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# The Relevance of the *Homologoumena* and *Antilegomena* Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case

Charles A. Gieschen

## I. The New Testament Canon in Recent and Ancient History

Two very significant developments have occurred in recent decades that provide important reasons for taking up again the subject of canon. First, *within the church* there is a growing erosion of the authoritative function of canonical writings in the lives of individual Christians and various Christian denominations. While it appears that some understanding that God reveals himself somehow and somewhere through the canonical writings remains among many Christians and Christian churches, the confession that these writings are the word of God and the sole source of authority for all Christian teaching and life is largely a minority understanding among Christians in the United States. The most vivid example of this erosion is that the teaching of the Scriptures on moral issues as basic as sexuality and marriage is no longer authoritative for many Christians and their churches. Among a significant number of Christians, homosexual orientation is considered a creation of God that is as natural as heterosexual orientation, and same-sex marriage is an estate blessed by God.<sup>1</sup> Renewed attention to the study of the unique and authoritative content of the canonical writings by distinguishing clearly between these sacred, revelatory writings and other religious literature is at least one important step in stemming the erosion of their authoritative function. It should also be noted here that there is a distinct difference between the current situation and the one faced in the early church. In the earlier context, there was widespread recognition of the documents of the New Testament having divine origins and thus an authoritative function in the church, even as there were other documents circulating that also claimed to be authoritative. Today there are significant doubts among some Christians about any New Testament writing having divine origins; thus, the divine auth-

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<sup>1</sup> One can read such a perspective in Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014).

ority of these documents is questioned, and they are regarded as the wisdom of men about God conditioned by their context and culture.

Second, *within some parts of the academy* there is a growing marginalization of canonical writings through claims that these writings privilege the message of the orthodox minority rather than the broadly diverse majority of Christianity in the earliest centuries.<sup>2</sup> This has resulted in calls to study multiple early Gospels, including the Gnostic Gospels, alongside the four canonical Gospels and to regard the canonical epistolary literature as merely pastoral advice that was dependent on context, like that of so many other pastors or church fathers who wrote in subsequent centuries. The pattern that the Jesus Seminar introduced when its members put the Gospel of Thomas alongside the canonical Gospels in their publication *The Five Gospels* has continued to multiply.<sup>3</sup> One prominent example is Bart Ehrman's introduction to the New Testament published by Oxford University Press and used as the standard text for courses on the New Testament at many colleges and universities.<sup>4</sup> Although this is an introduction to the New Testament, he includes a chapter entitled "Jesus from Different Perspectives: Other Gospels in Early Christianity," which begins: "Many people don't realize that lots of Christian Gospels did *not* make it into the New Testament."<sup>5</sup> Another example of this desire to break down the canonical distinction is *A New New Testament: A Reinvented Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts*, edited with commentary by Hal Taussig.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Maricon cut out portions of the New Testament that he considered too Jewish, Taussig pastes in other non-canonical literature alongside the canonical documents in an attempt to blur the canonical distinction. An even more recent and sensationalist example is *The Lost Gospel* by Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is the so-called "Bauer hypothesis" popularized by Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 195 (emphasis original).

<sup>6</sup> Hal Taussig, ed., *A New New Testament: A Reinvented Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text that Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary the Magdalene* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2014).

Jacobovici is the cinematographer who made a splash in 2007 on the Discovery Channel with his film and book *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*.<sup>8</sup> His recent book is another effort to discredit the historical portrait of the canonical Gospels by elevating a late and unreliable document as a historical source alongside the canonical Gospels, especially now that the Coptic fragment called the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* has been shown to be a forgery.<sup>9</sup> Finally, one can easily project that an even greater marginalizing of the study of New Testament literature will continue in the academy with the shift to studying it alongside the literature of other major religions. This shift, driven by culture and market, is already taking place.<sup>10</sup> It is the move from studying the diversity within early and present Christianity to focusing on the diversity within the global religious milieu, both ancient and modern. In this context, the Bible is not the sole source of theology but is one source among many sources of religious wisdom.

It is important to express at the beginning of this study the understanding of the historical process of establishing the New Testament canon that is assumed in the discussion below. Although the focus of this study is on the New Testament canon, it must be stated that the existence of a Jewish canon—later called the “Old Testament” by Christians—as authoritative revelation is an extremely important reason that helps explain the rapid embracing of the writings that came to be known as the New Testament as authoritative Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> The evangelists and apostles continued the pattern of Moses and the prophets not only in preaching, but also in writing. Acknowledging the significant influence of the Jewish canon for any discussion of the origins of the New Testament canon, there are two contrasting ways of understanding the historical process of how the New Testament came to be. Either one understands it as a third- and fourth-century process whereby a few church leaders decided what was authoritative and what was not, or one understands it as a process of the

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<sup>8</sup> See the analysis of the film in Charles A. Gieschen, “The Lost Tomb of Jesus?,” *CTQ* 71 (2007): 199–200.

<sup>9</sup> See Charles A. Gieschen, “The *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*: A Modern Forgery?,” *CTQ* 76 (2012): 335–337.

