

What happens when we find the Epistle of Laodicea (Colossians 4:16)? Will this be added to the Canon of Scripture if we can verify that it is from the Apostles?

This idea presupposes that Textual Criticism is criteria for Canonicity, however historically this is not how canonicity is determined. Archaeology and deconstructing of Manuscripts in order to find veracity within the text is **not** criteria for what *ought* to constitute and make up the list of the Bible. The mind of the Early Church for canonicity (in terms of that it should be included within the list of Scripture) was **if 1) it was read and used in the Liturgy;**

Eusebius on the authenticity of Hebrews;

Hence, as we know, it [Hebrews] *has been publicly read in churches, and I have found that some of the most ancient writers used it.*¹

2) And disputation amongst Church Fathers on what has been used and passed down via Tradition

Cyril of Jerusalem;

But let all the rest be put aside in a secondary rank. ***And whatever books are not read in Churches, these read not even by thyself,*** as thou hast heard me say.²

St. Athanasius on the origin of the Canon;

it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, ***and handed down, and accredited as divine.***³

Textual Criticism is not in the minds of the Church Fathers. Or in other terms, St. Irenaeus was **not** a German Textual Higher Critic – all of the Fathers believed in the Normative Authority of the Church as the prerequisite for Canonicity. Protestants disingenuously interpret the Fathers as if they were Textual Critics. For example, a Protestant will say “we do not deny the historical facts in the Formation of the Biblical Canon”. However, this proposition is meaningless, because they are interpreting the history of the Church as if these Fathers were German Higher Critics. As if the Fathers thought the Church was **not** a Normative Authority, and in order to come to certitude about what constitutes the Bible we must deconstruct the text and find veracity via the Textual Criticism ‘tradition’.

For example, in Against Heresies, Book 5 Chapter 26 St. Athanasius says this concerning the authority of the Church;

Wherefore ***it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church*** — those who, as I have shown, ***possess the succession from the apostles;*** those who,

¹ <https://www.bible-researcher.com/eusebius.html> (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 3.)

² <https://www.bible-researcher.com/cyril.html> (*Catechetical Lectures*, 4. 33-37)

³ <https://www.bible-researcher.com/athanasius.html> (Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle)

together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.⁴

Even though **St Athanasius** had a high view of Scripture, he also upheld the authority of the Church. Saying that it is *incumbent* or *obligated or required* to obey the presbyters who are in a Church with Apostolic Succession. In another place, St. Athanasius says that the Church has the authority to expound the Scriptures.

Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed, there it behooves us to **learn the truth**, [namely,] from those who possess that **succession of the Church which is from the apostles**, and among whom exists that which is **sound and blameless in conduct**, as well as that which is **unadulterated and incorrupt in speech**. For these also **preserve this faith** of ours in one God who created all things; and they increase that love [which we have] for the Son of God, who accomplished such marvellous dispensations for our sake: **and they expound the Scriptures to us** without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonouring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets.⁵

Since therefore we have such proofs, **it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church**; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. Revelation 22:17 **For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers**. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to **make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth**. For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?

To which course many nations of those **barbarians who believe in Christ** do assent, having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, **without paper or ink, and, carefully preserving the ancient tradition**, believing in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and all things therein, by means of Christ Jesus, the Son of God; who, because of His surpassing love towards His creation, condescended to be born of the virgin, He Himself uniting man through Himself to God, and having suffered under Pontius Pilate, and rising again, and having been received up in splendour, shall come in glory, the Saviour of those who are saved, and the Judge of those who are judged, and sending into eternal fire those who transform the truth, and despise His Father and His

⁴ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103426.htm>

⁵ Ibid

advent. ***Those who, in the absence of written documents, have believed this faith,*** are barbarians, so far as regards our language; but as regards doctrine, manner, and tenor of life, they are, because of faith, very wise indeed; and they do please God, ordering their conversation in all righteousness, chastity, and wisdom. If any one were to preach to these men the inventions of the heretics, speaking to them in their own language, they would at once stop their ears, and flee as far off as possible, not enduring even to listen to the blasphemous address. ***Thus, by means of that ancient tradition of the apostles, they do not suffer their mind to conceive anything of the [doctrines suggested by the] portentous language of these teachers, among whom neither Church nor doctrine has ever been established.***⁶

[The] universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] ***the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops.*** For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, ***on account of its preeminent authority*** [potiorem principalitatem].⁷

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, ***who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world;*** and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about.⁸

A tradition that was manifested throughout the whole world—we know this is not talking about the Textual Criticism/Sola Scriptura ‘tradition’. Rather a living and authoritative body of teaching that was transmitted via ***written and oral means***—preserved by the Holy Spirit by the Historical Canonical Church. The burden of proof on Protestants is to show that the Early Church viewed Apostolic Tradition as a means to preserve the ‘tradition’ of Higher Criticism. Another issue with this position is that Textual Criticism does not provide someone with Canonicity. ***Facts and Data do not provide the answer to the question of Normativity/Ethics.***

