



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Reflections Thoughtful Musings on Various Topics

“Later in this book you will meet people with broken spinal cords and Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. These are the people we must face head-on. No amount of mushy rationalizing can resolve their piercing questions. And these are the people who raise the question ‘Where is God when it hurts?’ most shrilly. If our faith cannot answer them, then we have nothing to say to a broken world.”
~ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 52

“Only a foolish person would describe a meeting with God as ‘fun.’” ~ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. in Michael R. Weed, “Consecrated Pragmatism: Trends in Modern Worship,” *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 5

“His judges view His death as an execution; Jesus views it as a sacrifice because ‘you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above’ ([John] 19:11). He is not resigned to death; He is committed to it.” ~ E. Earle Ellis, *The World of St. John: The Gospels and the Epistles*, 1984 repr. (University Press of America, 1995), 80

Beginnings of the Written Canon

David Anguish

In his preface in Luke 1.1-4, the third gospel’s writer declares his intention “to compile a *narrative* of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were *eyewitnesses* and ministers of the word have *delivered* them to us.” In Hebrews 2.3-4, the writer says the teaching he heard had been “at *first spoken* through the Lord” and then “confirmed to us by *those who heard*” (NASB).

From these statements, we infer that neither writer had personally experienced the ministry and oral teaching of Jesus. We also understand that they were passing on the message in written form to other believers who themselves had not personally experienced the events.

The two statements are snapshots from the process that resulted in the 27-document New Testament canon first listed as a unit in 367 AD (see issue 4/7 [here](#)). At the beginning, the message could be authenticated by the people who had heard, seen with their eyes, looked upon, and touched Jesus (1 John 1.1-3; cf. Acts 2.22, 32). But what would happen when those witnesses were no longer around—because the message had been disseminated to geographical areas where they were not present and/or because they had died? The answer was to record their testimony in a form that could go anywhere, making it widely accessible even as it retained the authority they possessed.

As the apostles and their representatives¹ wrote more and the writings were exchanged with others who also had received writings (see 1 Thess 5.27; Col 4.16), it was a natural step to begin collecting them, keep them for posterity, and, as time went on, make and disseminate copies so that the increasingly widespread fellowship of churches would all have access to the authorized message.

Of course, the apostles and their immediate representatives were not the only believers interested in writing about their

Reflections, cont.

“According to postmodernism, the human being is the creator of truth. The human being is the source of morality. The human being, in other words, is god. This sort of paganism is as old as Eden.” ~ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Crossway Books, 2013), 120

“God gave a *person*, then a *proclamation*, and then a *people*. This is the historical and theological order.” ~ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Eerdmans, 1996), xvii

“Unlike our poetry, the Psalms are a God-designed tool to help us feel truly the truth. Psalms say things we would rarely say out loud in church. But, then, people feel things they would rarely say out loud in church. We need somewhere to go to process those emotions, to inspect them in the light of God, and bring them into line with his will and his way.” ~ Josh Moody, *Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent* (Crossway, 2013), 15

“First, and above all, the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon. In many sermons, the biblical passage read to the congregation resembles the national anthem played at a football game—it gets things started but is not heard again during the afternoon.” ~ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Baker Book House, 1980), 20

faith. Over time, Christian writings began to proliferate. Some, in an effort to honor, but also at times to lend weight to the views they were expressing in a particular writing, wrote under the name of one of the apostles.

As the writings multiplied, some questions arose. Foremost among them was which writings were to be considered authoritative. This became especially important since the writings, some of which, remember, were penned under apostolic names, were not all of the same quality or in agreement in what they taught. Which teachers were true teachers? Which were false teachers? And, as persecution became more prevalent, which books could be given up if such were demanded by the governing authorities?

We’ll unpack these and related questions in future installments. For now, however, it seems prudent to preview the outcome with this summary statement of reassurance by Bruce Metzger:

The distinction between the New Testament writings and later ecclesiastical literature is not based upon arbitrary fiat; it has historical reasons.... The self-authenticating witness of the word testified to the divine origin of the gospel that had brought the Church into being; ... During the second and succeeding centuries, this authoritative word was found, not in the utterances of contemporary leaders and teachers, but in the apostolic testimony contained within certain early Christian writings. The Church did not create the canon, but came to recognize, accept, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the Church. If this fact is obscured, one comes into serious conflict not with dogma but with history.²

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Notes

¹ Note that the claim is not that all the writings were personally written by one of those whom Jesus directly charged with passing on the Spirit’s teaching (see issue 4/9 [here](#)). For example, regarding Luke, a self-described second generation believer (see above), multiple early church writers agreed with Irenaeus who wrote that Paul had “entrusted [him] to hand down to us a Gospel” (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1). For an overview of the external evidence for Lukan authorship, see David Anguish, *Luke 1-9*, Truth for Today Commentary (Resource Publications, 2021), 2-5. For a summary of the principal patristic witnesses to the authorship of all the gospels, see David Alan Black, *Why Four Gospels? The Historical Origins of the Gospels* (Kregel Publications, 2001), 37-42.

² Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Clarendon Press, 1987), 286-287.

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