<sup>10</sup> It has been going on in the American university setting for some time, but now is also happening in seminaries. For example, the first students to complete the Master of Divinity in Interfaith Chaplaincy program at Claremont School of Theology graduated in 2015; see “A Dream Realized: CST’s First Graduating Class of the Master of Divinity in Interfaith Chaplaincy,” last modified October 7, 2015, <http://cst.edu/a-dream-realized-csts-first-graduating-class-of-the-master-of-divinity-in-interfaith-chaplaincy/>.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the Old Testament canon, see Andrew E. Steinmann, *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999).

wider church confirming the books that had long been recognized and used extensively as authoritative Scriptures from the first century onwards, primarily motivated by the false claims of sectarian literature that surfaced in the second and third centuries. This study works with the understanding of the canonical process in this second manner; the church formally recognizing at a later date what had long been read and used as the Scriptures. Kurt Aland described this process in this manner:

In establishing the Canon, the Church authorities of the second and succeeding centuries only *subsequently* ratified the decisions which had already been reached by the Christian communities, or more exactly, by the individual believers. The organized Church as such did not create the Canon; it recognized the Canon which had already been created. It is only from the second half of the fourth century onwards, in connexion with the closing of the Canon, that the Church authorities began to have any effect.<sup>12</sup>

The church did not create a New Testament canon in the fourth century; it acknowledged the canon that was in use for three centuries.

Brevard Childs makes a similar point, stressing that the process of canon goes back to the time of the writing of the documents:

It is assumed by many that the formation of a canon is a late, ecclesiastical activity, external to the biblical literature itself, which was subsequently imposed on the writings. . . . Rather, it is crucial to see that the issue of canon turns on the authoritative role played by particular traditions for a community of faith and practice. Canon consciousness thus arose at the inception of the Christian church and lies deep within the New Testament literature itself. There is an organic continuity in the historical process of the development of an established canon of sacred writings from the earliest stages of the New Testament to the final canonical stabilization of its scope.<sup>13</sup>

To put it simply: the canonical process was more a process of the church excluding sectarian literature than it was a process of the church deciding whether the *antilegomena* should be included in the canon.

For this reason, the canonical criteria that are discussed by scholars are criteria that were used much more in excluding documents from the canon than in including documents that were already widely acknowledged as

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<sup>12</sup> Kurt Aland, *The Problem of the New Testament Canon*, Contemporary Studies in Theology 2 (London: A.G. Mowbrey and Company, 1962), 18 (emphasis original).

<sup>13</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994), 21–22.

Scripture.<sup>14</sup> The primary criterion is apostolic authorship; most of the literature regarded as authoritative by the church was written by an apostle (like Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul) or a close associate of an apostle (like Mark or Luke). If its authorship could not be connected to an apostle in the first century, doubts arose or the document was simply rejected. Antiquity itself is not a solid criterion for canon, since some heretical writings followed closely on the heels of the orthodox writings, or even may have, in a few cases, preceded them. There are few New Testament books, however, where the authorship is unknown, most prominently Hebrews. Although some early Christians sought to solve this problem by claiming that this epistle was written by Paul, the question concerning the authority of such writings was primarily answered by the use of the criterion of apostolic teaching, especially teaching about the person and work of Christ. Hebrews and other disputed writings, including Revelation, were primarily recognized as authoritative revelation because their content was congruent with the apostolic teaching of earliest Christianity as evidenced later in written documents like the four Gospels, Acts, and Paul's Epistles. For Luther, this criterion trumped all others: authoritative Scripture always teaches Christ and his work faithfully and clearly.<sup>15</sup> Closely related to the criteria of apostolic authorship and apostolic teaching is the early and consistent use of these writings by the faithful of the church.

What does all this have to do with the *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* distinction that exists within discussions of the New Testament canon? It is important to begin by explaining what this distinction is. *Homologoumena* (ὁμολογουμένα) refers to books "universally recognized" within the church, and *antilegomena* (ἀντιλεγόμενα) refers to books that were "disputed," meaning that some in the church expressed doubts about them. The primary source for these terms is Eusebius (early fourth century). Which books fit into these two categories? Twenty of the twenty-seven books that make up the New Testament canon had overwhelming acceptance from the beginning: the four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen Epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John. These are the *homologoumena*. The remaining seven, about which some questions were raised by some in the church, were considered the disputed books, the *antilegomena*: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John,

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of some typical canonical criteria, see Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 146-163.

<sup>15</sup> See J. A. O. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in the Lutheran Dogmatics," *Concordia Journal* 36 (2010): 134. This is a reprint of the original article found in *The Springfielder* 25, no. 1 (1961): 8-33. Subsequent citations of this article are to the version reprinted in *Concordia Journal*.

