

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

THE PROPER DISTINCTION BETWEEN ANTILEGOMENA AND HOMOLOGOMENA:  
ITS HISTORY AND APPLICATION

SUBMITTED TO PROF. PAUL O. WENDLAND  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE MASTER OF DIVINITY PROGRAM

BY  
BENJAMIN J. BIRNER  
FEBRUARY 22, 2019

## ABSTRACT

Orthodox Lutherans have varied in how they treat the antilegomena. Martin Chemnitz believed the antilegomena should not be used to establish doctrine. This was the practice in the Wisconsin Synod until not too long ago. Later theologians removed this distinction and this seems to be the practice of the Wisconsin Synod today. How do we deal with this apparent discrepancy in something as important to Christians as the Bible itself? This paper will review the authority of Scripture, the formation of the canon, and what Lutheran theologians have said about the distinction to show that there is no real theological issue underlying the ancient distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena. Nevertheless, Lutherans would be wise to maintain it for reasons of historical accuracy and apologetics.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	5
THE QUIET HISTORICAL PROCESS.....	9
Early Collections of Writings	9
The Need for a Canonical List	11
The Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction	12
The Canon is Set	16
Closing Thoughts on the Canon	19
LUTHER AND THE POST REFORMATION DISTINCTION .....	21
Martin Luther (1483-1546)	21
Martin Chemnitz (1522-1592)	24
Johann Gerhard (1582-1637)	31
Later Theologians	34
Possible Reasons for the Change	35
THE DISTINCTION IN THE WELS, LCMS, AND ELS .....	38
The Resurgence of Confessional Lutheranism 1800-1900	38
Renewed Emphasis in Historical Studies 1900-1940	41
The Distinction Continues 1940-1960	44
The Distinction Fades 1960-1990	46
The Distinction Disappears 1990-2015	49
500 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation	52
Trends	53
THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCTION .....	56

ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY.....	58
CONCLUSION.....	63
APPENDIX 1. DOGMATICS NOTES .....	66
APPENDIX 2. <i>VOLLSTAENDIGE ISAGOGIK DES NEUEN TESTAMENTS</i> .....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	70

## INTRODUCTION

What is the proper distinction between antilegomena and homologoumena? We know the historical definition of those words. The antilegomena are those books of the Bible that were spoken against by some—Hebrews, James, Jude, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, and Revelation. The homologoumena are those books that were accepted by all. Beyond this, the answers to this question in the WELS may be surprising. A younger pastor might wonder, “Why ask such a question? We make no distinction between the two because they are all canonical Scripture and the inspired Word of God.” An older pastor might say he maintains the historic Lutheran distinction between the antilegomena and homologoumena. “We ought not to establish our doctrine from the antilegomena without clear testimony from the homologoumena.” The older pastor may be disturbed to find this is no longer common practice and the younger pastor may be disturbed to learn the distinction was ever tolerated.

The distinction between homologoumena and antilegomena began during the formation of the canon. Lists of accepted books were published. Those books that were not agreed upon unanimously became known as antilegomena.

At the time of the Reformation, humanism reopened historical studies into the canon. The Old Testament apocryphal books were recognized as apocryphal and the New Testament antilegomena were questioned. Lutherans left the question of the canon open. The Reformed listed which books were canonical in their confessions.<sup>1</sup> In response to the teaching of *sola*

---

1. Cf. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1562,1571); The French Confession of Faith (1559); The Belgic Confession (1561); Westminster Confession (1647)

*scriptura*, the Council of Trent issued a decree that officially set the canon.<sup>2</sup> They based the decree on the authority of the church and thus placed the church over Scripture. In the face of this declaration, Chemnitz renewed the historic distinction between the antilegomena and homologoumena. The church cannot declare something to be God’s Word if it is not. Chemnitz wrote, “No dogma ought therefore to be drawn out of these books [the antilegomena] which does not have reliable and clear foundations and testimonies in other canonical books. Nothing controversial can be proved out of these books, unless there are other proofs and confirmations in the canonical books.”<sup>3</sup>

With Gerhard, this distinction began to wane. By Hollaz, the distinction between the books was gone. This seems to have been the norm among Lutherans until C.F.W. Walther.<sup>4</sup> Hoenecke did not distinguish the antilegomena while Koehler, Schaller and August Pieper did.<sup>5</sup> It seems the majority of our synod today holds no distinction and may never have heard of this distinction. How can two seemingly opposite opinions exist in our church body concerning something as precious to us as God’s Word? Are the antilegomena a source and norm of Christian doctrine or not? What then are the Scriptures of the confessions? To which Scriptures do we subscribe when we make our ordination vow?

---

2. Council of Trent, Session IV

3. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 1:189.

