

The Origins of the New Testament Canon: Issues, Problems, and Possibilities

#4: The Messiness of the Canon: Do Disagreements Amongst Early Christians Pose a Threat to Our Belief in the New Testament?

Introduction: Walter Bauer and the *Canonical Diversity Argument*

I. Examples of the Canonical Diversity Argument

A. Bart Ehrman

B. Helmut Koester

II. Response to the Canonical Diversity Argument

A. The Existence of Canonical Diversity is not an Argument

1. Does the mere existence of disagreements prove that these books are not from God?
2. The reason the Canonical Diversity Argument has worked is because it relies on an unspoken assumption (shared by many Christians!): *If God really gave divine books, there would be few Christians (if any) who dissent and virtually universal and immediate agreement on all of them.*
3. But, there are fundamental reasons to doubt this assumption:
 - a. God chose to deliver his canonical books through normal historical channels
 - b. There is always false teaching (and teachers) in the church
 - c. There are spiritual forces opposing the church
 - d. Not all who claim to be “Christians” are really Christians

B. The Extent of Canonical Diversity is Exaggerated

1. Strategies that critical scholars use to show canonical diversity

a. Use of Apocryphal Books

- Clement of Alexandria
- Origen

b. Disagreements Over Canonical Books

2. Key Refutation of the Canonical Diversity Argument: The Existence of a “Core” Canon by the Early/Middle Second Century

a. Most disagreements were only over a handful of books

b. Despite these disagreements, the existence of a core canon shows that the *theological trajectory of early Christianity was already determined*