Jude, and the Book of Revelation. Because of the importance of this distinction within discussions of the New Testament canon, the words of Eusebius on the matter are included here:

At this point it seems reasonable to summarize the writings of the New Testament which have been quoted. In the first place should be put the holy tetrad of the Gospels. To them follows the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. After this should be reckoned the Epistles of Paul. Following them the Epistle of John called the first, and in the same way should be recognized the epistle of Peter. In addition to these should be put, if it seem desirable, the Revelation of John, the arguments concerning which we will expound at the proper time. These belong to the Recognized Books [ὁμολογουμένοις]. Of the Disputed Books [ἀντιλεγόμενων] which are nevertheless known to most are the Epistle called of James, that of Jude, the second Epistle of Peter, and the so-called second and third epistles of John which may be the work of the evangelists or of some other with the same name. Among the books which are not genuine [τοῖς νόθοις] must be reckoned the Acts of Paul, the work entitled the Shepherd, the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to them the letter called of Barnabas and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles. And in addition, as I said, the Revelation of John, if this view prevail. For, as I said, some reject it, but others count it among the Recognized Books.<sup>16</sup>

Not only does Eusebius express the *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* distinction, but he also has the following ordering of importance for the *homologoumena*: the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles of Paul, 1 John, and 1 Peter. The rest are *antilegomena*, although Revelation was considered *homologoumena* by some and even “not genuine” by others. It is noteworthy that in this context Eusebius expresses not only a distinction between *homologoumena* and *antilegomena*, but also a distinction between the *antilegomena* and the *notha* (“not genuine” or “spurious” writings).<sup>17</sup> Canonical lists were not meant to remove the *antilegomena* from use but to prevent spurious writings from use alongside the Scriptures by some Christians.

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<sup>16</sup> This translation of the Greek text of Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.25.1–6, is from *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926), 257–259.

<sup>17</sup> *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.7 also mentions a fourth category of writings: “wicked and impious writings.”



The *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* distinction played a role for Martin Luther as is visible in his introductions to New Testament books.<sup>18</sup> It has continued to play a role in our Lutheran dogmatic tradition, although of lesser importance than to Luther, but nevertheless to the point that Chemnitz, Osiander, and others advocated that Christian doctrine should not be drawn or taught from the *antilegomena*. Chemnitz and later Lutheran dogmaticians, however, actually drew rather freely on the *antilegomena* in doctrinal writings.<sup>19</sup> It is ironic that the two primary proof-texts for the divine nature of the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Peter 1:21, are both from the *antilegomena*. It is not the intent of this study to diminish the importance of the *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* distinction when it comes to the discussion of the historical process through which various writings were acknowledged as the authoritative word of God or even the role this distinction had in the early history of Lutheranism.

This study, however, will demonstrate that our focus as Lutheran pastors in the twenty-first century context should be on cultivating respect for the apostolic content of the entire New Testament canon within the church, rather than creating doubts about the authority and value of particular writings by appealing to the *homologoumena-antilegomena* distinction. The authority of the documents in the canon comes from their apostolic content, not from their being in the canon. The canon simply acknowledges their apostolic content. In the present context, it is unhelpful to dismiss or discourage the reading of particular books of the New Testament because they are *antilegomena* or not to use these same writings to teach Christian doctrine and nurture Christian faith. To question their authorship should not lead one to disregard their content. Although there will always be a functional canon within one's formal canon—namely, that some books are more central to the life of the church like the four Gospels—nevertheless, it is unhelpful to the church and our witness to the world when we individually or corporately narrow the canon by not using the *antilegomena* for Christian faith and life. Many confessional Lutherans get very irritated with critical scholars who dismiss some of the Pauline letters as deutero-Pauline and not authentic (e.g., 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians,

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 35:357–411. Hereafter AE. Especially well-known are his introductions to James, Jude, and Revelation. See also the discussion of Luther and canon in Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 6th ed. (1889; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 480–486.

<sup>19</sup> This point is made by Preus, "The New Testament Canon," 135–146.

and the Pastorals), yet they can be charged with a similar practice if they use the *antilegomena* label as reason to diminish or dismiss the authoritative function of particular books of the New Testament.

## II. The Book of Revelation as a Test Case

Why pick the book of Revelation as an example of a disputed book that should not be marginalized in the canon? Brevard Childs states, “No book within the New Testament exhibits such a wide range of disagreement on its interpretation. The controversy extends from the early church fathers to modern times, and has engaged many of the most brilliant minds, often with disastrous results.”<sup>20</sup> Revelation’s status in the early church has some clouds over it. Although Eusebius states that some regarded it among the *homologoumena*, most have regarded it among the *antilegomena*. Its acceptance and use was much stronger in the Western church than in the East, probably due to the problems that arose in the East with Montanism.<sup>21</sup> It is a long-standing tradition that Revelation is not used for lectionary readings in the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>22</sup> The study of Revelation is far from embraced by most Lutheran pastors, in part due to Luther’s pronouncements on the book that will be discussed below and in part due to the distinctive content of Revelation as visionary prophecy in line with Old Testament visionary prophecy that receives little attention from many Lutherans, especially Ezekiel, Daniel 7–12, and Zechariah.

One fact to which the detractors of Revelation’s position in the canon point is the limited evidence of its widespread use in the first few centuries of Christianity. There are not nearly as many early manuscript copies of Revelation as there are of the Gospels or Pauline Epistles.<sup>23</sup> In fact, there are only six papyri manuscripts dating from second to the sixth century, five of which are very fragmentary. Papyrus 47 is the most important early manuscript for Revelation, a third-century papyrus manuscript that contains Revelation 9:10–17:2. There are only eleven extant uncial manuscripts, dating from the fourth to the tenth centuries, four of which contain the complete text. Of these, Codex Alexandrinus is the most important

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<sup>20</sup> Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 502.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>22</sup> William C. Weinrich, *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XII (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), xx.

