dynamic ontological *monism, or oneness of being, which left no room for distinctive revelation.

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A. M. Robbins

CALVIN, JOHN

The contribution of John Calvin (1509–1564) to Christian apologetics may be said to be somewhat oblique, and it is the subject of continuing scholarly debate. Given his reputation as a systematic theologian, he was clearly not an irrationalist, and wherever there is the appearance of contradiction in some theological position Calvin makes efforts to establish logical consistency. Nor is he a fideist, despite the importance he gives to faith. Faith involves belief, and belief requires evidence, importantly for Calvin the self-evidencing character of Scripture.

In the *Institutes*, when dealing with the natural knowledge of God, Calvin appears to attach little if any importance to the proofs of the existence of God. Is this because he thinks that they are impossible, or unnecessary, or is it because *natural theology was not an issue at the Reformation? The closest he comes to medieval apologetics is in *Institutes* 1.8 where he discusses how the Bible's divine character might be given external support. Though his discussion of these 'proofs' is quite lengthy, Calvin believes that they nevertheless have a subordinate role to that of the self-authenticating work of the *Holy Spirit because they can at best change our opinions, never give certainty. Besides these references in the *Institutes*, he also has interesting scattered observations about natural theology elsewhere, e.g. in his comments on Acts 17.

Calvin gives much greater place to the *sensus divinitatis*, an innate sense of the existence of God, than he does to the proofs of natural theology. Claims have been made on Calvin's behalf that this appeal to the *sensus divinitatis* is in effect the claim that the belief that God exists is 'properly basic', i.e. it does not require formal proof but is on a par with other of our basic beliefs, such as memory beliefs or beliefs arising from immediate perception. Calvin shows little interest in rationality *per se*, and it is likely that his appeal to the *sensus* is his way of underlining the teaching of Paul in Rom. 1 about human accountability. Responsibility, not rationality, appears to be Calvin's chief concern.

Those who have seen Calvin as a proponent of 'negative apologetics' would seem to be closer to his spirit. From his own practice it is clear that his somewhat limited apologetic endeavours were designed to answer objections, particularly logical objections, to Christian claims, and then to let those claims speak for themselves. But the strength and importance of even this limited apologetic strategy has to be qualified by two factors. The first is Calvin's repeated appeal to the principle of divine accommodation in our understanding of the Bible. According to Calvin, as the Bible is not a textbook of astronomy any more than it is of philosophy or medicine, it cannot be expected to 'take sides' in conflicts between *revelation and secular learning. The only exception is where such learning clearly falls within the parameters of scriptural teaching, and one gains the impression that Calvin thinks that these parameters may be fairly narrow. The second factor is Calvin's insistence on the indispensability of the work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the mind to the saving truth expressed in Scripture and in bringing an individiual to repentance and faith in Christ.

While some in the Calvinist tradition, such as B. B. *Warfield, have seen Calvin's remarks on the natural knowledge of God as evidence of his commitment to full-blown natural theology and a proponent of the *cosmological argument, others have claimed him as a 'presuppositionalist'. If what makes a presuppositionalist is a stress on the importance of premises (starting points in *reasoning), then Calvin might be said to be one. Such an approach is, however, common, by no means exclusively Calvinian. Sometimes the term 'presuppositionalism' is given to the conviction that only by an appeal to the Bible alone can a coherent *epistemology and *metaphysics be established. There is little evidence in Calvin of such an a priori approach. He is much more inductive and guarded in his approach to Scripture, recognizing the presence of *mystery and of our own cognitive limitations, warning

against speculation and emphasizing that the purpose of divine revelation in the Bible is overwhelmingly concerned with salvation.

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P. Helm

CANON OF SCRIPTURE

Since the fourth century AD, the term *canon*, meaning 'rule' or 'norm', has been used to describe the books of the OT and NT. Use of this term revealed what Christians had already believed for centuries: that these writings are the final *authority within the church. How did they come to be viewed this way? The process of canonization spanned several centuries and was different for each testament.

The OT canon

Judging from the way NT authors refer to 'Scripture' (John 20:9; Gal. 3:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; 2 Pet. 1:20; cf. 2 Tim. 3:15–16), there appears to have been an accepted set of authoritative texts among Jews at the time of Christ. In fact, throughout the NT most books of the OT are cited in a specific way, denoting their status as authoritative Scripture.

