

CRACKING THE DAVINCI CODE
How Was The New Testament Canon Determined?
9/26/04

How was the New Testament canon determined?

Was the decision made by a church council?

Did these books “just happen” to be collected without any specific criteria?

Was the decision made on the basis of a sinister act of censorship as the DaVinci Code alleges?

1. Was the canon of the New Testament determined by Constantine and the Council of Nicea?

The Bible as we know it today was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. (The DaVinci Code 231)

Teabing in The DaVinci code tells Sophie that our modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda- to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and to use His influence to solidify their own power base. (cf 234)

The NT Canon was not the product of a decision by Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

- **Erwin W. Lutzer (The DaVinci Deception 14-15)**
“Historical works on Nicaea give no evidence that Constantine and the delegates even discussed the Gnostic Gospels or anything that pertained to canon. Try as I might, I have not found a single line in the documents about Nicaea that records a discussion about what books should or should not be in the New Testament. . . . Twenty rulings were issued at Nicaea, and the contents of all of them are still in existence; not one of them refers to issues regarding the canon.”
- An anonymous document written 550 years later (887 AD) tells a fanciful legend about the Council of Nicea placing the canonical and apocryphal books by the altar

and praying that God would sort out which were inspired by placing the inspired books on the top.

2. How Was The Biblical Canon Determined?

a. The Old Testament

1. There are over 3800 assertions in the OT that God is speaking.

2. The inspired books were recognized by the people of God at the time of writing. Exodus 24:3-4; Deuteronomy 31:26; Joshua 24:26; 1 Samuel 10:25; 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chronicles 32:32; Ezra 7:6; Nehemiah 9:14,26-30; Daniel 9:2

- ◆ Exodus 24:4a- “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.”
- ◆ Deuteronomy 31:26- These writings were carefully laid in the Ark.
- ◆ Joshua 24:26 So were the writings of Joshua
- ◆ 1 Samuel 10:25- and Samuel
- ◆ 2 Kings 17:13 cf 2 Chronicles 32:32- The prophets were recognized as bringing a message from God. and recorded.
- ◆ Ezra (7:6) and Nehemiah (9:14, 26-30) - possessed copies of the law of Moses and the prophets.
- ◆ Daniel 9:2- Jeremiah was included in the collection of inspired books.

3. Not all of Jewish religious literature was considered a part of the list of inspired books.

- ◆ Jashar Joshua 10:13
- ◆ Book of the Wars of the Lord Numbers 21:14
- ◆ Others 1 Kings 11:41

4. Our OT is based on the Hebrew OT canon that was accepted by the Jews.

5. Jesus refers to all three sections of the Jewish canon. Luke 24:44

6. The Council of Jamnia (90 AD) only ratified books that the Jews had accepted five centuries earlier.

b. The New Testament

1. Christ claimed authority for His teachings. Mt 24:35

2. Christ tells the apostles that they will receive truth from the Holy Spirit in the future. John 14:26; 16:13

3. The apostles claim to be true and to be speaking God's message. John 21:24; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 3:2

◆ John - John 21:24

◆ Paul- 1 Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:2,15, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,12,

◆ Peter- 2 Peter 1:16-21; 3:2

4. The apostles claim divine authority for each other. 1 Timothy 5:18; 2 Peter 3:2,15-16

◆ Paul for Luke- 1 Timothy 5:18

◆ Peter for all the apostles- 2 Peter 3:2

◆ Peter for Paul- 2 Peter 3:15-16

5. There are hints of early collections of NT writings. Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Peter 3:15-16

◆ Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation were questioned by some.

c. The Testimony Of The Early Church Fathers

1. The early church fathers quote extensively from the NT but not from the Gnostic texts.

- ◆ Clement of Rome (95)- disciple of Peter
- ◆ Ignateus (70-110)- quotes 13 NT books
- ◆ Polycarp (115)- a disciple of John- call NT quotes “scripture”
- ◆ Iraneus (180)- quotes 20 NT books
 - ◇ Specifically attacks the Gnostic documents in, *Against Heresies* (cf Bock 112-113,114-115)
 - ◇ 150 years before Constantine and the Council of Nicea
- ◆ **Justin Martyr- Bock 118**
- ◆ **Tatian- Bock 119**
- ◆ **Origin- Bock 119-120**
- ◆ Clement of Alexandria (150-212)- 2400 quotes- all but 3 NT books
- ◆ Tertullian (160-220)- 7000 NT quotes
 - ◇ Avid opponent of the Gnostic works
 - ◇ Wrote- *The Prescription Against Heretics*
 - ◇ Again over 100 years before Constantine and Nicea.
- ◆ Origin (185-253)- 18,000 NT quotes

2. The early church had very definite criteria that had to be met for a book to be included in the NT.

- From the 2nd to 5th centuries of Christianity, many different books were written about the teachings of Jesus and His apostles that never made it into the NT.
- How did the early church decide that these books were to be rejected and not included in the NT?
 - ◆ Divine authorship- Does it claim to be inspired?

- ◆ Human authorship- Was it written by an apostle or someone associated with an apostle?
- ◆ Genuineness- Is it from the same author and time it claims to be?
- ◆ Acceptance- Was it accepted by the people of God as canonical from the time it was written?
 - ◇ There was surprising agreement by the early churches.
 - ◇ Some churches at first questioned Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation.

When were these decisions made? And who made them?

- There was never an ecumenical council in the early church that officially decreed that the 27 books now in our NT were the right ones.
 - ◆ Rather, the Canon gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God.
- The various books were not given authority by any council or committee.
 - ◆ Not council or pope imposed upon the churches books that the people of God had not already accepted.
- There was widespread agreement on most of our NT books (including the 4 gospels) by the end of the 2nd century.
 - ◆ Muratorian Canon (late 2nd century)- aged and mutilated document with some parts missing.
 - ◇ 23 of our 27 NT books are identified. (cf Bock, **Breaking the DaVinci Code 112**)
 - ◆ Irenaeus (late 2nd century) and Origin (early 3rd century) have similar though not identical lists.

- Athanasius (367) has the earliest listing of all the books.
- The Council of Hippo (393) and the Council of Carthage (397) did ratify the 27 books we find in our NT.

Darrell Bock (123-124) Attributing the selection of the Gospels to Constantine and the Council of Nicea ignores more than a century of widespread use and recognition of these four Gospels. There was never a time when most church leaders were picking and choosing from dozens of gospels. To suggest otherwise is to morph Constantine into a figure he never was. The four Gospels were well established long before Constantine was born.

Why the ‘Lost Gospels’ Lost Out (Christianity Today, June 2004) “Among the second-century lists of authoritative Scriptures, never are gnostic texts listed- not even by the unorthodox Marcion in about 140.”

- No, the NT canon was not a product of a decision by Constantine and the Council of Nicea.
- No, Constantine didn’t eliminate 80 gospels and have them burned.
- The NT was clearly recognized and distinguished long before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

3. Did Constantine commission a new Bible which omitted certain gospels and embellish the gospels we have?

Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up and burned. (234)

Constantine did write a letter to Eusebius ordering preparation of 50 copies of the sacred scriptures.

- But nowhere in the letter does he command that any of the gospels be embellished in order to make Jesus appear more godlike.

We have copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that are significantly earlier than Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

- When we compare these early manuscripts with those that followed the Council of Nicea to see if any embellishment occurred. None did.

In addition we have literally tens of thousands of quotes of NT texts from the church fathers who lived 100 years and more before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

- They lived between 100 and 200 years before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.