<sup>23</sup> This evidence is presented in Louis H. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 26–27.

early uncial for Revelation because it retains many of the semiticisms in Revelation that tended to be corrected by copyists, including the transcriber of Papyrus 47.

Although doubts have been expressed about apostolic authorship, namely whether the seer John was truly the apostle John due to significant differences between the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, the tradition that the author was the apostle John is quite strong among the early church fathers, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen.<sup>24</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 247–265), however, is an early voice expressing strong opinions that the Gospel and the Apocalypse could not have been written by the same person.<sup>25</sup> Thus, apostolic authorship did not give Revelation a pass that it could have ridden into the canon.

One cannot overestimate the impact of Martin Luther's opinions about the Book of Revelation on the study and use of Revelation within the Lutheran church. Because Luther specifically mentions one of the central canonical criteria discussed above, apostolic content, when rendering an assessment of this book in his "Preface to the Revelation of St. John (1522)," his entire opinion will be presented here before rebutting it:

About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, *and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic*. First and foremost, *the apostles do not deal with visions*, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the Gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions. Moreover *there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images*. For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; *I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it*. Moreover he seems to me to be going much too far when he commends his own book so highly (Revelation 22)—indeed, more than any of the other sacred books do, though they are much more important—and threatens that if anyone takes away anything from it, God will take away from him, etc. Again, they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to

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<sup>24</sup> Weinrich, *Revelation*, xvii–xx.

<sup>25</sup> Weinrich, *Revelation*, xviii.

keep. Many of the fathers also rejected this book a long time ago; although St. Jerome, to be sure, refers to it in exalted terms and says that it is above all praise and that there are as many mysteries in it as words. Still, Jerome cannot prove this at all, and his praise at numerous places is too generous. Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: *Christ is neither taught nor known in it*. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1:8, "You shall be my witnesses." Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.<sup>26</sup>

As is well known from his prefaces to the New Testament books, Luther's primary criterion for canonicity was the clear proclamation of Christ from the document. He concluded here that "Christ is neither taught nor known" in the Book of Revelation. With the evidence below, this study will demonstrate that Christ is indeed taught "clearly and purely" in the Book of Revelation, proving how wrong Luther was in his assessment. Furthermore, Luther's opinion that this book is "neither apostolic nor prophetic" is also faulty. It is my conviction, from over thirty years of research, writing, and teaching related to Revelation, that the apostolic teaching present in Revelation, especially regarding the person and work of Christ, is the basis for why this book has been recognized as authoritative Scripture, certainly more important than its possible apostolic authorship (i.e., the author "John" being identified as the apostle John, son of Zebedee).<sup>27</sup> Luther is also wrong in asserting that "no prophet in the Old Testament . . . deals so exclusively with visions and images." If one reads Ezekiel, Daniel 7-12, and Zechariah 1-7, one will find the Old Testament visionary prophecy that preceded and found its fulfillment in the Book of Revelation. Like Luther, many Lutherans may not feel comfortable with visionary prophecy in either the Old or New Testaments, but if God is comfortable with giving it, then we should study it and even delight in what it reveals. Indeed, it is specifically because interpreters have narrowed their personal canons and not immersed themselves in

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<sup>26</sup> AE 35:398-399 (emphasis added). It is noteworthy that Luther wrote a much-expanded and more positive preface in 1530 that was revised near the end of his life in 1546; see AE 35:399-411. What seems to have excited Luther about Revelation, according to this later preface, was his identification of various heretics and heresies in the book, not necessarily its teaching of the person and work of Christ.

<sup>27</sup> For what it is worth, I value the book of Revelation as apostolic teaching in spite of my conclusion that the apostle John, the son of Zebedee who wrote the Gospel and Epistles of John, is not the author of Revelation.

these Old Testament canonical books that they feel out of place and uncomfortable in Revelation.

### III. Does the Book of Revelation Proclaim Christ Clearly and Purely?

One of the key problems that interpreters of Revelation encounter, including Luther and many Lutherans, is not taking the claim of the first three words of this book seriously: Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“The unveiling of Jesus Christ”). The clear and pure proclamation of the person and work of Christ is a hallmark of this book.<sup>28</sup> Powerful portraits of Christ are repeatedly presented in the visionary prophecy, beginning with the vision of Christ that spans Rev 1:12–3:20. There John beholds the risen Christ as a glorious “one like a son of man.” He is seeing the same eternal son in a long, flowing robe seen by Isaiah in his call vision, by Ezekiel repeatedly in his book—especially the opening vision recorded in Ezekiel 1—as the Glory of YHWH, and finally by Daniel as the one like a son of man in chapters 7 and 10 of his visionary prophecy. This Christ, who is so grounded in the Old Testament revelation of YHWH, is the one who says to John, “I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I died, and behold I am living forevermore, and I have the keys to Death and Hades” (Rev 1:17b–18). What is the primary characteristic highlighted by Jesus’ words? Not that he is the eternal Son who existed before creation, but that he is the flesh and blood Son who truly died (ἐγενόμην νεκρός) and now lives forever (ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). His incarnation, death by crucifixion, and victorious resurrection are not hidden away but are trumpeted out by the very first words of Jesus in this book. He is seen in the midst of the lampstands, truly and really present on this earth with his bride the church, having the seven pastors of the seven churches in his right hand, the safe place where he holds all of his faithful messengers. This flesh and blood crucified and risen Jesus continues to be front and center in this opening scene and throughout his dictating of the seven letters (Rev 2:1–3:22).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the Christology of Revelation, see Charles A. Gieschen, “The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne,” *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, and Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 221–243 (with notes on 427–432).

