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MINISTRIES

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A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll

Revelation, the Bible, and the Canon Research Brief

From Pastor Mark Driscoll

Prepared by a research team

I. General and special revelation

Christianity theology as revelation-dependent

How does God reveal? Two-fold distinction:

-Special revelation in Christ and scripture (2 Tim 3:16 and Heb 1:1)

-General revelation through external world and internally through being the image of God (Ps 19:1-4, Ps 94:8-10, Rom 1:19-21)

Calvin on Special revelation: “Despite the brightness which is borne in the eyes of all people, it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very creator of the universe. It was not in vain that God added the light of the Word by which to become know unto salvation. In order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages...it was God’s pleasure to have recorded the oracles on public tablets.” (*Inst.* I, VI, 1,2)

Hodge on special revelation: “It is not denied that God reveals by God’s works and has done so from the beginning of the world. But all the truths thus revealed are clearly made known in God written word. The Bible contains all of the extant revelations of God...It is only through supernatural revelation that we know we can be saved.” (*Systematic Theology*, I, pp. 25-26, 182)

Calvin on general revelation: “God not only has sowed in our minds that seed of religion but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole creation and preservation of the universe. As a result, humans can not open their eyes without being compelled to see God.” (*Inst.* I, V, 1)

Hodge on general revelation: “The Scriptures clearly recognize the fact that the works of God reveal God being and attributes...Even without speech or words the heavens testify of God to all people.... It can not be doubted that not only the being of God, but also the eternal power and Godhead are so revealed in God’s works as to lay a stable foundation for theology.” (*Systematic Theology* I, 24-26)

Calvin on the revelation form being the image of God: “Certain philosophers long ago called humans microcosms because they are rare examples of God” power, goodness, and wisdom and contains in themselves enough miracles to occupy our minds if only we are not irked at paying attention to them.” (*Inst.* I, V, 3)

II. Canonicity

Introduction

F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, pp. 18-19: “Many of the world’s religions have sacred books associated with their worship and traditions. However, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have come to be known as ‘people of the book’ in a special sense... The ‘book’ has a regulative function: conformity to what the book prescribes is a major test of loyalty to their religious faith and practice.”

The English word “canon” goes back to the Greek word *kanon* and then to the Hebrew word *qaneh*. Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, p. 152: “Its basic meaning is ‘reed,’ and our English word ‘cane’ being derived from it. Since a reed was sometimes used as a measuring rod, the word *kanon* came to mean a standard or rule. It was also used to refer to a list or index and when so applied to the Bible denotes the list of books which are received as Holy Scripture. Thus if one speaks of the ‘canonical’ writings, one is speaking of those books which are regarded as having divine authority and which comprise our Bible.” In this sense the word appears to have been first used by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in a letter circulated in A.D. 367. Grudem uses the following definition: “The canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 54).

Authority and Canon

When we speak of the “canon of Scripture,” we are referring to those books that the church has recognized as the authoritative Word of God. Thus, although a formal distinction can be made between canon and authority, they are closely related. Specifically, books that the church has recognized as canonical are those that are recognized as having divine authority (F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 95). Therefore, we can first note the testimony of the Scripture concerning its own authority.

First, the OT itself witnesses to its own authority. This is seen especially instances where the words of Scripture are said to come directly from the Lord. Both the Mosaic Law (for examples, cf. Exod 4:30; Deut 18:21, 22; Lev 4:1, 5:1) and later parts of the OT use phrases such as, “The LORD has spoken,” “The mouth of the LORD has spoken,” or “The word of the LORD came to saying” (Josh 24:2; Isa 8:11; Jer 7:1; 11:1; 18:1; 21:1; 26:1; 27:1; 30:1,4; 50:1; 51:12; Amos 3:1).

The NT also witnesses to the authority of the OT. In Matt 22:43, Jesus refers to Psalm 2 and says that David wrote “in the Spirit.” The Apostles witnessed to the Spirit-inspired authority of the OT in Acts 4:24-25: “And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?’” In 2 Tim 3:16-17, Paul recognizes the authority and inspiration of the OT: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Also, parts of the NT recognize the authority of other NT books. Peter considered Paul’s writings to be Scripture in 2 Pet 3:15-16: “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” Paul cites both Deut 25:4 and Matt 10:10 in 1 Tim 5:18: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” This verse seems to consider both Deuteronomy and Matthew to be Scripture.

There are even places where a NT writer recognizes the special authority of his own writing. Paul speaks of his commandments as being from the Lord. 1 Cor 14:37 says, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord." Revelation 22:18-19 claims special authority, so much so that if anyone adds to it, he is damned: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

However, not every book in our Bibles has these explicit endorsements of God-given authority, and the 66 books of the Protestant canon did not fall from heaven in a neatly bound bundle. Rather, the church slowly came to recognize which books were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore authoritative. This process differed in the reception of the OT and NT canon, therefore, the historical circumstances of each will be addressed separately.

It is unclear exactly when what we now recognize as the 39 books of the OT were clearly recognized as a closed canon (in the Hebrew OT, these books are divided and arranged differently, making only 22 books). In earlier generations, it was thought that a council of rabbis in Jamnia (modern Yavne, Israel) formally recognized the OT canon in the late first century A.D. This view is now doubted by most scholars; the recognition of the OT canon was probably a more gradual process (Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the NT*, 727-28).

In any case, by the time the NT was written, the OT books were almost certainly recognized as a closed canon. Furthermore, the writers of the NT clearly regard our 39 OT books as the established, authoritative canon of Scripture. Five observations support this: 1) The books that the NT writers cite as Scripture closely match the 39 books of the OT; 2) In those places where other books are cited (i.e., the Greek philosopher Cleanthes in Acts 17:28 or the pseudepigraphical *I Enoch* in Jude 14-15), they are never called Scripture or said to be inspired; 3) The NT writers never attempt to disregard or eliminate the authority of the OT books; 4) Although the NT writers may be arguing with their Jewish contemporaries, they agree with them that the starting point of their arguments is the OT Scripture; 5) Jesus' reference to martyrs from Abel to Zechariah son of Berekiah is probably a reference to the first and last books of the OT canon (according to the common Jewish order, the first book is Genesis and the last 2 Chronicles) (see Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pages 731-32).