For example, the Qumran Caves (facts and historical empirical data) do not provide one with a Canon (a question of normativity). This is David Hume's critique of rationalistic ethics. Hume's famous statement reads as such; “you can not derive an ***ought*** (ethical, normative predicate) from an ***is*** (facts, and the empirical method)”. Hume is quoted saying that this deduction is “altogether inconceivable”.⁹

Hume says here that no ought-judgment may be correctly inferred from a set of premises expressed only in terms of ‘is,’ and the vulgar systems of morality commit this logical fallacy. This is usually thought to mean something much more general: ***that no ethical***

⁶ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103304.htm>

⁷ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103303.htm>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-moral/#ear>

or indeed evaluative conclusion whatsoever may be validly inferred from any set of purely factual premises.¹⁰

Hume also makes the argument that *pure reason alone* is not sufficient enough to provide someone with moral instincts. For example, when someone witnesses injustice—it is not *pure reason* that reacts to said phenomena. *He claims to prove that “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will”.*¹¹

Natural phenomena and facts are a ***different category in epistemology*** than Normativity and Ethics. This is why all theology that is predicated on the empirical method usually ***falls short*** in explaining ethics (ex. Thomistic ‘Natural Theology’). Since the natural order *alone does not provide* normativity or ethics. The Orthodox position points this out as being epistemologically flawed, since there is no Normative Criteria for what constitutes Canonicity (ultimately comes down to Textual-Higher Criticism and deconstructing the Autographa), or the normative interpretation of said Canon therein. For example, Protestant scholar John Peckham admits to the lack of Normativity in terms of Canonicity in his book *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura and the Theological Method*.

To be sure, the question of the final form of the canonical text includes a great deal of complexity, requiring considerable care. As a working approach it seems reasonable to approach the canonical text in the extant form(s) that we have, admitting the lack of access to a complete, original, final form. This final-form approach thus utilizes *the most attested findings of textual criticism* wherever such bear on the canonical meaning of the text. However, canonical theology ***does not*** divert attention to non-manuscript-based reconstruction of the text based on form, source, or tradition criticism because of the unavoidably conjectural nature of such undertakings. ***Rather, attention is focused on the received corpus of canonical texts and the study thereof, focusing on textual and in-textual hermeneutics regarding the final form of the sixty-six-book canon without neglecting textual issues that pertain to extant texts from this canon.***¹²

Even Peckham approaching the texts in its “extant forms” i.e. the “Common Canon” has nothing to do with the ***objective/normative*** use of a particular canon of Scripture. This fact ***could*** attest to the legitimacy and preservation of said text, however, as Hume has pointed out. *Empirical facts do not answer questions of normativity/ethics.* Just in the same way that the Quran has been preserved accurately (a question about facts/empiricism) via oral and written transmission – does not follow to the Quran being true (a question of normativity). This fallacy undergirds the whole process of Textual-Higher Criticism. The idea that deconstructing the text into a ***purely intellectual criticism*** can grant answers to questions on ethics and what the Canon *ought* to be.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² (Page 200) Peckham, John. 2016. *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method*. N.p.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Also appealing to something “working” also has nothing to do with normative use or rational justification. The Uniformity Principle (or the idea that phenomena that happens in the past *will* happen in the future) “works”, however David Hume critiques the rationalists on their use of said rule—concluding that it is never rationally justified. As Hume pointed out in the problem of induction, he reveals that the concept of the uniformity principle is always presupposed in empirical science. However, it is never rationally justified—since the Uniformity Principle **presupposes certainty** in the idea that propositions deducted from that past will be true in the future (i.e. which is literally the Uniformity Principle).

P5. Any probable argument for UP presupposes UP.

P6. An argument for a principal may not presuppose the same principle (Non-circularity).

C2. There is no probable argument for the UP (by P5 and P6).¹³

This circularity led Hume to conclude that the Uniformity Principle **can not be justified rationally**, rather presupposed. This same issue is in effect in Protestants' use of a specific list of books. Protestants will appeal to the 66 book canon as a rule in which we can know what the list of books are. However, this only presupposes what is at question (i.e. what is the normative use of the biblical canon).

Thus, Sola Scriptura is not tenable as a position—lacking in its epistemology the category of Normativity. Protestants can not answer the question of **what ought to consist of Scripture**. Also unable to demonstrate that the Fathers were Textual Critics, which would give them evidence that the Fathers and Apostles teach the Protestant ‘tradition’ of Sola Scriptura.

¹³ “The Problem of Induction (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).” 2022. November 22, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/induction-problem/#TackSecoHornHumeDile>.

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