<sup>29</sup> The ongoing revelation of Jesus throughout the dictating of the seven letters in Revelation 2–3 is reinforced by the mention of details to each church from the appearance of the risen Christ at the beginning of the visionary experience (Rev 1:12–16).

The next scene of this visionary prophecy, the most important scene in the entire book because it is the revelation of the ultimate mystery of God's presence in the divine throne room, begins in chapter 4 and climaxes in chapter 5 with this amazing and powerful revelation of Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> And in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slaughtered, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed people for God."<sup>30</sup>

This worship scene goes on. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then this vision is at least a 10,000 word essay or even a full volume on Christology. The Lamb is depicted in the midst (*ἐν μέσῳ*) of the divine throne (Rev 5:6).<sup>31</sup> Because no one other than God occupies this throne, this vision is trumpeting the full divinity of this Lamb.<sup>32</sup> Why "a lamb" (*ἀρνίον*), when one would expect to see Christ as the glorious "one like a son of man" who appeared in chapters 1-3? The Passover Lamb imagery here emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, his bloodied and slaughtered appearance proclaims the sacrifice that defines the Lamb, and his standing posture proclaims his resurrection victory. The seven horns proclaim the full divinity of this little lamb as a powerful ram, and his seven eyes testify of the fullness of the Holy Spirit with whom he is united. This Lamb-Christology is also congruent with the Christology Christians weekly experience in the Lord's Supper as they receive there the body and blood of this Passover Lamb (cf. 1 Cor 5:7). The worship of this Lamb shows his oneness with the Father, who also is the object of worship. The unity of worshipping the Father and the Son as the one God is expressed most forcefully in the final part of this throne room scene (Rev 5:13-14):

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<sup>30</sup> The translation is the author's.

<sup>31</sup> The ESV translation here, "in between," is less clear and makes it more difficult to express the theological significance of the Lamb having a position "in the middle" of God's throne.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the significance of enthronement in Second Temple Judaism, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 152-181.

<sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Is it not ironic that some Lutherans have argued that Revelation should not be a source of Christian doctrine, but this scene and song from Revelation 5 is currently a major source of teaching about Christ and the Lord's Supper each Sunday in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) through its use in the liturgy, specifically the text of "This is the Feast" in Divine Service, Settings One and Two of *Lutheran Service Book*?<sup>33</sup> Without doubt, Christ is being taught in Revelation 5 clearly and purely.

The Lamb, a title used twenty-eight times in Revelation, is the dominant portrait of Christ in this visionary prophecy.<sup>34</sup> It is the Lamb who then opens the seven seals of the book, each of the first six unleashing various maladies depicted in chapter 6, showing his control over the future. It is this Lamb who is seen again when we flash forward in chapter 7 to "the great multitude that on one could number . . . standing before the throne and the Lamb" after the Last Day resurrection when this little lamb is also "the shepherd" who guides the saints "to springs of living water" and "wipes away every tear" (Rev 7:17). In chapter 14, the Lamb is seen again in the midst of 144,000, the church militant, affirming that this Lamb is not only enthroned in heavenly glory but is also present in the midst of his church militant during the daily struggles she endures (Rev 14:1-5). And finally, the Lamb appears on the throne again in chapter 22 in the heavenly Jerusalem, a scene that once realized will go on for all eternity (Rev 22:1-5).

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<sup>33</sup> *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 155, 171-172. For historical background on how this canticle came to be used by Lutherans, see John Warwick Montgomery, "An Historical Study of the *Dignus Est Agnus* Canticle," *CTQ* 68 (2004): 145-153. This is a little-known article, in part because Montgomery used the Latin title to this canticle that has been known primarily by the English title "This is the Feast of Victory." The Latin title for this canticle, it should be noted, appears in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), 122.

<sup>34</sup> For the number and significance of the titles used for Jesus in Revelation, see Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 1-37. No other name/title for Christ is used so frequently in Revelation. For example, the second most frequent designation is the name "Jesus," which occurs fourteen times.



Christ, who appeared as the glorious man-like form of God in chapters 1-3, appears in similar form in several other scenes of this visionary prophecy.<sup>35</sup> He is probably the angel ascending from the east in Revelation 7:1-4 who has the seal of the living God and commands that the 144,000 be sealed with it, a depiction of Baptism with the divine name.<sup>36</sup> He is likely the angel functioning as the heavenly high priest in Revelation 8:3-5 who throws the censer to earth. He is clearly the mighty angel with the scroll in Revelation 10:1-11 who offers the prophet John the scroll to eat even as the Glory of YHWH gave the scroll to the prophet Ezekiel. He is the glorious one like a son of man coming on clouds to harvest the earth in Revelation 14:14-20. He is the rider of the white horse in Revelation 19:11-21 clothed in a robe dipped in blood with a sharp sword coming out of his mouth as he carries out the final battle. He is the angel who binds Satan in Revelation 20:1-3. The entire book, from start to finish, is truly what it claims to be: Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Not only is Christ taught clearly and purely in this book, but even more extensively and powerfully than in some other apostolic writings of the New Testament.