Good evidence exists in the New Testament which shows that by the time of Jesus the canon of the Old Testament had been fixed. It cannot be questioned that Jesus and his apostles time after time quote from a distinctive body of authoritative writings. They designate them as "the Scripture" (John 7:38; Acts 8:32; Rom. 4:3), "the Scriptures" (Matt. 21:42; John 5:39; Acts 17:11), "the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), "the Sacred Writings" (2 Tim. 3:15), and so forth. They often introduce their quotations with "it is written," that is, it stands firmly written.

If some writings were "Scripture," others were not. If some writings were canonical, others were non-canonical. Jesus had many disputes with the Pharisees over the proper interpretation of the Scriptures but we have no record of any dispute between Jesus and the Jews over the extent of the OT canon. There apparently was full agreement with what books were considered canonical Scripture. Jesus himself gives us some clear indications about the extent of the Old Testament canon. When applying the Scriptures and their fulfillment to himself, he speaks of "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" (Luke 24:44). This threefold division is undoubtedly equivalent to the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Jews often refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Tanak, TaNaK, or

Tanakh. This term is an acronym for the titles of the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible: Torah-“Law” Neviim-“Prophets” Ketuvim-“Writings.” Indeed, the newest standard Jewish English translation of the Bible published by the New Jewish Publication Society is called TANAKH: The Holy Scriptures.

On another occasion, Jesus not only alludes to the threefold arrangement but points to the books contained in this arrangement. He once spoke of the time “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary” (Luke 11:51; cf. Matt. 23:35), thus referring to the martyrs of the Old Testament. The first martyr of the Old Testament was Abel and the last martyr was Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-21). The book of Chronicles is placed at the end of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the Old Testament Jesus knew was a collection of writings reaching from Genesis to Chronicles, with all the other books in between, a collection which embraces the same books as in our Old Testament today (Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, pp. 153-4).

Josephus

The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, defended the Old Testament canon in his work *Against Apion* 1.38-42: “We do not have an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from, and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for, during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”

Several conclusions can be drawn from Josephus. Josephus mentions the number of books having divine authority to be twenty-two. These twenty-two books are the same as the thirty-nine books in our Bible today. The Jews enumerated their books differently that we do in our English bibles: (1-5) Pentateuch: Five books of Moses (6) Joshua (7) Judges-Ruth (8) 1 and 2 Samuel (9) 1 and 2 Kings (10) Chronicles (11) Ezra-Nehemiah (12) Psalms (13) Proverbs (14) Ecclesiastes (15) Song of Solomon (16) Isaiah (17) Jeremiah-Lamentations (18) Daniel (19) Ezekiel (20) Job (21) Esther (22) Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Malachi.

Josephus mentions books that were written detailing the history of the Jews but these books are not “esteemed” with “authority.” On this point Grudem comments: “This statement by the greatest Jewish historian of the first century A.D. shows that he knew of the writings now considered part of the ‘Apocrypha,’ but that he, and many of his contemporaries, considered these writings not worthy of equal credit with what we now know as the Old Testament Scriptures... Rabbinic literature reflects a similar conviction in its repeated statement that the Holy Spirit (in the Spirit’s function of inspiring prophecy) departed from Israel” (Grudem,

Systematic Theology, p. 56). In other words, according to Josephus, by 435 B.C. the canon is closed.

But what about the Apocrypha? Why is this collection of books included in the canon by the Roman Catholic Church but excluded by Protestants? These books were never accepted by Jews as Scripture. Jerome included these books in his Latin Vulgate translation in A.D. 404, though he said they were not “books of the canon” but merely “books of the church” that were helpful for believers. The earliest Christian list of the OT canon by Melito, the bishop of Sardis in A.D. 170, does not include the Apocrypha (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 57-59). Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 726): “The first Christians, of course, possessed no New Testament canon; they relied on the gospel that was being preached by the apostles and others, and on the books in what we now call the Old Testament canon.”

NT canon

The apostolic sermons recorded by Luke in Acts demonstrate how the apostles preached the gospel from the Old Testament. The development of the New Testament canon begins with the writings of the apostles. Did the apostles understand they were writing Scripture? Two texts are helpful in determining that the apostles understood they were writing authoritative, God-inspired Scripture.

2 Peter 3:15-16—“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” Peter acknowledges Paul’s writings and calls them “Scripture.” Grudem notes: “The word translated ‘scriptures’ here is *graphe*, a word that occurs fifty-one times in the New Testament and that refers to the Old Testament Scriptures in every one of those occurrences. Thus, the word Scripture was a technical term for the New Testament authors, and it was used only of those writings that were thought to be God’s words and therefore part of the canon of Scripture” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 61).

1 Timothy 5:17-18—“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” The first quotation is from Deut. 25:4. The second quotation is not found in the OT. It is actually an exact quote in the Greek text from Luke 10:7. So Paul quotes from the Gospel according to Luke and calls it Scripture.

The work of heretics such as Marcion spurred the church to comprehensively recognize the canon. The formation of the New Testament canon began in the early part of the second century A.D. The earliest list was drawn up in Rome, in A.D. 140, by the heretic Marcion. Although his list was not authoritative, it did demonstrate that the idea of a New Testament canon was accepted at that time.

