

Geisler & Nix: Canonicity: Internal Evidence: Authors Recognized Their & Others' Writings as Scripture; Christophobia: Then & Now; the Gospels' "Verily" Passages

Reading procedure. Another indication within the New Testament itself that a canon was being formed is the repeated injunction that certain books should be read to the churches. Paul commanded that 1 Thessalonians be “read to all the brethren” (5:27). Revelation 1:3 promised a blessing to all who read “the words of the prophecy” and kept it; in fact, it gave a warning to those who “hear the words of the prophecy” of this book and do not keep them. The key to canonicity implicit in those injunctions appears to be authority, or prophecy. If a writing was prophetic, it was to be read with authority to the churches. (pp. 286-87)

Circulating procedure. Those writings that were read as authoritative to the churches were circulated and collected by the churches. The book of Revelation was circulated among the churches of Asia Minor, as John was told to “write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches” (Rev. 1:11). Paul commanded the Colossians, saying, “When this letter is read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea” [i.e., Ephesians]:

Colossians 4:16 - After you have read [ἀναγινώσκω, *anaginōskō*: to come to perceive by reading aloud in public] this letter [Colossians], have it read [imperative of ποιέω, *poiēō*] to the church of Laodicea. In turn, read the letter from Laodicea as well.

This is a crucial passage, because it indicates that the authority of one epistle included a larger audience than just the one to which it was written. Thus, as the book of Revelation was circulated throughout the churches, so other epistles were to be exchanged, and prophetic messages were to be read with all authority.

Collecting procedure. The circulating procedure no doubt led to the habit of collecting prophetic and apostolic writings, such as those alluded to in 2 Peter 3:15-16, where the author speaks of “all his [Paul’s] letters” as being on a level with “the rest of the Scriptures.” The apostles considered the collection of Old Testament writings to be divine Scripture; therefore, as the New Testament prophets wrote inspired books, those were added to the collection of “the other Scriptures.” Thus, by the time of 2 Peter (ca. A.D. 66) Paul’s epistles were in the canon. Since most of the general epistles were written after Paul’s, it cannot be expected that they would be mentioned. Nevertheless, Jude probably is referring to Peter’s book, and he seems to regard it as Scripture (cf. Jude 17-18 and 2 Peter 3:2-3):

<p>Jude 17 - But you, dear friends—recall the predictions foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>2 Peter 3:2 - I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy <u>prophets</u> [Old Testament (1:19-21)] and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles [New Testament (1:16-18)].</p>
<p>v. 18 - For they said to you, “In the end time there will come scoffers, propelled by their own ungodly desires.” (NET)</p>	<p>v. 3 - Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges. (NET)</p>

(p. 287)

Quotation procedure. If Jude quoted from Peter's writing when he said, "You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17), then he not only verified that Peter's writing was accepted into the canon by that time, but that the books received were immediately and authoritatively quoted as Scripture. Paul (1 Tim. 5:18) quoted from the Gospel of Luke (10:7) with the same formula he used to quote the Old Testament. It would be too much to expect that every book of the New Testament would be verified in this way, but enough of them are referred to (at least some of Paul's, one of Luke's and perhaps one of Peter's—a substantial part of the New Testament) in order to demonstrate that there was a canon of New Testament books even during New Testament times. (pp. 287-88)

In summary, the primary test of canonicity in New Testament times was apostolic or prophetic authority. Those writings that came to local churches (or individuals) were read, circulated, collected, and even quoted as a part of the canon of the Scriptures. Those writings supplemented and formed an integral part of the inspired Word of God along with the previously recognized Old Testament Scriptures. (p. 288)

The search for truth has led us to the immutable, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. It has been validated by a system that discovers the consistency of divine revelation: absent contradiction and thus complementary throughout. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament may be trusted for their veracity through our confidence of their perfection. The canon becomes the beacon that guides us in the darkness of the devil's world.

NOTE: The rise of Christophobia (intolerance of Christ, the Bible, Christians, and traditional standards established from biblical sources) in America is a historical trend that should alert Christians to the possibility of coming persecutions. Such has periodically been the case for the last two thousand years. A look back at those who were martyred as a result of uncompromising faith is the subject of this article by:

McCracken, Charles E., "They Feared Man So Little because They Feared God So Much," *Israel My Glory*, January/February 2008, 18-20:

During a few short years of my childhood, our family lived in southern England. Surrounded by relics of the past, I had many adventures while on holiday, visiting places that made history books come alive.

Of all the landmarks and historic sights [sic] intriguing to a boy of eight, the most memorable was Westminster Abbey. As we crossed the threshold of this imposing edifice, we entered the cavernous nave and almost 700 years of history. After coming to grips with the fact that people were actually buried inside the abbey, I became intrigued with the epitaphs on headstones embedded in the floor. One in particular impressed me. It stated simply, "He feared man so little because he feared God so much." (p. 18)

The poignancy of the declaration did not elude me as I pondered the words that afternoon. In fact, it articulates a stance taken by hundreds of thousands throughout the church's 2,000-year history: They dared to die rather than deny Jesus Christ. (pp. 18-19)

Living in a day when Christians—shackled by political correctness—tend to be more cowardly than courageous, we can learn from the undeniable testimony of these devout men and women of faith who feared man so little because they feared God so much.

Rome's Attempt to Exterminate Christianity.

History reminds us that during the most intense times of persecution, untold thousands lost their lives. Around the turn of the first century, Pliny the Second, a Roman naturalist and writer, "seeing the lamentable slaughter of Christians, and moved therewith to pity, wrote to [Roman Emperor] Trajan, certifying him that there were many thousands of them daily put to death, of which none did any thing contrary to the Roman laws worthy of persecution."

