
- The Word of God is what one experiences THROUGH reading sacred writings
- Distinction is made between scriptures and the Word of God
  - Scriptures are a witness to the Word of God (Jesus)
  - He is experienced when one reads the scriptures and responds in faith
- Faults
  - It divorces the authority of God and the authority of scriptures.
  - The canon ceases to function as the authoritative norm for Christians because it is so fluid and uncertain.
  - it puts the authority of the church above the scriptures.
  - If the books are in doubt, then the canon is in doubt.

Canon-within-the-canon Model

- Starts with the assumption that the books of scripture have been corrupted over time
- To find the true message of Christianity, one must "peel back the layers" to find the core doctrines
- This was most notably propagated by "The Jesus Seminar"
- Faults
    - It submits the scriptures to authorities outside of itself.

Criteria-of-canon Model

- Most popular view amongst evangelicals
- Canon is the set of books that meet a certain list of historical criteria
- Proponent B. B. Warfield said,
    - "It is a most assured result of biblical criticism that every one of the twenty-seven books which now constitute our New Testament is assuredly genuine and authentic."
- Attributes of canon
    - Apostolic origin/oversight
    - Orthodox teachings
    - Widespread usage
    - Divine features

Criteria-of-canon Model

- Although apostolic origins is only one of the attributes or "criteria", it is the foundation for the other points.
- Faults
  - This model proposes that the scriptures can be verified as canonical solely through historical means.
  - This model also puts external authorities over the scriptures, namely the criteria itself.

Self-Authenticating Model

- Scripture claims for itself authority and informs us how external evidence is to be utilized
- Internal evidence
  - Speaks out of its own authority
- External evidence
  - Is subservient to internal evidence
- Since God is the highest authority, no other authority can be appealed to without diminishing God
- Michael Kruger says,
  - "we are applying scripture to the question of which books belong in the New Testament."

Self-Authenticating Model

- God's guidance of his scriptures
  - Providential exposure
    - God preserves the texts in such a way as to allow his church to hear the true word
  - Attributes of canonicity
    - Divine qualities
    - Corporate reception
    - Apostalic origins
  - Internal testimony of the Holy Spirit
    - "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27 ESV