In “Jesus of Nazareth: How Historians Can Know Him and Why it Matters” (pages 25-26), Craig Blomberg provides a concise summary of the formation of the NT canon: “Already in the mid-second century, Christian writers began to compile lists of books they believed were canonical—that is, uniquely accurate and authoritative and worth putting on a par with the

Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians would come to call the Old Testament). At first, this occurred largely in response to unorthodox teachings like those the various Gnostic sects promoted. But what is intriguing is that we have no record of the Gnostics themselves ever proposing any of their distinctive documents for inclusion in any canon, theirs or anyone else's. Instead, they tried to reinterpret New Testament writings in a fashion that would support their distinctives for the very reason that they recognized the unique authority attached to those documents. As the decades went by, the number of books for a New Testament on which there was agreement grew, until in 367 C.E., in his Easter encyclical, bishop Athanasius of Alexandria listed the twenty-seven books that have ever since comprised the canon. Ecumenical councils in both Carthage and Hippo in North Africa at the end of the fourth century ratified this common consensus. As far as we know, the four Gospels, Acts, and the letters of Paul were never seriously in doubt. The only significant debates surrounded the letter of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the book of Revelation. And the only books that were ever serious candidates for inclusion in the New Testament but omitted were also epistles, specifically, from the second-century collection of largely orthodox Christian writings known as the Apostolic Fathers. Even then, there was considerably more enthusiasm for the most weakly supported of the letters that did "make it in" than for any of those that were left out. In no meaningful sense did these writers, church leaders, or councils 'suppress' Gnostic or apocryphal material, since there is no evidence of any canon that ever included them, nor that anyone put them forward for canonization, nor that they were known widely enough to have been serious candidates for inclusion had someone put them forward. Indeed, they would have failed all three of the major criteria used by the early church in selecting which books they were, at times very literally, willing to die for—the criteria of apostolicity (that a book was written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle), coherence (not contradicting previously accepted Scripture), and catholicity (widespread acceptance as particularly relevant and normative within all major segments of the early Christian community)."

How did the church know which books ought to be recognized as canonical? What were the criteria for canonicity? The criteria used by the church in discussing as to what books were canonical were primarily three:

1. Conformity to "the rule of faith." In other words, did the book in question conform with orthodoxy, that is, Christian truth recognized as normative in the churches?
2. Apostolicity. Was the writer of the book an apostle or did the writer of the book have immediate contact with the apostles? Mark's gospel was understood to be tied to Peter and Luke's to Paul. "The Fathers universally rejected pseudonymity as an acceptable literary category for documents bearing the authority of Scripture... That any pseudonymity was knowingly accepted into the New Testament is denied by the evidence" (Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the NT*, p. 737).
3. Catholicity. For a document to be considered canonical it must have widespread and continuous acceptance and usage by churches everywhere. "The fact that substantially the whole church came to recognize the same twenty-seven books as canonical is remarkable when it is remembered that the result was not contrived. All that the several churches throughout the Empire could do was to witness to their own experience with the documents and share whatever knowledge they might have about their origin and

character. When consideration is given to the diversity in cultural backgrounds and in orientation to the essentials of the Christian faith within the churches, their common agreement about which books belonged to the New Testament serves to suggest that this final decision did not originate solely at the human level.” (Barker, Lane, and Michaels, p. 29; quoted in Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the NT*, p. 736).

“It was not so much that the church selected the canon as that the canon selected itself” (Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the NT*, p. 735).

The concept we have today of a completed Bible was formulated early in the history of the church. By the end of the second century all but seven books (Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, James, and Revelation) were recognized as apostolic, and by the end of the fourth century all twenty-seven books in our present canon were recognized by all the churches of the West. After the Damasine Council of Rome in A.D. 332 and the third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 the question of the canon was closed in the West. By the year 500 the whole Greek-speaking church had also accepted all the books in our present New Testament.

J. I. Packer writes: The church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by his work of creation, and similarly he gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up (J. I. Packer, *God Speaks To Man*, p. 81).

A distinction needs to be made between canonizing and collecting. No man or council can pronounce a work canonical or scriptural, yet man was responsible for collecting and preserving such works. F. F. Bruce writes: “One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa—at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397—but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of these communities” (F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p. 27).

In the early 4th century, Eusebius of Caesaria produced a list made up of three categories: 1) recognized books (*homologoumena*)—the four gospels, Acts, 14 letters he attributes to Paul (including Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation; 2) disputed books (*antilegomena*), he further divided this category into disputed but generally accepted books (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John) and books that are probably not canonical; and 3) heretical writings.

The first list that names only the 27 books found in our New Testament appears in the Easter letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, in 367 C.E (William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, OUP, 31). Although the books appear in a different order, the 27 books of the NT, and only these books, appear in Athanasius’ list. The Third Council of Carthage in 397 recognized all 27 canonical NT books, and there has been little dispute in the Western church since then.

Athanasius published a list of books that were to be read in the churches under his care. His list included precisely those books we have in our Bibles (with this exception — he admitted Baruch and omitted Esther in the Old Testament). “These are the fountains of salvation, that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone the teaching of

godliness is proclaimed. Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away from them. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.”

Other such lists had been published by others, as early as the year 170, although they did not all agree (Hebrews, James, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. How did the men who published these lists decide which books should be called Scripture? Scholars who have studied this matter closely have concluded that the lists of books are merely ratifications of the decisions of the majority of churches from earliest days. We are able to prove this by examining the surviving works of Irenaeus (born 130), who lived in days before anyone felt it was necessary to list the approved books. He quotes as Scripture all of the books and only the books that appear in the list published on another continent and sixty years later by Origen.

It is evident that the elders of each congregation had approved certain writings and rejected others as they became available. By 170, most of the churches were in agreement, having approved the same books independently. Prominent teachers were also influential in this process. About that time bishops began to prevail in the Church, as governors of groups of churches, and they simply ratified with these lists the results thus arrived at. These books constituted the standard *rule of faith* for all the churches. We must not imagine that the canon was imposed by ecclesiastical authorities. The canon grew up by many independent decisions of elders who were responsible for their congregations alone.

Some disagreements arose along with the rise of heresies. The elders of the churches became wary, and even began to doubt some of the writings they had formerly received as copies from other churches. Writings which came under question were Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Revelation of John. The reasons for doubt were various. The author of Hebrews does not identify himself. James was not an apostle, and his message seemed to contradict Paul's message. Jude was not an apostle, and he quotes books which the churches did not receive as Scripture. 2 Peter, it seems, was not widely distributed at first. The author of 2 and 3 John does not identify himself plainly. The author of the Revelation identifies himself as John, but does not say that he is the *apostle* John, and the style of the book is different from the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, the majority of churches received and used these books without questioning them, *while vigorously rejecting all others*.