After, Trajan, Adrian brutally persecuted Christians with the same vehemence. In this new round of persecution, such influential Christian leaders as Alexander, bishop of Rome; his two deacons; many prominent Christians and their families; and at least 10,000 others were put to death. (p. 19)

A time infamously referred to as the Era of the martyrs was incited by Galerius \ga-lir'-ē-as\, Emperor Diocletian's \dī-a-klē'-shan\ adopted son. Provoked by his pagan mother, he continuously badgered Diocletian to begin a major persecution of Christians. Diocletian finally yielded; and February 23, 303, was declared Terminalia [The annual festival held by the ancient Romans in honor of Terminus, the god of boundaries, and celebrated on February 23, the end of the old Roman year.]: a day the pagan world hoped to exterminate Christianity. (pp. 19-20)

Churches were stormed and sacred books seized and thrown onto fires. Not content with merely burning the books, Diocletian and Galerius had a church leveled, ordered the same for all other churches in the empire, and declared Christians outlaws. As a result, "All the Christians were apprehended and imprisoned; and Galerius privately ordered the imperial palace to be set on fire, that the Christians might be charged as the incendiaries and a plausible pretense given for carrying on the persecution with the greater severities."

Entire households were burned in their homes. Others were chased from their houses, tied together with stones fastened around their necks, and driven into the sea. In some cases, whole villages were slaughtered and burned because the inhabitants refused to renounce their faith in Christ.

Not even the Roman military was immune to the persecution. A remarkable account of courage is recorded about the Theban \thē'-ban\ Legion, composed entirely of Christians. Maximian \mak-sim'-ē-an\ ordered a pagan sacrifice requiring the legion not only to participate but also take an oath of allegiance swearing to eradicate Christianity from Gaul. The entire legion refused and so enraged Maximian that he ordered every tenth man killed. When the remaining 90 percent still refused to comply with the order, every tenth man again was killed. When those still standing refused to recant, Maximian, in a fit of rage, ordered all surviving 5,400 soldiers executed. The sentence was carried out by other troops who hacked the Christians to pieces with their swords.

In the final verses of Hebrews 11, the author recounted people of faith, who braved almost every conceivable abuse. Summarizing, he said they "obtained a good testimony through faith," demonstrating fearlessness despite intense persecution (Heb. 11:39-40). He continued: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (12:1).

The witnesses are those who were persecuted, as cited in the previous chapter. They are *witnesses to us*, providing an unswerving testimony of courage, endurance, and faith in the face of the ultimate trial. There is no way to ascertain how many hundreds of thousands have perished for their faith in Christ through the centuries of church history. What seems obvious, however, is that these Christian martyrs took to heart the words of Jesus Christ who warned, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

In this age of political correctness, the words of Ignatius \ig-nā'-shē-as\, bishop of Antioch, should encourage believers not to fear men but to fear God alone. Condemned as a Christian and transported to Rome for execution, he declared, "I care for nothing of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!" (p. 20)

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When the Lord addressed either groups of people or individuals, he often prefaced his instructions with this phrase: “Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (σοι [sing.]),” “*Amēn legō humin (soi)*.” The King James Version translates this phrase with the archaic, “Verily I say unto you.”

The word “verily” is derived from the Middle English *verray* which means “true.” It is defined by:

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.: “verily”:

A. In truth; as a matter of fact. Frequently used as an emphatic affirmation of the truth of a statement, especially with verbs of believing, thinking, etc.

b. Placed in front of a sentence or statement as an emphatic asseveration [a serious declaration] of its truth or accuracy.

In versions of the New Testament, regularly used to render the Latin *amen*, or Greek ἄμην, which are frequently strengthened by repetition.

The modern translations do more justice to the translation than does the King James. The New American Standard’s is good: “Truly I say unto you,” but the New International Version and the NET Bible’s effort is the best: “I tell you the truth.”

This phrase is used exclusively by Jesus Christ and appears in all four of the Gospels: in Matthew, He uses it 30 times, in Mark 13, in Luke 6, and in John 25; a total of 74 occasions. All of John’s 25 quotes are “strengthened by repetition”: “Verily, Verily, I say unto you” (KJV), “Truly, truly, I say unto you” (NASB), “I tell you the truth” (NIV), and the best, “I tell you the solemn truth” (NET).

A study of the Lord’s *Amēn legō humin* passages offers a wealth of insight into the divine concept of truth and how it corresponds to the reality of God’s plan. For an excellent exercise in Bible study, here are the 74 verses where the Lord uses the term, preceded by an example from each of the four Gospels:

Matthew 5:18 - “I tell you the truth [Ἀμὴν λέγω, ὑμῖν, *Amēn legō humin*: plural for the disciples], until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of the pen shall pass away from the Mosaic Law until all is accomplished” [γίνομαι, *ginomai*: becomes a reality; its fulfillment on the cross].

The 30 occurrences in **Matthew** are: 5:18, 26; 6:2, 5, 16; 8:10; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11; 13:17; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34.

Mark 14:25 - “I tell you the truth [Ἀμὴν λέγω, ὑμῖν, *Amēn legō humin*: plural for the disciples], I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

The 13 occurrences in **Mark** are: 3:28; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30.

Luke 23:43 - And Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth [Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, *Amēn, legō soi* (singular for the criminal that believed in Christ)], today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

The six occurrences in **Luke** are: 4:24; 12:37; 18:17, 29; 21:32; 23:43.

John 3:3 - Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth [Ἀμὴν ἄμην λέγω σοι, *Amēn amēn legō soi*: (singular for Nicodemus)], unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The 25 occurrences in **John** are: 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24-25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20-21, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18.

Also, there is an abundance of passages that utilize the **ἀληθεύω**, *alētheuō* word group. This is the verb form, also called the vocabulary form, “to speak the truth.”