

CONCORDIA  
THEOLOGICAL  
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 44, Number 1

ELC 48325

JANUARY 1980

Harry A. Huth, D.D., 1917-1979..... 1

Perceived Influences on Occupational Choice  
of Seminarians ..... William M. Cross 3

The Purpose and Fruits of the  
Holy Supper.....C.J. Evanson 17

Luther's Understanding of "Church" in His  
Treatise *On the Councils and the Church*  
of 1539 .....Eugene F. A. Klug 27

To Raymond Surburg on His  
Seventieth Birthday..... 39

Raymond F. Surburg: A Selected Bibliography..... 41

Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology ..... 46

Theological Observer ..... 50

Homiletical Studies..... 62

Books Reviewed..... 79

Books Received..... 99

102720



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ELC 48325

# Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology

## Apostolicity, Inspiration, and Canonicity

Apostolicity, inspiration, and canonicity are qualities of the New Testament Scriptures with each existing coterminously with and interdependent upon the other.

The authorship of the New Testament books belongs under apostolicity. Their divine origin and content belongs to inspiration. Canonicity is the church's recognition of this apostolic authorship and hence also of inspiration.

Apostolicity is first of all an historical question, but never an historical question in isolation. To this historical question are attached certain theological implications, as outside this apostolic office there is no certain and sure inspiration and authority.

The office of apostle was established by Jesus during His earthly ministry to witness the saving events of His life and death (Jn 15:27) and to preserve His words (Mt 10:1-2; Mt 28:20). The occupants of the apostolic office were chosen directly by Jesus (Mt 4:18-22) and recognizing them as apostles is the foundation of the early church's faith (Gal 1:8; Eph 2:20). The apostolic authority shares in God's infallibility (Jn 14:26; Jn 15:26) and operates under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit (Mt 10:20). This infallibility and Spirit supervision of the Apostles are preserved in the Holy Scriptures (2 Thes 2:15). The apostolic words are God's Words (1 Thes 2:13). The choosing of the apostles are events in time and space (Mt 10), even though the office of apostle is divinely given and is entrusted with a divine message (Mt 10:20). Twelve were chosen as apostles before the crucifixion. All four Gospels and St. Paul (1 Cor 15:5) recognize the special character of their possession of the office and their unique function as historic witnesses (Acts 1:8). Others besides the Twelve are entrusted with the apostolic office after the Lord's resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-9), e.g., Matthias, James, Paul, and perhaps Jude. The office of the apostle is intended to be exclusive; therefore others whose names may appear in the New Testament should not be accorded the honor or rank of apostle unless there is strong Biblical evidence. When the Lutheran Confessions speak about "the apostolic Scriptures", they mean that the New Testament writings proceed directly from the authority of the apostles. In this authority the Holy Spirit is always directly and authoritatively working. Apostolic inspiration must be clearly distin-

guished from ecstatic inspiration. The content of the apostolic message is always Jesus Christ and the message and words which He conveyed to them (Acts 1:8). The apostolic literature demands the church's obedience (2 Thes 3:14).

Some New Testament books do not carry with them specific apostolic claims, e.g., Mark, Luke, and Hebrews. Mark and Luke, the authors of the second and third Gospels respectively, make no specific claims to apostleship and neither should they be accorded the rank of apostle. But their books were written under direct apostolic supervision and preserve the apostolic message (Mk 1:1; 16:7; Lk 1:1-4; Acts 28). Because these writings proceed out from direct apostolic authority, they share fully in inspiration since there is no apostolic authority without inspiration. The apostolic trademarks can be found within these Gospels themselves. Like other Biblical writings, they are not dependent for their authority upon other writings of the New Testament, but, of course, share a unity in message and in an origin from the one apostolic office. Their authority proceeds from the apostle who authorized their writing and under whose aegis they did their writing. Hebrews also claims to come out of the apostolic circle of authority attached to St. Paul (13:23). While the Epistle to the Hebrews may be anonymous to us as well as the early centuries of the church, it was *not* anonymous to its first recipients.