Apocrypha and the Septuagint

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches accept a collection of books commonly called the Apocrypha as part of the OT canon. These books were written between the composition of last books of the OT and the first books in the NT. However, there seems to be a clear difference between the way that the 39 books of the OT and the Apocryphal books are treated. The first century Jewish historian Josephus knew of this collection of books, saying they were written between the book of Esther (probably written during the reign of Artaxerxes I) and his time: “It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been deemed with equal authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time” (*Against Apion* 1:41). He clearly regarded the Apocryphal books as inferior to the OT. It seems then that in the first century, it was widely recognized that prophetic activity and writing, and therefore the writing of authoritative Scripture, had ceased for some time. These Apocryphal books were not accepted by Jews as equal to the OT and were not deemed officially canonical by the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in 1546.

Apocrypha is a Greek word meaning *things hidden*, and in ancient times this word was applied to religious writings esteemed almost as scripture by some, but which were not read to the unlearned in public. In modern Protestant usage the word "apocrypha" refers to all those writings which have *wrongly* been regarded as scripture by many in the church. The Apocrypha refers to the fifteen books (fourteen if the Letter of Jeremiah is put with Baruch) written between the years 300 B.C. and 100 B.C. (except Esdras which was written about A.D. 100). Eleven of these fourteen books are considered Holy Scripture by the Roman Catholic church. When added to the Old Testament, they constitute only seven extra books because the others are attached to existing books. The Apocrypha is about the size of the New Testament.

It is inaccurate to talk about the Septuagint as a single book in apostolic days: the various writings existed as separate scrolls, and were not bound in a single volume until the middle of the second century, when the codex or physical "book" as we know it was invented. People did not have bookshelves, but cabinets or large cans full of these scrolls. The codex was adopted by Christians who wanted a more convenient way of referencing Scripture, and so the Greek Old Testament was one of the first collections of writings to be put in this form. When this was done, certain writings (called Apocryphal) which were highly regarded by the Greek-speaking Jews and often studied by them were bound in the same volume as the canonical books. The apostles never quote from these writings, and there is no reason to believe that they regarded them as Scripture, or would have approved of binding them with the other books in a codex.

Eventually the Septuagint came to be regarded as a kind of inspired paraphrase by teachers in the churches, mainly because the apostles had used it, and partly because they suspected that the Jews had deliberately corrupted the Hebrew text in anti-Christian ways since it was translated. Then the additional books traditionally included in complete copies of the Septuagint also came to be regarded as Scripture by some, especially in the West. This was a mistake, but it did little harm, because not much attention was paid to these books. At first the churches would not possess copies of the entire Septuagint, nor even all books of the Old Testament, but perhaps only separate codices of Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms; and they would gradually collect all the books. Copies of the entire Septuagint were very expensive.

The Muratorian Fragment (about A.D. 170)

The Muratorian Fragment is the oldest known list of New Testament books. It was discovered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in a manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and published by him in 1740. It is called a fragment because the beginning of it is missing. Although the manuscript in which it appears was copied during the seventh century, the list itself is dated to about 170 because its author refers to the episcopate of Pius I of Rome (died 157) as recent. He mentions only two epistles of John, without describing them. The Apocalypse of Peter is mentioned as a book which "some of us will not allow to be read in church." The English text below is from Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, pages 305-07:

... at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed them in his narrative. The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, whom Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to the general belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, one of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him to

write, he said, Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another. In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all the Gospels: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his epistles, saying about himself, What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes himself to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For "Most excellent Theophilus" Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence, as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city when he journeyed to Spain. As for the epistles of Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones they are, from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the plan of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle. It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. Paul also wrote out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also an epistle to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians, both forged in Paul's name to further the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church. For it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two bearing the name of John are counted in the catholic Church; and the book of Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote "The Shepherd" very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore, it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after their time. But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians.

| Books included | Excluded books | Additional books | Not canonical, but recommended for private use |
|--|-----------------------|--|---|
| [Matthew] [Mark] ¹ Luke John Acts Romans 1 and 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 and 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2 Timothy Titus Philemon James 1 and 2 John Jude Revelation of John Revelation of Peter Wisdom of Solomon | Hebrews 3 John | Revelation of Peter Wisdom of Solomon | Shepherd of Hermas |

Development of the Old Testament Canon

1000-50 BC:

The Old Testament (hereafter "OT") books are written.

C. 200 BC:

Rabbis translate the OT from Hebrew to Greek, a translation called the "Septuagint" (abbreviation: "LXX"). The LXX ultimately includes 46 books.

AD 30-100: Christians use the LXX as their scriptures. This upsets the Jews.

C. AD 100:

So Jewish rabbis meet at the Council of Jamnia and decide to include in their canon only 39 books, since only these can be found in Hebrew.

¹The text is incomplete so it does not include Matthew and Mark, but it is highly likely these were included.

C. AD 400:

Jerome translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin (called the "Vulgate"). He knows that the Jews have only 39 books, and he wants to limit the OT to these; the 7 he would leave out (Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach [or "Ecclesiasticus"], and Baruch--he calls "apocrypha," that is, "hidden books." But Pope Damasus wants all 46 traditionally-used books included in the OT, so the Vulgate has 46.

AD 1536:

Luther translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek to German. He assumes that, since Jews wrote the Old Testament, theirs is the correct canon; he puts the extra 7 books in an appendix that he calls the "Apocrypha."

AD 1546:

The Catholic Council of Trent reaffirms the canonicity of all 46 books.