#### IV. Should We Use the Book of Revelation to Teach Doctrine? The Atonement in Revelation as an Example

In my opinion, the position that *antilegomena* should not be used to teach Christian doctrine, where it is still held in our Lutheran circles, should be abandoned.<sup>37</sup> If this biblical book is read in worship and preached from pulpits, as it has been for almost two millennia in the Western church, then it is already being used to teach doctrine, even if not in every dogmatics text. Although false teaching such as premillennialism has been drawn from Revelation 20, a portion of Scripture that is difficult to interpret does not mean that we should jettison the book. To illustrate, it may be helpful to examine how Revelation teaches a rather significant teaching of Christianity: the atonement.

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<sup>35</sup> For more extensive discussions of the christological identification of these figures in Revelation, see Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 245-269, and Gieschen, "The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne," 221-243.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion, see Charles A. Gieschen, "Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation," *CTQ* 67 (2003): 149-174.

<sup>37</sup> For this position among some Lutheran dogmaticians, see Preus, "The New Testament Canon," 135-146.



*Anselmic Atonement Imagery and Language*

The Anselmic understanding of the atonement—so prominent in Lutheran teaching and preaching—which holds that the death of Jesus paid the entire debt of humanity’s sin, is clearly taught in Revelation. Even before the first vision begins, John declares that Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead” and the one “who loved us and has loosed us from our sins by his blood (λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ) and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev 1:5–6). If one stopped here before hearing/reading the opening vision, he would already have a theologically rich and vivid testimony to the atonement through the mention of the shedding of the blood of the incarnate son (“his blood”) as payment for sin that results in forgiveness (“loosed us from our sins”) as well as the privileged status of reigning (“a kingdom”) and serving (“priests”) with Christ.

As already noted, the most prominent and powerful scene of Revelation is chapter 5. There the Anselmic atonement theology is seen in the slaughtered Lamb and then heard in the hymn sung to the Lamb: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for *you were slaughtered* (ἐσφάγης) and *by your blood you redeemed people for God* (ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου) from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10). Here is the language of atonement. In the sacrificial blood he poured out in his crucifixion, the “slaughtered” Lamb has purchased the various peoples who now make up the new Israel. From this inclusive imagery, one could even argue that universal substitutionary atonement is taught here, because individuals of every tribe, language, people, and nation could not be part of the new Israel unless all have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. This language of purchasing through blood is also behind the redemption language used of the 144,000 later in Revelation: “No one could learn that song except the 144,000, *the redeemed ones* [οἱ ἠγορασμένοι] from the earth” (Rev 14:3) and “*These have been redeemed* [οὗτοι ἠγοράσθησαν] from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

More blood and more teaching of Anselmic atonement theology is found in Revelation 7. The great multitude that no one can number is crying, “Salvation belongs to our God, namely the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb!” These coming out of the great tribulation then specify that this salvation is based upon the reality that “*they washed their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb* [ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου]” (Rev 7:14). This theme arises

again in the concluding chapter: “Blessed are *those who wash their robes* [οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν] so that they may have the right to the tree of life and they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14). The basis for the purely white resurrected glory of these saints is the blood that the Lamb shed in his crucifixion that has purified these sinners from all sin.<sup>38</sup> The source of the martyrs’ victory over Satan is not their personal might, but the blood of the Lamb: “And *they conquered* [αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν] *him by the blood of the Lamb* and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11). As this evidence demonstrates, there is abundant and beautiful testimony to Anselmic atonement theology.

### Christus Victor Atonement Imagery and Language

In any of the post-Easter appearances of Jesus, one would expect much *Christus victor* testimony and imagery, and there is this in Revelation, beginning with his glorious appearance to John on Patmos (Rev 1:12–16) and the first words out of his mouth: “Stop fearing, I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. I was dead, but I am living forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1:17b–18).<sup>39</sup> Christ is here the one who has conquered death and the realm of the dead through his own death and resurrection, a theme that is apparent in each of the promises about conquering made at the end of each letter to the seven churches (Rev 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26–28; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21). The announcement that Christ has “the key of David” that opens the door to heaven (Rev 3:7) is an image of victory similar to his proclamation that he has the keys of Death and Hades.<sup>40</sup>

The Lamb’s victory over death and sin is also featured in the central vision of Revelation—namely, the throne room scene of chapter 5. He is said to be worthy to open the scroll, an image that shows him to be in charge of history: “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals (Rev 5:5). This slaughtered little lamb is “standing” in the midst of the divine throne, a posture of resurrection victory. His victory makes him the object of worship for all those on earth and in heaven, as

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the language of “robes” representing resurrected glory in Revelation, see Gieschen, “Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation,” 159.

<sup>39</sup> For the background of this appearance of Christ in the Old Testament appearances of YHWH, see Gieschen, “The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne,” 232–235.

<sup>40</sup> See the fuller discussion of this text in Gieschen, “Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation,” 162–167.

John writes, "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (Rev 5:12). This is an ultimate expression of the *Christus victor* theme, not only in Revelation, but within the whole New Testament canon.