The development of the OT canon was a process. Books were written at different times and came to be recognized as authoritative by a variety of means. It is difficult to say at exactly what point the canon of the OT was firmly settled. Nevertheless, we can say several things.

Since at least 130 BC, we have evidence of a three-fold division of Hebrew Scripture into the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. In a well-known passage about the 'famous men' of Israel, the author of the book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) draws from most of the books of what we now call the OT. By doing this he links the books of our OT to the three-fold division of Scripture mentioned in the introduction to Ecclesiasticus. In a similar way, Luke 24:44–45 tells us that *Jesus revealed all that the Scriptures said about him in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (probably referring to the 'Writings'). It would seem that Luke's Gospel reflects a tradition of a fairly well-defined, tri-partite canon which had been around for at least 175 years.

Some scholars argue that the canon of the OT was not 'closed' until AD 90, when a council of Jewish leaders met at a city called Jamnia. While these rabbis did debate the place of the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes in the canon, no record exists of their deliberations, and there is no reason to regard this meeting as a type of 'general council'. Instead, what this minor debate points to is near complete agreement on a canon of the Hebrew Bible (our OT) from well before this time.

We can say with some confidence that the canon of the OT had a clear shape before the time of Jesus – perhaps centuries before. The NT reveals that the earliest church viewed the contents of what became known as the OT with a unified submission to its authority, believing that Jesus himself fulfilled what was promised therein.

The Apocrypha

The books of the *Apocrypha never appear as part of Hebrew Scripture. They do, however, appear alongside the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint), and hence in many Bibles today. Segments of the church throughout history have viewed these books as canonical. This is a questionable practice for several reasons. First, these books, though attached to the OT, were never viewed as Scripture by Israel. Secondly, these books were not viewed as Scripture by the earliest church. This is clear because no explicit quotation of an apocryphal book occurs in the NT. Thirdly, the apocryphal books were expressly described as deutero-canonical by a number of influential Church Fathers, including *Athanasius, Jerome, Epiphanius and Cyril. While we may not consider these books to be canonical, they have been used for education and edification throughout the history of the church.

The NT canon

If the OT canon was relatively well established and adopted by the early church, when and how did the church recognize the NT canon?

In both the Eastern and Western churches the canon of Scripture as we know it was firmly fixed by the end of the fourth century. It was born out of three centuries of intense discussion and debate in which it became more and more necessary to articulate the limits of orthodox belief. For the Eastern church this occurred decisively in the thirty-ninth Paschal Letter of Athanasius in AD 367. For the church in the West this same canon was fixed by a church council in Carthage in AD 397.

While it is somewhat anachronistic to speak of a set of specific criteria by which the early church determined canonicity, it is possible to outline several principles which guided the church as it came to recognize certain works as authoritative.

1. *Apostolicity*. For a writing to be considered canonical it had to bear the marks of apostolic authority. In other words, it must have been written by one of the apostles, or otherwise closely connected to an apostle. Because of this, it made sense that older documents had an advantage. In fact, in spite of what some scholars might argue, none of the extra-canonical works known to us today can be dated any earlier than our canonical documents.

2. *Orthodoxy*. Another means of gauging whether or not a piece of writing was authoritative was to look at its theology. If a work proclaimed a different gospel from that which was proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles, then that work was not considered authoritative. This became increasingly important as heretical texts, claiming to speak the truth about Christ, abounded in the second and third centuries.

3. *Catholicity*. Finally, for a writing to be considered canonical it had to have been widely known throughout the church, with near universal acceptance of its authority.

These criteria show that the early church valued eye-witness reporting, theological consistency and widespread acceptance of documents before they were officially recognized as part of the canon. In spite of attempts to denigrate them, these criteria stand up well under inspection. Historical research method indicates that eye-witness testimony corroborated by other eye-*witnesses and quickly accepted by a wide range of people provides superior evidence to relatively late, secondhand accounts which diverge from the standard version.

Recent assaults on the canon

During the twentieth century, discoveries in Egypt and Israel uncovered a number of texts which were either previously unknown or no longer extant. These discoveries led to an enormous increase in our knowledge of early Christianity and *Judaism. They also raised questions as to how and why certain texts had come to be regarded as authoritative while others were forgotten. Ultimately, they precipitated a thoroughgoing critique of the idea of a Christian canon of Scripture. What are the primary criticisms of our notion of the canon? There are many, but it is possible to limit our discussion to three of the most common.