OT Canon

| Protestant Order | Jewish <i>Tanakh</i> Order and Divisions |
|-------------------------|---|
| Genesis | Torah |
| Exodus | Genesis |
| Leviticus | Exodus |
| Numbers | Leviticus |
| Deuteronomy | Numbers |
| Joshua | Deuteronomy |
| Judges | <i>Nevi'im (Prophets)</i> |
| Ruth | Joshua |
| 1 and 2 Samuel | Judges |
| 1 and 2 Kings | Samuel (1 and 2) |
| 1 and 2 Chronicles | Kings (1 and 2) |
| Ezra | Isaiah |
| Nehemiah | Jeremiah |
| Esther | Ezekiel |
| Job | The Twelve |
| Psalms | Hosea |
| Proverbs | Joel |
| Ecclesiastes | Amos |
| Song of Solomon | Obadiah |
| Isaiah | Jonah |
| Jeremiah | Micah |
| Lamentations | Nahum |
| Ezekiel | Habakkuk |
| Daniel | Zephaniah |
| Hosea | Haggai |
| Joel | Zechariah |

| | |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| Amos | Malachi |
| Obadiah | <i>Ketuvim (Writings)</i> |
| Jonah | Psalms |
| Micah | Proverbs |
| Nahum | Job |
| Habakkuk | Song of Solomon |
| Zephaniah | Ruth |
| Haggai | Lamentations |
| Zechariah | Ecclesiastes |
| Malachi | Esther |
| | Daniel |
| | Ezra-Nehemiah |
| | Chronicles (1 and 2) |

Development of the New Testament Canon

C. AD 51-125:

The New Testament books are written, but during this same period other early Christian writings are produced—for example, the Didache (c. AD 70), 1 Clement (c. 96), the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 100), and the 7 letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110).

C. AD 140:

Marcion, a businessman in Rome, teaches that there were two Gods: Yahweh, the cruel God of the OT, and Abba, the kind father of the NT. So Marcion eliminates the Old Testament as scriptures and, since he is anti-Semitic, keeps from the NT only 10 letters of Paul and 2/3 of Luke's gospel (he deletes references to Jesus' Jewishness). Marcion's "New Testament"--the first to be compiled--forces the mainstream Church to decide on a core canon: the four gospels and letters of Paul.

C. AD 200:

But the periphery of the canon is not yet determined. According to one list, compiled at Rome c. AD 200 (the Muratorian Canon), the NT consists of the 4 gospels; Acts; 13 letters of Paul (Hebrews is not included); 3 of the 7 General Epistles (1-2 John and Jude); and also the Apocalypse of Peter.

AD 367:

The earliest extant list of the books of the NT, in exactly the number and order in which we presently have them, is written by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter of 367. [Note: this is well after the Constantine's Edict of Toleration in 313 A.D.]

AD 904:

Pope Damasus, in a letter to a French bishop, lists the New Testament books in their present number and order.

AD 1442:

At the Council of Florence, the entire Church recognizes the 27 books, though does not declare them unalterable.

AD 1536:

In his translation of the Bible from Greek into German, Luther removes 4 NT books (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelations) from their normal order and places them at the end, stating that they are less than canonical.

AD 1546:

At the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church reaffirms once and for all the full list of 27 books as traditionally accepted.

“Mapping Theologies of Scripture,” Justin S. Holcomb (excerpt from the introduction to *Christian Theologies of Scripture*, focusing on Incarnation and Scripture as revelation)

“Most of us hear the word ‘scripture’ without stumbling over it. Using it, we give the impression, even to ourselves . . . that we know what scripture is. On reflection, it turns out that it is hardly the case.”—Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?*

What is scripture? W. C. Smith challenges us to pause and ponder this question. All religious traditions that ground themselves in texts must grapple with certain questions. In worship services and public and private readings, Christians often turn to scripture for guidance: to the stories of Abraham or Moses, to the Psalms, to the prophecies of Isaiah, to the life of Jesus, to the letters of Paul, to the vision of John. Therefore, Christians must confront their own set of questions. Indeed, to ask such a question—“What is scripture?”—is to become mired in a muddy pool of questions: What is the nature of scripture? Is it divine? Human? Both? Is scripture authoritative? If so, how is it authoritative? For whom? What is the scope of its authority? Is scripture inspired by God? What about scriptural interpretation—is that inspired? Does God illuminate humans to understand scripture? Is there an appropriate method of interpreting the words of scripture? Who can interpret the scriptures? What is the purpose of scripture? How *is* scripture used? How *ought* scripture to be used? How do scripture and tradition relate? Does scripture interpret tradition or does the tradition interpret scripture? Or both? What does it mean for a Christian to call the Bible “the word of God”? And if Jesus is also called the word of God, how does Jesus as the word of God relate to the Bible as the word of God?

The phrase “theologies of scripture” includes the diverse discussions about the nature of scripture, the authority of scripture, the interpretation of scripture, the relationship between scripture and tradition, and the uses of scripture (liturgical, political, corporate, personal, etc.). Different theologians at different times have focused on different topics regarding scripture. While Origen’s treatment of scripture is different from both Augustine’s and Aquinas’, all three dealt with similar issues common in the patristic and medieval era—relating the plain or literal sense of the biblical text to the figural, allegorical, or spiritual interpretations. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation both focused on the issue of authority and interpretation as debates continued concerning who was the appropriate interpreter of scripture and which books should be considered scripture. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries one of the goals was to figure

out how the Bible was still the word of God in light of the historical-critical methods that seemed to challenge its historicity and reliability.

The term “scripture” designates a body of texts that are recognized as authoritative for Christian thinking—although the nature and extent of that authority is a matter of debate. The Bible bears witness to the drama of redemption in both the history of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within this basic agreement on the importance of scripture throughout the Christian tradition, there are various theologies of scripture. Our investigation will find that the reason there are different theologies of scripture is not because the Christian tradition is inherently contentious and cannot reach a consensus, but because each moment, era, and epoch raises different questions about the nature, authority, and interpretation of scripture, and about how scripture relates to tradition, reason, and experience.

Christian theologians have dealt with a common issue in that they are all negotiating how the self-disclosure of God in Jesus relates to the scriptures as the word of God. Each theologian discusses the relationship between “the Word” becoming human flesh (incarnation) and “the Word” becoming human words.

The designation of Christianity as a “religion of the Book” is certainly congruent with the fact that Christians believe the Bible to be an indispensable, reliable, and authoritative means of knowing about Jesus and of interpreting God’s self-revelation in him. This should not guide us into thinking that Christianity is focused on the Bible, rather than the Incarnation, as the primary mode of revelation. From the Christian point of view, Jesus is the message—God participating in human life. Jesus is not just the main person in one of many events in the story of God’s people. For Christians, Jesus is the final revelation of the fact that God has a story, a drama of redemption. That is, in Jesus, humanity sees the God who has always been a part of the drama in the full light that reveals God’s role in it. According to the Christian tradition, Jesus is God’s ultimate word *about* human life and the Bible is God’s word about God’s self-revelation *through* human life.