In the strictest sense of the words there were no anonymous or pseudonymous writings in the New Testament. The recipients of the New Testament writings knew the author. They did not randomly pick up 'Gospel' literature and preserve it either for the beauty of the language or the magnificence of theology. The words of Jesus have validity first of all because of the one who speaks them. The words of the New Testament have validity because of the ones who authorized them, i.e. the apostles. The office of the apostle is an undivided one; therefore its message must be one and without contradiction. A writing explicitly claiming to be apostolic, but differing from the already accepted apostolic corpus, was suspect.

There is strong evidence to suggest that pseudonymous apostolic writings, i.e., writings claiming falsely to come from the hands of the apostles, were at times accepted by various churches (2 Thess 2:2). When such writings were discovered to be pseudonymous they were immediately disregarded as authoritative in the church. If one is honestly of the opinion that certain writings were not, in fact, written or authorized directly by the apostles but were written by others, even though the intentions of the forgers were benign, that individual should be consistent in

stating that those writings are not inspired and hence have no authority in the church. This is not to question the literary value of such writings on their own merits. Outside of the apostolic sanction there is no authority supervised by the Spirit. The suggestion that the Pastoral Epistles, the Apocalypse, or other writing now in the New Testament are pseudonymous is intolerable. Consistency would require such writings to lose their authority in the church.

Canonicity may be defined as the church's recognition of the apostolic character of certain writings. In a more technical sense canonicity refers to the official recognition of the New Testament along with the process leading up to this official recognition. The declaration of the canonicity of a certain book in the New Testament is not in reality a *creatio ex nihilo* or *novum*, but canonicity actually involves official recognition of an already existing state of affairs. Thus from the time the New Testament writings were received by the churches established by the apostles, they were the source and norm of the church in her doctrine, preaching, teaching, baptism, piety, and instruction of the catechumens. These writings were also shared and were the center of the church's worship life. The impulse towards a New Testament corpus began during the time of the apostles with their knowledge and encouragement (2 Pt 3:15; 1 Thes 5:27; Col 4:16). Canonicity is a corporate act of the church's self-consciousness whereby the church examines an already existing authority. It would be better to avoid stating that the process of canonicity was either "inspired" or "apostolic." This would suggest that the canonical decisions regarding certain books happened through a direct working of the Holy Spirit or that the apostles gathered in council to make the decision.

The discussion of which books are homologoumena and antilegomena belongs under the category of canonicity. The church in its self-examination to determine which writings were authoritatively received from the apostles found that some books were universally recognized and others exercised authority in limited geographical areas of the church. Such books as 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, James, Jude, and Revelation were received in certain parts of the church and have been placed in the category of the antilegomena, i.e., those writings whose authority was not recognized universally in the church. The antilegomena were "spoken against" because they were not widely known and hence were recognized by only certain sections of the church.

The question of the antilegomena cannot be settled by the church today without being guilty of the conciliar theology of

the Romans and Anglicans. Many who have examined the antilegomena have not been impressed by their apostolic credentials. For those who have made this decision, these books cannot be regarded as inspired or authoritative and thus cannot be used for preaching or demonstrating Christian doctrine. At best they can serve as a witness of the early church to Christian doctrine. For those who are convinced of their apostolic origins, these books must be considered inspired and authoritative and may be used with the same type of regularity and conviction as the homologoumena are.

The concerns of contemporary New Testament scholarship with its doubts of apostolic authorship of certain writings and its suggestion of pseudonymous authorship does not properly belong to the homologoumenon and antilegomenon distinctions of the early church. Pseudonymous writings in the early church were rejected and were placed in neither category. The concept that the New Testament writings were products of communities, schools, or anonymous "prophets" is an intolerable position as it denies the unique apostolic office upon which Christ has chosen to establish His church.

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 the 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 an 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.

*This opinion was prepared by David P. Scaer in response to a question raised by a Lutheran pastor in Germany.*