

Criteria of Canonicity

Bruce discusses briefly the following criteria for canonicity—in a sentence or two, what should we recall about each criterion:

apostolic authority

antiquity

orthodoxy

catholicity

traditional use

inspiration

propriety for reading in church

propriety for settling doctrinal issues

A Canon within the Canon?

Although Bruce cites Lutheran and evangelical traditions as recognizing “a canon within the canon,” is that generally true throughout Christianity? Why or why not?

Ultimately, what does Bruce conclude about the usefulness of multiplicity—for example, of witnesses, of narratives, gospels, of epistles, of prophets?

How closely must the church follow *was Christum treibet* (what promotes Christ) in deciding canon and doctrine?

What does Bruce conclude, on page 275, when he quotes von Campenhausen, “Even an Old Testament read with critical eyes is still the book of a history which leads to Christ and indeed points toward him, and without him cannot itself be understood”?

Note, too, Bruce’s contention about the role of the OT (p. 276): “So far as the Old Testament is concerned, this is a heritage with which the Christian church was endowed at its inception. Its contents meant much in the life of the church’s Lord; they cannot mean less in the life of the church. ‘What was

indispensable to the Redeemer must always be indispensable to the redeemed.” How, then, is he responding to those churches and Christians who purport to be “New Testamental” only?

On pp. 277-278, Bruce answers well Charlotte’s earlier question about Gnosticism and the gnostic gospels—why did they fail to attain orthodoxy and canonicity?

What should we value about prophetic inspiration? Where does it occur in both OT and NT? Why does Bruce conclude (p. 281) that “the work of the Holy Spirit is not discerned by means of the common tools of the historian’s trade”?

Canon, Criticism, and Interpretation

Which form of the Old Testament is canonical? What issues does this question raise? Why is the Masoretic text regarded as the best for some works? The Septuagint for others, the targums for others?

What concerns does Bruce discuss with regard to any insistence on the text “as originally given”? Cite an example or two (see pp. 288-289).

Of what importance are the stages of composition? How does the gospel of Matthew serve as an example?

What did Harnack mean when he wrote that the process of canonization “works like whitewash; it hides the original colours and obliterates all the contours”?

How does Bruce define *canonical exegesis*?

Note this important statement on p. 294: “The injunctions in such occasional documents as Paul’s letters were never intended to be applied as canon law to personal or communal Christian life at all times and in all places.” What does that statement say about how Christians and churches generally treat the Bible?

In addition, Bruce notes, “It is not enough to say ‘the Bible says . . . ‘ without at the same time considering to whom the Bible says it, and in what circumstances.” What does that statement say about how Christians and churches generally treat the Bible?

Finally, on the doctrine of election, a principle implied from God’s call of Abraham, Bruce says: “The principle . . . that some are elected in order that others through them may be blessed has not always been borne in mind by those who thought of themselves as the elect of God.” What does he mean?