Early Gospel Harmony

In the late 2nd century A.D., the Christian teacher Tatian produced a harmony of the four canonical Gospels (commonly known as the *Diatessaron*). This early document demonstrates at least two things about early Christianity’s attitude toward the Gospels. First, the four canonical Gospels held pride of place by the end of the second century. Second, although there was some tendency to harmonize the Gospels, the church eventually recognized the importance of the diverse, but not contradictory, perspectives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Nag Hammadi Library

In 1945, a man named Muhammed Ali (not the boxer!) stumbled across a collection of ancient manuscripts in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. These documents were largely a collection of Gnostic documents, the most famous of which is the *Gospel of Thomas*. Proponents of revisionist histories of Christianity often appeal to the Nag Hammadi documents as evidence of alternative Christianities (cf. *The DaVinci Code*, p. 234).

DaVinci Code and Bart Ehrman

A number of recent events—the success of Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code*, the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*, and Bart Ehrman’s writings—have popularized alternative theories of early Christianity and the formation of the Christian canon.

The *DaVinci Code*'s challenges to Christianity are based on numerous historical inaccuracies. Besides the claim that Constantine decided which books should be included in the Bible, the story also claims other laughable historical errors, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls contain Christian documents and the idea that Jesus' humanity was emphasized by suppressed Gnostic gospels. The reality is, there is not a single Christian document among the Scrolls, and the Gnostic gospels taught that Jesus' humanity was merely an allusion. Jesus is exclusively divine and transcendent in the Gnostic gospels.

The *Gospel of Judas*, although sensationalized by the media, is no serious threat to the origins of Christianity. It was composed over 200 years after the events described in the Gospels (as opposed to a 40-60 year gap between the events and the canonical gospels). It is also full of historical inaccuracies. As Cambridge University professor Simon Gathercole commented in a recent interview, it contains historical mistakes that would be like someone in our day commenting on Queen Victoria's CD collection ("Sunday" on BBC4, 3/19/2006). To an American audience, it contains errors like speaking of Abraham Lincoln listening to his iPod on his way to Ford's Theatre.

The most serious of these challenges come from Ehrman, who is the chairman of the Religious Studies Department at UNC Chapel Hill. Ehrman attended evangelical institutions Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College but later rejected his evangelical convictions while at Princeton Seminary. In addition to being a world-renowned NT scholar, he has written a number of popular books and made appearances on TV shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. In these books, he argues that early Christianity was actually quite diverse and full of alternative viewpoints about the Christian faith, that scribes often intentionally changed the words of the Bible when copying it, and that we cannot have any real confidence that what we have is an accurate copy of the original manuscripts of the NT.

Ehrman's claims do not fully account for the historical picture. Although it is true that there were divergent viewpoints among early Christians, Darrell Bock's book *The Missing Gospels* rightly argues that orthodox Christianity was not the party that emerged from a free-for-all in the early days of the church, but rather the reality is that Christian orthodoxy as we know it is rooted in the writings left behind by those who were closest to Jesus himself. Regarding the reliability of the NT manuscripts, Ehrman also overstates his case. It is true that there are a large number of variants in the surviving manuscripts of the NT. Of those variants, however, "the smallest category, comprising about 1% of all textual problems, involves those variants that are both meaningful and viable. Most NT scholars would say that these textual problems constitute much less than 1% of the total" (Daniel Wallace, Ed Komoszewski, and M. James Sawyer, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You*).

Furthermore, the sheer number of NT manuscripts outnumbers any other ancient document by a substantial margin (there are approximately 5700 catalogued NT Greek manuscripts; the works of Homer come in second at less than 2400 manuscripts). If we cannot establish the text of the NT, we have no hope of reconstructing *any* ancient text. So, contrary to Ehrman's claims, we can know to a reasonable degree of accuracy what the NT originally said.

***The DaVinci Code* (movie) and the Canon**

In a famous scene from the *The DaVinci Code*, Sir Leigh Teabing explains to Langdon and Sophie the truth behind the history of Christianity. In this exchange, there are several

stunning claims that run counter to the historical evidence, but two of them particularly relate to the formation of the canon.

- Claim: “More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament” (*DvC*, 231)
- Reality: “The most generous count of extrabiblical documents appears in Harvard Professor Helmut Koester’s *Introduction to the New Testament*. That count stands at sixty, excluding the twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, a vast majority of these works were not gospels” (Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the DaVinci Code*, 62).
- Claim: Emperor 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” (*DvC*, 234).
- Reality: The Gnostic gospels are built on a theology that despised earthly and material realities and exalted the “higher” spiritual plane. Therefore, the only attention they gave to the humanity of Jesus was when trying to excuse it. The canonical gospels, however, provide a picture of Jesus as full human—recounting his birth, family, struggles, etc.

NT Textual Variants

(Daniel Wallace, Ed Komoszewski, and M. James Sawyer, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don’t Tell You*, reproduced at http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=4054)

What is *really* at stake when it comes to the text of the NT—when it comes to how accurately the copies were made? We have already noted four kinds of textual problems related to this issue, but it would be helpful to briefly list them again here.

1. The largest amount of textual variants (well over half) involve spelling differences and nonsense readings that are easily detectable. These affect nothing of meaning in the text.
2. The next largest group are those that do not affect translation or, if they do, involve synonyms. Variants such as “Christ Jesus” vs. “Jesus Christ” may entail a slightly different emphasis, but nothing of great consequence is involved.
3. Then there are the meaningful variants that are not viable. That is, they simply have no plausibility of reflecting the wording of the original because the manuscripts in which they are found have a poor pedigree. This issue involves careful historical investigation and requires the scholar to take the transmission of the text seriously. We saw that Robert Price’s attempt to excise Luke 1:34 from the Bible belonged to the category of “meaningful but not viable.” In his case, there was absolutely no manuscript evidence on his side, only wishful thinking.
4. Finally, the smallest category, comprising about 1% of all textual problems, involves those variants that are both meaningful and viable. Most NT scholars would say that these textual problems constitute much less than 1% of the total. But even assuming the

more generous amount (by expanding on the scope of both “meaningful” and “viable”), even then not much *theologically* is affected.