Christ's victory over Satan is especially prominent in the scene about the war in heaven found in Revelation 12: "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown with him" (Rev 12:7-9). This action in heaven is the resulting effect of the Lamb's victory on earth through the shedding of his blood.<sup>41</sup>

The theme of victory is also signaled by the title given to Christ in Revelation: "Lord of lords and King of kings." It is first heard in the vision of the Harlot, who is also Babylon: "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14). Even more vivid is this King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16) depicted as the conquering warrior on the white horse who "treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Rev 19:15), throwing the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire and single-handedly slaying with the sword of his mouth all who make war against him (Rev 19:19-21).

The theme of Christ's reign introduced in Revelation 5 is sounded again in Revelation 11: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15). This reign of Christ comes to a climax in the marriage supper of the Lamb found in Revelation 19: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come" (Rev 19:6). This Hallelujah proclamation of God's reign through Christ's victory is the textual basis for sublime musical compositions such as "The Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *The Messiah*. Yes, this *Christus victor* atonement theology in Revelation has

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<sup>41</sup> See also Charles A. Gieschen, "The Identity of Michael in Revelation 12: Created Angel or the Son of God?," *CTQ* 74 (2010): 139-143.

continued to be the Holy Spirit's voice to point many Christians to Christ's victory and eternal reign forever and ever.

*Exemplary Atonement Imagery and Language*

Finally, the exemplary understanding of atonement is also found in Revelation. The most prominent example of this is Jesus being repeatedly proclaimed to be "the witness (*ὁ μάρτυς*)" (Rev 1:5; 3:14; cf. 19:11) and one who gave "witness" (*μαρτυρία*) through his teaching and life (Rev 1:2; 1:9; 19:10 [twice]). In Revelation, "the witness of Jesus" is paired and on par with "the word of God" several times (Rev 1:2; 1:9; 20:4; cf. 12:11). These texts are stark evidence, within a few decades of Jesus' own ministry, of the respect that early Christians gave to the witness of Jesus' teaching and life.

In the book of Revelation, the faithful and true witness of Jesus unto death becomes an example or exemplar for the lives of his followers who are also to be faithful and true witnesses. For example, Revelation tells of other "witnesses" who were put to death, such as Antipas from the church in Pergamum (Rev 2:13) and "the ones killed on account of their witness" whom John sees under the altar calling for judgment (Rev 6:9). The two witnesses of Revelation 11:1-13, who symbolize the prophetic office of the Holy Ministry in the church, are put to death but rise again to bear witness. The whore of Babylon is described as one who is "drunk with the blood . . . of those who bore witness to Jesus" (Rev 17:6). Towards the end of this visionary experience, John sees "the souls of those beheaded on account of their witness for Jesus" (Rev 20:4). Certainly, Revelation tells of these "witnesses" following Jesus' example even to death. It is this stress on Jesus as our exemplar as a faithful witness that led Revelation to be an important book for inspiring martyrdom and for those whose witness led to execution.

It is noteworthy, however, that the various occurrences of "witness" language in Revelation do not primarily describe the witness that Christians gave as they were put to death, but the witness given during their lives on earth. Faithful Christians who testified to Jesus with their lips and lives and then died of sickness or old age, rather than being killed on account of their confession, are also known as witnesses. Simply put, a martyr or witness in the Book of Revelation is one who gives "witness" or "witnesses" to Jesus (Rev 1:2; 12:17; 19:10), bearing witness to Jesus as God incarnate and to what he has done by "freeing us from our sins by his blood" (Rev 1:5). Against all forms of idolatry that surround and tempt Christians, the Book of Revelation sets before the hearer of this vision the most powerful witness that Christians can give to the world: gathering

together on earth with the saints of heaven to worship the one true God who alone is worthy to be worshiped. As Richard Bauckham states, "Worship, which is so prominent in the theocentric vision of Revelation, has nothing to do with pietistic retreat from the public world. It is the source of resistance to the idolatries of the public world."<sup>42</sup> In the face of such idolatries, Jesus' witness becomes our exemplar, whether our witness leads to death or not.

#### *Use of Revelation for Christian Doctrine*

Should this book be used to teach doctrine? While there have been those who have questioned Revelation as the authoritative word of God, it is clear that the seer and author John was not one of them. Otherwise, he would have never concluded the book with this dire warning: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away for the words of the book of his prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:18-19). Many in the early church obviously had the same conviction, and with good reason due to its apostolic teaching. Contrary to Luther's early assessment, what has been made very apparent through the evidence presented here is this: Christ is clearly and purely taught and known in this book.<sup>43</sup>

### V. Conclusion

The study of the *homologoumena-antilegomena* distinction is an important part of understanding the history of the New Testament canon and is especially important for understanding a priority within the New Testament canon beginning with the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline Epistles, 1 John, and 1 Peter. This presentation, however, has argued that use of the *homologoumena-antilegomena* distinction in a manner that marginalizes or dismisses the significance of the *antilegomena* within the traditional twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon for Christian faith and life is unhelpful and counterproductive in our twenty-first century context. It is fuel for the fire of those who seek to erode our understanding of canon by removing or adding documents. J. A. O. Preus, former president of Concordia Theological Seminary as well as the LCMS, states the following in the

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161.