4. J.A.O. II. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” *Concordia J.* 36.2. (2010): 145.

5. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels and Henrich Vogel, vol. 1 (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 507.; J. P. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course,” in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis Jahn, vol. 1 of (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 191–220.; John Schaller, *The Book of Books: A Brief Introduction to the Bible*, Rev. ed. (Milwaukee, Wis: Northwestern Pub. House, 2002), 199.; August Pieper, “Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper” (Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1933), 6.

It is important to remember a few things about studies in the canon. First, there is no doctrine of the canon. Nowhere do the Bible or the confessions lay out for us what the books of the Bible are.<sup>6</sup> Second, recognizing the Scriptures is simultaneously an article of faith and a human endeavor in historical research. On the one hand, the church received the canon by a “quiet historical process.” On the other, the Scripture’s self-authenticating nature and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit convince us this is the inspired Word of God. Third, the chief concern for Lutherans writing about the distinction of the antilegomena is to uphold the authority of God’s Word and to assure God’s people they have the true Word of God.

We will first review the authority of Scripture followed by the historical development of the canon. Then we will examine what various Lutheran theologians have said about the distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena. It should be noted as of first importance: there is no theological difference between making a distinction or not. Those who uphold the distinction make sure nothing new is said in the antilegomena that is not established in the homologoumena. They freely use the antilegomena but understand them in light of the homologoumena, and often see the historical doubt expressed by some as a matter of whether or not the antilegomena were inspired. Those who do not uphold the distinction do so because there is nothing taught in the antilegomena that is not taught in the homologoumena and they see the historical doubt only as a question of the human author and not of inspiration. I intend to show that while there is no real theological issue underlying the ancient distinction between the

---

6. The closest they come to doing so is in the Epitome to the Formula of Concord, “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and of the New Testament.” (Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 486).

homologoumena and antilegomena, Lutherans would be wise to maintain it for reasons of historical accuracy and apologetics.

## THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

While the canonicity of the separate books of Scripture is primarily a historical investigation, it is inextricably connected to the canonicity of Scripture as a whole, the doctrine of inspiration, and the authority of Scripture. All orthodox Lutheran theologians agree about the authority of Scripture. The defense of Scripture's authority is the primary reason for discussions of the canon.

Scripture possesses divine authority for no other reason than it is God's word. Gerhard writes, "Because it is God-breathed, published, and spread by divine inspiration, therefore it is credible in itself, having credibility from itself."<sup>7</sup> This authority does not rest on the historical witness of the early church nor on the opinion or scholarly research of any man, but is absolute in and of itself because it is θεόπνευστος, or "God-breathed." Our dogmaticians call Scripture's self-attestation, i.e. its divine authority in and of itself because of inspiration, *autopistia*. We cannot equate the authority of Scripture with our recognition of Scripture. No inspired book loses its divine authority if it is not recognized as inspired. In the same way, no book that is not inspired gains divine authority by anyone claiming it to be divine. No man can add to or take away from what is God's Word.

The only criterion for a book to be Scriptural, i.e. authoritative and canonical, is that it be inspired. How do we recognize what is inspired, authoritative, and canonical? Gerhard gives three kinds of witnesses which testify to Scripture's authority: internal criteria of Scripture, external criteria, and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. These three witnesses can further

---

7. Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, Theological Commonplaces (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006), 68.

be divided into two categories: that which creates *fides divina* or Christian certainty and that which creates *fides humana* that is a human opinion i.e. natural certainty.

The internal and external criteria are based on reason and can only create a human conviction concerning the divinity of Scripture. Examples of the internal criteria of Scripture are the majesty of the subject it treats, the uniqueness of its speech, the harmony between the Old and New Testament, the fulfillment of prophecy, etc.<sup>8</sup> Examples of the external criteria are the testimony of martyrs, the swift spread of Christianity throughout the world, the high witness of the church, the original letters of the apostles and evangelists which were still extant in the early church, etc.

Only the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit can create certainty in the divine authority of Scripture. Perhaps the simplest definition of the Spirit's testimony is faith. The Holy Spirit works through Scripture. He creates faith in our hearts that we are redeemed children of God. With saving faith the Spirit convinces us of Scripture's authority.<sup>9</sup> The relation between the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit and *autopistia* is this: when the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts through the Scriptures, we trust what the Scriptures say about themselves. The Scriptures are never separate from the Holy Spirit. Professor Deutschlander provides a brilliant summary of inspiration, *autopistia*, and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of inspiration, like all the great teachings of God's Word, is an article of faith. The best advice we can give to one who needs to be persuaded of the inspiration of the Bible and the absolute truthfulness of its message is this: Read it! All of the arguments that make it sensible to accept the Scriptures, their message and their

---

8. Robert Preus notes that later theologians contend that the internal criteria are able to bring about faith and divine certainty because these criteria are nothing more than the divine form of Scripture itself. (David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, (Holmiae et Lipsiae, 1741), 125.; Osiander, *Collegium Theologicum Systematicum*, p 108. cited in Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 1:301).