Mormon Canon

The official canon of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints includes the King James Version of the Bible “insofar as it is translated correctly,” the *Doctrine and the Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and the *Book of Mormon* (Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 192-93). The *Book of Mormon* tells the story of two ancient civilizations in the Americas. The first group, the Jaredites, left the Tower of Babel and migrated to the Americas, where they were eventually destroyed because of their corruption and apostasy. The second group was supposedly a group of Jews who left Jerusalem around 600 B.C. and also came to the Americas. This group later split into the Nephites and the Lamanites. The Lamanites, who were cursed with dark skin, are the ancestors of Native American Indians.

In contrast to the Biblical history, which takes place in the context of well-established history (even if all of the details cannot be verified), there is absolutely no evidence that the events in the *Book of Mormon* are anything close to real history. Furthermore, in spite of the claims of many Mormons, it is difficult to read the *Book of Mormon*’s attitude toward the Lamanites as anything but racist.

Islamic canon

Muslims claim that the *Qu’ran* is a series of verses that Allah dictated to the angel Gabriel, who in turn dictated it to the prophet Muhammed. Although they also believe that the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels are holy books, Muslims claim that these texts were corrupted by Christians and Jews; therefore, Allah sent the *Qu’ran* to correct the errors that had crept in to the other books.

Regardless of any other arguments that can be made about the origins of the *Qu’ran*, some of its claims contradict the Gospels; therefore, they cannot both be reliable.

“People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, ‘Three.’ Refrain; better is it for you. God is only One God” (*Sura* 4:169)

“And for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny, and for their saying, ‘We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God’—yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty—no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise” (*Sura* 4:157).

III. Natural Law in Christian Thought

Stephen Buckle, "Natural Law," in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer, p. 173: "Natural law is a very general moral outlook developed, in the first place, to rebut moral skepticism. Its basic premise is that human moral beliefs have a rational foundation, in the form of general principles of right conduct that reflects a determinate and rational human nature. Its weakness has been the difficulty of showing how these most general claims can be translated into reliable and specific practical maxims."

Natural law was first articulated by the ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle is often said to be the father of natural law. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle spoke of an order of justice that was derived from nature. He advocated the existence of a rule of justice that is "natural" and has the same validity everywhere.

The Stoic philosophers constructed systematic natural law theories. According to Stoicism the entire universe is ordered by the Logos. To live virtuously was to live according with one's nature. Passion is irrational and causes actions that violate this universal Logos or principle. Therefore, one must seek to eradicate all passion and live a consciously rational life.

The Roman orator Cicero defined natural law in his *De Republica*: "True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions... There will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and for all times."

The Stoic Cicero argued, "Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is Law. And so they believe that Law is intelligence, whose natural function it is to command right conduct and forbid wrongdoing. They think that this quality has derived its name in Greek from the idea of granting to every man his own and in our language I believe it has been named from the idea of choosing. For as they have attributed the idea of fairness to the word law, so we have given it that of selection, though both ideas properly belong to Law. Now if this is correct, as I think it to be in general, then the origin of Justice is to be found in Law; for Law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which Justice and Injustice are measured" (Cicero, *De Legibus*, quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, 109-11).

Many of the church fathers, especially apologists who advocated the Logos Christology, embraced the natural law doctrine of their contemporary Stoic philosophers.

Although Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165) likely had a place for natural law in his theology, he also noted that much of Plato's understanding of creation, physiology, and law were not derived from nature, but specifically borrowed from the Mosaic Law. Thus, "these things are not the product of human wisdom, but are spoken by the power of God" (*First Apology* 60).

One of the earliest references to natural law in the church fathers appears in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, written around A.D. 180. "At first God deemed it sufficient to inscribe the natural law, or the Decalogue, upon the hearts of men; but afterwards He found it necessary to bridle, with

the yoke of the Mosaic law, the desires of the Jews, who were abusing their liberty; and even to add some special commands, because of the hardness of their hearts” (*Against Heresies* 4.15).

Clement of Alexandria also claims that natural law and divine revelation are closely connected. “Whether, then, it be the law which is connate and natural, or that given afterwards, which is meant, it is certainly of God; and both the law of nature and that of instruction are one” (*Stromata* 1.29). However, he did not claim that natural law alone is sufficient, for God’s commandments serve to strengthen our resolve to act according to what we naturally know to be good: “Again, God has created us naturally social and just; whence justice must not be said to take its rise from implantation alone. But the good imparted by creation is to be conceived of as excited by the commandment; the soul being trained to be willing to select what is noblest” (*Stromata* 1.6).

Natural law played an important role in the writings of Origen (184-255). In his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen follows the Stoic philosophers in defining natural law as “that which says what one ought to do and forbids what one ought not to do” (*Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 140). Like Clement, he saw natural law and the moral codes of the Mosaic Law as essentially the same. Natural law appears again in Origen’s *Against Celsus*. Here, Origen again draws on Stoic philosophy, which made a distinction between natural law and the written codes of cities. Origen argues that Christians may not always keep the codes of cities, but they do submit to natural law, which is the higher of the two (*Westminster Handbook*, 141).

Another early father, Tertullian (160-225), claimed that natural law had been given by God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This law is “the source of common wisdom and discipline” (Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West*, CUP, 240). Unlike Origen and Clement, Tertullian claimed that natural law, although reflected in the Mosaic law, is ultimately “free from the historical limitations of the law of Moses” (Osborn, *Tertullian*, 240). Tertullian also made a distinction between what God allows vis-à-vis natural law and what he wills for the Christian. Thus, 1 Cor 7 says that there are some things that are lawful, yet not expedient.

In his homilies on Rom 2, John Chrysostom (c. 347-c. 407) calls the law which Jews follow a “written law” and the law that the Gentiles follow “natural law.” He seems to distinguish between more sharply between these two laws than some, claiming that the written law is outside of a person, but the natural law is within. Furthermore, he claims that there are two types of natural law: that which is seen in nature and that which is seen in the actions of men (*Sixth Homily on Romans* [Rom 2:25]). Both the church fathers and modern natural law proponents appeal to this passage in Romans as one of the primary NT support texts for a natural law theology.