<sup>43</sup> See Luther's assessment, quoted above, including his conclusion, "Christ is neither taught nor known in it" (the referent of "it" here is the Book of Revelation).

closing line of his article on the canon: "We need have more of the dogmaticians' reverence for scripture as the God-breathed, authoritative word, which we recognize on the basis of its authorship, human and divine, its content, and the history of its use through the ages of the church."<sup>44</sup> The *antilegomena* label should not lead us to avoid these books in the canon, but it should focus us on the content of these writings that indeed has shown itself over the centuries to be of the apostles' teaching and the same Holy Spirit. The primary goal of this study is renewed appreciation for, and study of, the *whole* canon, both New and Old Testaments, especially by pastors, so that the apostolic ministers and the church remain truly grounded in all the teaching revealed there. This, after all, is what pastors promise to do in their ordination vows, at least in the LCMS.

It has been also been argued that the most important criterion for canonicity is apostolic teaching, because the most important period for the canon was neither the third or fourth century, nor the sixteenth century. The most important period for the New Testament canon was the two decades after the death and resurrection of Christ when the significance of that event was being preached and taught orally as the Holy Spirit bore witness through the apostolic ministers: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ Jesus died on behalf of sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). The *regula fidei*, the rule of faith, took shape during this oral period, long before it was expressed more publicly in the second century. The next most important period for the canon was between AD 50 and 70, when most of the New Testament documents were written. It was the oral apostolic proclamation and teaching already in place and the eyewitnesses still living that confirmed the authority of these documents now found in the New Testament.<sup>45</sup> And the next most important period was between AD 70 and 150 when these documents began to be read, proclaimed, and studied in the earliest Christian churches as the word of the Lord grew and multiplied throughout the ancient world. By the time the early canonical lists appeared in the late second through the fourth centuries, the church had

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<sup>44</sup> Preus, *The New Testament Canon*, 151.

<sup>45</sup> It is the thesis of Samuel Byrskog that the Gospels were written within the generation of the events in them specifically because the authors wanted the historical testimony in their Gospels to be confirmed by witnesses still living. See Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 123 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

already clearly recognized the vast majority of the canonical writings that were authoritative Scripture through their widespread use of them, even the *antilegomena*. If they had not, then the *antilegomena* would not have been disputed; they would have been rendered not genuine.

Concerning the importance of apostolicity in discussions of authority and canon, the following conclusion of an opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary contains practical guidance for how pastors can address this matter in a congregation setting:

After the times of the apostles, Christians became acquainted with a completed canon rather than with individual, separate writings. The authority of each New Testament writing does *not* derive from its being in the canon, but it derives from its apostolic authority which is corroborated by the apostolic content of its message. Christians will recognize that all New Testament books share in the same apostolic message. The canon reflects a unified apostolic origin and content. The distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena should not ordinarily be discussed among laity, as it is chiefly an historical issue. The distinction however is not destructive of the Christian faith or message, and it can be approached candidly. The distinction however does not mean that the Christian has unrestricted license to discard New Testament books. The person rejecting certain New Testament books because the apostolic authorship is doubted should be able to demonstrate his arguments in this matter. The selection of New Testament writings does not belong to Christian liberty.<sup>46</sup>

Even though some questions surrounding the authorship and origins of some documents of the canon will probably always remained unanswered, the church is not in a situation of doubt and uncertainty about what God has revealed. J. A. O. Preus reminds us that just as the church recognized the apostolic Scriptures long before the 39th Paschal letter of Anthansius in AD 367 or the decree of the Third Council of Carthage in AD 397, so also these Scriptures of the New Testament continue to show themselves to be the word of God through our use of them for faith and life in Christ:

Are we then in a state of darkness and confusion which makes us as theologians so unsure of our moorings that we are not quite sure whether God might also have revealed himself to the pious of antiquity or to the contemplative among the Hindus and the virtuous among the Moslems? Much of modern theology today has arrived at

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<sup>46</sup> "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology: Apostolicity, Inspiration, and Canonicity," *CTQ* 44 (1980): 49.



this point, largely because men have given up scripture as the authoritative and inerrant word of God. Again our dogmaticians supply us with an answer. Scripture is *autopistos*. It is its own authority, needing neither the decrees of councils and popes, nor the scientifically documented witness of the history, nor even the absolute proof regarding specific apostolic authorship to establish its authority and value. The same scriptures which convinced the early Christians that they were truly God-breathed books convince us of the same, if we approach them with the attitude which Christ requires of all those who will worship him and be his disciples. Perhaps the Lord in his wisdom has dealt with the canon in the same way as he did with the text. There is confusion, uncertainty, and a host of unanswered questions; yet the scripture continues to accomplish its mighty acts among men. There is a peculiar combination of faith and history involved in the study of the canon. We can be scientific and scholarly up to a point, but at that point faith must take over. Where faith is lacking, not only the canon falls, but so does the Bible and ultimately the Christ to whom the scripture testifies.<sup>47</sup>

All twenty-seven documents that have come to be known as the New Testament continue to show themselves to be authoritative witnesses to Christ, including the *antilegomena*. May we make use of them all in our witness to Christ in each passing century, including this one.

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<sup>47</sup> Preus, "The New Testament Canon," 149-150.