

# Faith of our Fathers

## *A Tour Through Church History*

### Class #3 – The Challenges & Opportunities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century

#### I. The Establishment of the NT Canon

*“More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament” Teabing remarked, “and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.”*

*“Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked.*

*“Aha!” Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. “This is the fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was put together by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea. At this gathering many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon – the date of Easter, the role of bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history. Constantine commissioned & financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits & embellished those gospels that made him Godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up & burned.*

Dan Brown, The DaVinci Code

The fact of the matter is that when we look into early church history there was no such council. Sure, there were regional church councils that made declarations about the NT canon (Laodicea, Hippo, Carthage). But these regional councils did not just “pick” books they happened to like, but affirmed the books **that were already functioning as foundational documents for the Christian faith**. In other words, these councils affirmed the way things had been, not the way they wanted them to be. These councils did not create, authorize, or determine the NT canon. They simply were part of the process of *recognizing a canon that was already there*. This raises an important fact about the NT canon that every Christian should know. The shape of our Bible was not determined by a vote or by a council, but by a broad and ancient consensus. This historical reality is a good reminder that the canon of Scripture is not a man-made construct. It was not the result of a power play brokered by rich cultural elites and an insecure emperor in some smoke-filled room. It was the result of many years of God’s people reading, using, and responding to these books.

Michael Kruger

#### Qualities Considered by the Early Church for the Canon

##### 1. Apostolicity/Inspiration

- Whether or not a particular book/letter came from the apostles or those in close relation/association with them.

##### 2. Widespread acceptance by the people of God

##### 3. Orthodox content

- Did it agree with other accepted books?

## II. Widespread Persecution

- Non-attendance at arena games
- No public education for children
- Rejection of abortion, infanticide, divorce, adultery
- No fighting in military

## III. Establishment of Public Worship

*“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the overseer verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.*

*Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the overseer in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the overseer, who provides for the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.*

*But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in darkness & matter, made the world; & Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”*  
 –Justin Martyr (110-165AD)

## A typical 2<sup>nd</sup> century worship service

1. Service of the Word
  - greeting
  - OT reading
  - Psalm/hymn
  - NT reading
  - Gospel reading
  - Sermon
  - Dismissal for Lord’s Supper
2. Service of the Lord’s Supper
  - Prayers
  - Greeting
  - Kiss of peace
  - Offering
  - Distribution
  - Benediction

# Timeline of NT Canon