1. Alternative gospel accounts and documents referring to them have recently been discovered. There are over thirty different pieces of 'gospel' writing which purport to describe Jesus' life and ministry. Given the fact that we have so many gospels about Jesus it seems unfair to limit the canonical collection to just four. Why do we insist that the canonical gospels are right and the others wrong?

2. During the first centuries of the church different Church Fathers had different canons. If these important men did not agree on what was canonical, why should we? We need to come to terms with the fact that the canon was not delineated until the late fourth century and that the idea of a canon must have been foreign to the earliest church.

3. Finally, it is time for the church to recognize that the canon was a tool of oppression used to stamp out unpopular voices, limit discussion and legitimize the power of Constantine's empire.

Defending the canon today

These various critiques of the canon are easy to spot both in scholarly and in popular literature. The best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, bases a significant part of its plot on alternative gospel accounts, specifically the Gospels of Philip and Mary. Why do Christians not accept these accounts of Jesus' life as accurate? The main reason is that they were written several centuries after Christ (probably early third century) by a heretical Christian sect called the Gnostics. They were written to justify a set of beliefs that date long after Christ, cannot be traced to the apostles and are clearly a derivation from Christianity.

While those who question the canon of Scripture point to the diversity of 'canons' in the early church, they generally ignore the astonishing congruence of early views about authoritative texts. To speak of disagreements is to ignore widespread agreement within the church of the second century (compare *Irenaeus with the Muratorian Canon) and the near universal agreement of the fourth century church. To set this feat in perspective one need only bring up the notion of a canon of 'classical Western literature', an idea about which two English professors in the same department cannot agree, much less those debating across cultural and linguistic barriers as did the early church.

One of the hallmarks of postmodern thought is the belief that truth-claims are actually barely concealed claims to *power. Hence, to claim that one text is canonical and another not is to exercise power through the oppression of a different point of view. This belief produces a thoroughgoing sense of suspicion toward all 'winning texts', with the final conclusion that because they are oppressive by virtue of their original use they continue to be oppressive today. With this presupposition in mind it is easy to see why some view the formation of the canon as one of history's most successful power-grabs.

One of the more articulate scholars arguing from this perspective is Bart Ehrman, a professor at the University of North Carolina. His book *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford, 2003) is cogently argued and effective in undermining confidence in the canon.

Ehrman's ultimate goal appears to be to encourage religious tolerance by emphasizing the diversity of early 'Christianities' and the evils of oppression by those wielding 'orthodox' truth-claims. He is interested in promoting not a 'true' alternative Christianity, but a multiplicity of 'Christianities' where each one stands equal and respectful of the others. The result of his work is the barely concealed conclusion that belief in a canon of orthodox Scripture is subscription to an intolerant and oppressive religion.

When addressing this type of critique it is important to remember that literary canons are both common and necessary. Most professions depend upon a body of literature that is authoritative and instructive. If medical doctors were to practise 'unorthodox' medicine, people would die. The simple point is that a canon is not a tool of oppression by virtue of its existence. It is more often a tool of clarification and the establishment of norms, leading to good professional practice.

Secondly, while we tend to speak of the 'formation' of the canon, it is probably better to speak of the 'recognition' of the canon by the church. Those texts which became known as Scripture were authoritative long before they were canonical. To call something canonical was to recognize the authority it already had. Canonical development was not a power play. It did have ugly moments, but to claim that it was a state-sponsored attempt to silence dissent is to read history through postmodernist spectacles.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must remember that the church was founded on the atoning work of Christ and the gospel that was preached as a result. This gospel was quickly put down in writings that then became authoritative for the church. That we now rely on the canon of Scripture as a final authority within the church is a recognition of God's gracious provision for us, not an oppressive grab for power.

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CAPITALISM

Capitalism has, since its inception, created a conundrum for Christians. It deals with the way in which people in large parts of the world organize the economic structures of and relations in societies since the seventeenth century. Capitalism is an economic system in which private individuals and business firms carry out the bulk of production and exchange of goods and services through a complex network of markets and the prices formed by them.

Although market exchange has existed since antiquity, capitalism as a system is a feature of recent times, preceded by systems based on tradition or command. Like all previous