9. When Peter was preaching to the crowds at Pentecost they were cut to the heart. That is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Other Scriptural examples of this testimony are 1 John 5:6, Romans 1:16, John 6:63, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 and 2:13.

authority, are useful; but, ultimately the Holy Spirit working through his Book convinces us that it is his Book. That's what we mean when we say that the Scriptures are self-authenticating.<sup>10</sup>

An objection to the above is that the internal criteria and testimony of the Holy Spirit is no different from the claims made by the Turks with the Quran or the Jews with the Kabbalah.<sup>11</sup>

To be clear, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is not a subjective impression about the Scriptures. It is always connected with the objective context of the Spirit-inspired words.

Stephen Valleskey cautions us about a subjective application of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to individual books as proof of their canonicity.<sup>12</sup> Most of our dogmaticians speak of the internal testimony of the Spirit only under the heading of the authority of Scripture and rely on history for investigations into the canonicity of individual books.<sup>13</sup> Gerhard provides further guidance in this regard, “We do not set forth only the testimony of the Holy Spirit, but to it we connect the internal criteria and the testimony of the Church. Whoever will take up jointly those three classes of arguments about the canonical authority of Scripture will not at all be able to go wrong.”<sup>14</sup> In particular, the early church bears witness to a time when the autographs of the apostles and even the apostles themselves were still living. Therefore their witness becomes historically helpful in distinguishing between the genuine apostolic works and works that are spurious and apocryphal.

---

10. Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 42–43.

11. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 82.

12. Stephen P Valleskey, “The New Testament Canon: Cur Alii Prae Aliis” (n.d.): 12.

13. Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Hay and Henry Jacobs, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), 87.

14. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 82–83.

Using these other criteria in connection to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit does not detract from Scriptures authority. Scripture created the church. Martin Luther writes, “It is not God’s Word just because the church speaks it; rather, the church comes into being because God’s Word is spoken. The church does not constitute the Word, but is constituted by the Word. A sure sign, by which we may know where the church is, is the Word of God.”<sup>15</sup> The witness of the church concerning that which created it does not at all harm the authority of Scripture in the same way that “the authority of the letters of kings and great men does not depend on the authority of the secretary who brings them and testifies of them.”<sup>16</sup>

A balance must remain between the historical process by which the church received the canon and the self-authenticity of Scripture through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The WELS, therefore, maintains in *This We Believe*,

Scripture being the Word of God, it carries its own authority in itself and does not receive it by the approbation of the Church. The Canon, that is, that collection of books which is the authority for the Church, is not the creation of the Church. Rather, the Canon has, by a quiet historical process which took place in the worship life of the Church, imposed itself upon the Church by virtue of its own authority.<sup>17</sup>

We will now discuss that “quiet historical process” by which man received God’s inspired word.

---

15. Martin Luther, “The Misuse of the Mass, 1521,” in *Luther’s Works: Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Abdel Wentz, trans. Frederick Ahrens, vol. 36 of, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 144–45.

16. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 71.

17. “This We Believe: Scripture,” WELS, n.d., <https://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/scripture/>.

## THE QUIET HISTORICAL PROCESS

[The New Testament student of the canon] must follow the separate books of the New Testament through a veritable maze of conflicting opinions, of quotation and misquotation, of allusion and innuendo, of charitable exposition and vitriolic digression, of pros and cons, on the part of the early Church Fathers; he must continually interrogate his witnesses as to the extent of their New Testament canon.<sup>18</sup>

This is how Professor Blume describes the study of the canon. We live in a time in which it seems as if modern scholarship questions the canonicity of every book in the Bible and jumps on every spurious writing as a “long-lost gospel.” Should we leave the study of the canon up to liberal scholars? Its history, while not always easy to follow, is not so ambiguous that we have no idea what the canon contains. All the same, since the authority of God’s Word is not dependent on even history’s witness, there is no need to oversimplify what we know and do not know about the canon’s historical development.

### Early Collections of Writings

The early church recognized the very authority of Christ in the apostles’ preaching and writing (Lk 10:16; 2 Th 2:15). Churches who received their writings copied them and circulated them to other churches who in turn did the same. The first steps toward the canon were early collections of these copies. Bruce writes, “In the first half of the second century, then, collections of Christian writings which were due one day to be given canonical status were already taking shape—notably the fourfold gospel and the corpus of Pauline letters.”<sup>19</sup>

---

18. Frederic E. Blume, “The Formation of the New Testament Canon,” *Wisconsin. Lutheran Quarterly*. 38.4 (1941): 272–92.

19. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 123–24.