Augustine (354-430) articulated his view of natural law in his *Treatise on the Trinity*: “Where then are these rules written, if not in the book of that light we call the truth? In it is written every just law; from it the law passes into the heart of man who does justice, not that it migrates into it, but that it places its imprint on it, like a seal on a ring that passes onto wax, without leaving the ring.”

Augustine described natural law as “transcribed, as it were, in the rational soul” (*De div. quaest.* LXXXIII, q. 43). Augustine used the term “eternal law” as an equivalent of “natural law.” He describes the eternal law as “the divine reason or the will of God commanding that the natural order be preserved and forbidding its disturbance.” Furthermore, sin is “any saying, deed, or desire against the eternal law” (Michael Bertram Crowe, *The Changing Profile of Natural Law*, p. 66).

A letter of Augustine summarizes the views the early church fathers well. In it, he said the following about natural law: 1) natural law written in the heart of man; 2) natural law is reflected in the Golden Rule to do unto others as you would have them do to you; and 3) natural law had to be supplemented by the Mosaic Law (Crowe, *The Changing Profile of Natural Law*, p. 67). Augustine’s theology of natural law, coupled with that of Thomas Aquinas, provides much of the basis for the modern Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of the doctrine.

The natural law tradition has been sustained throughout church history, and can be seen in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and the catechisms of the Roman Catholic Church.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) understood natural law to be the light of understanding placed in humans by God. He understood natural law to be natural because it is in accordance with human nature and this nature is a rational nature: “Whatever is contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the nature of human beings as such; and what is reasonable is in accordance with human nature as such. The good of human being is being in accord with reason, and human evil is being outside the order of reasonableness... So human virtue, which makes good both the human person and his works, is in accordance with human nature just in so far as it is in accordance with reason; and vice is contrary to human nature just in so far as it is contrary to the order of reasonableness.”—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 71, a.2c

“Natural Law Tradition in Ethics” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: “For Aquinas, there are two key features of the natural law, features the acknowledgment of which structures his discussion of the natural law at Question 94 of the Prima Secundae of the *Summa Theologiae*. The first is that, when we focus on God’s role as the giver of the natural law, the natural law is just one aspect of divine providence; and so the theory of natural law is from that perspective just one part among others of the theory of divine providence. The second is that, when we focus on the human’s role as recipient of the natural law, the natural law constitutes the principles of practical rationality, those principles by which human action is to be judged as reasonable or unreasonable; and so the theory of natural law is from that perspective the preeminent part of the theory of practical rationality”

Natural Law in the Roman Catholic Catechism:

2068—“The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them; the Second Vatican Council confirms: ‘The bishops, successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord ... the mission of teaching all peoples, and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments.’”

2070—“The Ten Commandments belong to God's revelation. At the same time they teach us the true humanity of man. They bring to light the essential duties, and therefore, indirectly, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person. The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law: ‘From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue’ (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 15, 1: PG 7/1, 1012).”

2072—“Since they express man's fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbour, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, grave obligations. They are fundamentally immutable, and they oblige always and everywhere. No one can dispense from them. The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart.”

Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner: “The sum of the rights and duties which of themselves follow directly from the nature of man, as a being endowed with reason and free will, is . . . called natural law in Catholic ethics; the mutability or immutability of the law and the possibility of knowing it are an important theme in Greek and Christian philosophy.” (Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology*, 329).

In *Humanae vitae* #4, Pope Paul VI stated that the teaching set forth in the encyclical “is based on the natural law as illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation. Let no Catholic be heard to assert that the interpretation of the natural moral law is outside the competence of the Church's Magisterium. It is in fact indisputable. . . the reason being that the natural law declares the will of God, and its faithful observance is necessary for men's eternal salvation.”

Many prominent Protestant theologians have rejected natural law (Karl Barth's concept of revelation claims that God cannot be known at all through nature; for an evangelical perspective see Carl F. H. Henry, “Natural Law and a Nihilistic Culture,” *First Things* 49 [January 1995]).

While Aquinas held a very high view of human reason, Martin Luther understood the limitations of natural law and human reason with respect to salvation: “God alone, through his Word, instructs the heart, so that it may come to the serious knowledge how wicked it is, and corrupt and hostile to God. Afterwards God brings man to the knowledge of God, and how he may be freed from sin, and how, after this miserable, evanescent world, he may obtain life everlasting. Human reason, with all its wisdom, can bring it no further than to instruct people how to live honestly and decently in the world, how to keep house, build, etc., things learned from philosophy and heathenish books. But how they should learn to know God and his dear Son, Christ Jesus, and to be saved, this the Holy Ghost alone teaches through God's Word” (Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, XLVIII).

However, there is a historical precedent for Protestants to embrace the doctrine. John Calvin spoke of two classes of knowledge. Under the first heading, he clearly affirms natural law, arguing: “No man is to be found who does not understand that every sort of human organization must be regulated by laws, and who does not comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence arises that unvarying consent of all nations and of individual mortals with regard to laws” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.2.13).

Alabama and the Ten Commandments

In recent years, some conservative Christians in America have increasingly argued that the Ten Commandments, as natural law, are the basis for the Judeo-Christian legal system, and should therefore be given a special place of honor and displayed in plaques and monuments in government buildings. Others have responded with the claim that such a practice violates the establishment clause of the Constitution.

The most famous battle over this question took place in 2003, when a US circuit court ordered the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, Roy Moore, to remove a 2.6 granite monument to the Ten Commandments from the courthouse. Moore refused, and after continuing to ignore the order, was removed from his post as chief justice. The monument was subsequently removed on Nov. 14, 2003.

According to a CNN article on the day the monument was removed, “Moore and his supporters say the Ten Commandments are the foundation of the U.S. legal system and that forbidding the acknowledgment of the Judeo-Christian God violates the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion.” Moore’s opponents, however, claim that Moore believes the Ten Commandments are and should be recognized as “the supreme law of the land.” This belief, they claimed, was the basis for the circuit court’s decision that Moore violated the Establishment Clause (<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/LAW/08/27/ten.commandments/index.html>).