

## “Argument Of An Internal Canon”

*Objection #1 – “If one examines the quotes from within the Protocanon of the Bible, it becomes clear that the Bible itself reflects its own canon. For starters, the first five books of Scripture are ascribed to Moses and they are immediately accepted by all Jews as having divine authority and these books are repeatedly quoted as authoritative throughout Scripture. The Book of Joshua was likewise accepted because Joshua was Moses’ successor as were the Judges who followed him. The later prophets quote the earlier prophets. The New Testament quotes from both the earlier and later prophets. St. Paul cites the Gospel According to Luke. Peter affirms Paul’s writings as Scripture. Finally, the Book of Revelation quotes many Scriptures. By this examination of how Scripture confirms Scripture, we see that the undisputed books affirm each other’s inspired and authoritative status.”*

Answer: This argument has the appearances of moving from what is known to what is not known in that it begins with the first five books of the Bible (whose status nobody denies) and builds upon Pentateuch to confirm the other books of Scripture. A closer examination reveals something quite different. .

Yes, the objector begins with the Books of Moses, Joshua and Judges so as to give the impression that it will proceed in chronological order, but the argument then skips to the later books in order to confirm the earlier books and continues this same pattern until the end. The foundation for this argument is not the first five books of the Bible; it is Second Peter and the Book of Revelation. Second Peter confirms the Pauline writings. The Pauline writings then, in turn, confirm the Gospels. The Gospels are then said to confirm the later prophets and the later Prophets confirm the earlier ones and all of them quote the first five books of Moses. No justification is ever given to establish the *bona fides* of Second Peter or Revelation!

The argument is actually much worse. Let’s examine it step-by-step, beginning at the conclusion and working forward to the preceding premises. The Book of Revelation quotes from many of the prophets (especially Ezekiel and Daniel), but which inspired book quotes Revelation? Since Revelation is generally held to be the last book to be written in the New Testament, no book in the New Testament can confirm it.<sup>1</sup> Second Peter is used to confirm the writings of Paul. Second Peter reads:

“...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”<sup>2</sup>

Like the Book of Revelation, nothing is quoted to establish the inspired status of Second Peter. Even if we grant Second Peter’s authenticity, how do we know which of Paul’s writings Peter had in mind? Since they are not named, it is impossible to know that “all of his letters” are those same letters that are in our Bibles. As for St. Paul’s quotation from the Gospel of Luke, where is the confirmation for the other three Gospels (or the three letters of John, First Peter and Jude for that matter)? What about them?

The internal canon argument only affirms the Gospel of Luke, the letters of Paul (the number of which we do not know nor do we know whether it includes the Book of Hebrews), Second Peter and Revelation (although no attestation is provided for the last two books). Clearly, this method fails to produce a canon identical with the one held today.

The situation becomes worse when we move to the Old Testament. Several protocanonical Old Testament books are not mentioned or quoted in the New Testament. Therefore, according to our objector’s theory, they too are left unaccounted for in the “internal canon.” If the New Testament fails to quote these books then we know that there are seven fewer books to confirm the earlier books. When all is said and done, the canon of Scripture does not match anyone’s Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Second Peter and Book of Revelation were among the last books of the New Testament to be universally accepted into the New Testament canon.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 3:15-16

The omitted books of the “internal canon” are not the only problem with this argument. The Old Testament and New quote from the Deuterocanon and also apocryphal works that nobody accepts. For example, the New Testament book of Jude quotes the apocryphal Book of Enoch.

“It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’”<sup>3</sup>

If quotation equals canonicity, then the Book of Enoch is canonical and ought to be in everyone’s Bible.<sup>4</sup> Surely, no one would argue such a thing today.

If a quotation equals canonicity, what constitutes a quote? Does a quote have to be a literal word-for-word match or can it be a paraphrase? Will an allusion be sufficient to prove inspiration? If so, then how does one rule out so many apparent allusions to the Deuterocanon in the New Testament?<sup>5</sup> If an allusion does not confirm inspiration, upon what basis does one rely to determine whether a reference is of the quality to confirm inspiration?

In conclusion, the Holy Spirit did not give us an inspired table of contents for the Bible nor did He give us an internal code by which one could reconstruct the canon. Rather, the revelation of the Father was given to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and bestowed upon the Church by the Son. The Church doesn’t reconstruct the canon through some sort of internal puzzle, but it merely receives the Scriptures as part of the deposit of Faith given to her by Christ and the Apostles.

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<sup>3</sup> Jude 14-15 quoting Enoch 1:9.

<sup>4</sup> The strength of this quotation by Jude led the early Christian writer Tertullian to conclude that it ought to be included in Scripture since it is affirmed by Jude (cf. *On the Apparel of Women* [De Cultu Foeminarum] Book I, 3). This idea seems to have died with Tertullian with the exception of the church in Ethiopia. While Tertullian’s line of reasoning was well intentioned, it forced Jude to affirm something that apparently the Holy Spirit did not wish to affirm.

<sup>5</sup> We will examine many of these references and allusions in Section Two.