Our earliest references to the gospels as written authorities come from Ignatius (35-108 AD), the *Didache*, and Papias (70-163 AD).<sup>20</sup> Tatian wrote his *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels, sometime after 165 AD, suggesting all four of the gospels were in use well before this date. It is evident the gospels were widely used and accepted from an early date.

Moving on to Paul's epistles, we do not know the first person or congregation that began collecting them, but Peter already makes reference to a collection of Paul's letters in 2 Peter 3:15,16. From the early second century on, Paul's letters circulated as one collection.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, the four gospels and the letters of Paul were joined together in one collection with Acts serving as a bridge between the two.

Not as much is known about the remaining books of the Bible in terms of the canon at this early point in history. The Bible itself gives us some clues into the care the early church took to reject anything that was not from an apostle (e.g. 2 Th 2:2; Rev 2:2).<sup>22</sup> As to the period immediately following the apostles, Professor Blume is hesitant to make any statement whatsoever concerning the remaining books of the canon.<sup>23</sup> However, he does say this about them:

When the disciples and hearers of the apostles begin writing (*i.e.*, just as soon as we have evidence for a New Testament canon at all) in language and in thought they reflect these remaining eight books of the New Testament as well, not in such a manner to be sure as would satisfy a scientist with a microscope or an engineer with a vernier caliper, but with sufficient clarity so that we today who know and love the Lord Jesus as they did may be

---

20. If Ignatius is referencing a written gospel in his letter to the church of Smyrna it is probably Matthew's. *Didache* 8.2 uses the form of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13, "as the Lord commanded in his gospel." Papias writes about Mark and Matthew. (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 128).

21. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 130.

22. David P. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way*, Impact Series (Milwaukee, Wis: Northwestern Pub. House, 1995), 32.

23. Blume, "The Formation of the New Testament Canon," 277.

sure that they knew and valued these other writings, by Peter, James, John, and Jude, and trusted them as the very Word of God.<sup>24</sup>

Professor Blume is clear, however, that every book being accepted somewhere is not the same as every book being accepted everywhere. Considering how much is left unsaid about the canon at this period, and that the concept of canon did not even exist as we know it today, it is perhaps somewhat of an overstatement to say, “When one considers the doubts or objections that have been expressed about the antilegomena, it becomes clear that the problem lies either in the person’s lack of understanding or lack of information.”<sup>25</sup> The church following this period carefully considered the information that was available to them.

### **The Need for a Canonical List**

Ironically, Marcion, a heretic whose theology led him to accept only ten of Paul’s epistles and an abridged version of Luke’s gospel, is an important figure in the formation of the New Testament canon. When the church rejected his ideas, Marcion broke from the church and published his own list of the canon.

There are two theories about what can be concluded from his published list. Either the church began to publish their own lists of the canon in response to false teachers like Marcion, or Marcion mutilated the already generally accepted canon of the Scriptures. Bruce, along with Theodor Zahn, believes the second theory is correct: “Marcion formed his Bible in declared opposition to the holy scriptures of the church from which he had separated; it was in opposition

---

24. Blume, “The Formation of the New Testament Canon,” 277–78.

25. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation*, 33.

to his criticism that the church in its turn first became rightly conscious of its heritage of apostolic writings.”<sup>26</sup>

The church recognized Marcionism as an innovation from the apostolic tradition and rule of faith which they had inherited. The church had to show their followers that Marcion’s teaching was wrong and so it became necessary to show their followers what the books of the Bible were. The Muratorian Fragment is possibly a response to Marcion. It is a list of which books were considered authoritative in the Roman Church at the time, probably around the end of the second century. Of our canonical books, the list seems to contain Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, all of Paul’s letters, Jude, 1 John, 2 John, and Revelation, but the list has some notable differences from the canon as we have it today. While Hebrews is missing, the list does include the Wisdom of Solomon and the Apocalypse of Peter. The Muratorian fragment explains that both Revelation and the Apocalypse of Peter are universally recognized.

### **The Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction**

We could, of course, say more about the early development of the canon and discuss the witness of many more church fathers. But for now, let us move quickly on to our main topic: the disputed and undisputed books of the New Testament.

Origen was the first to distinguish between the disputed and undisputed books. Origen himself left no list but Eusebius recorded Origen’s thoughts on the canon.<sup>27</sup> The undisputed books were the four gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. He

---

26. Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte Des Neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Erlangen: Junge & Sohn, 1888), I:586. by Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 144.

27. *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25. (Eusebius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Reprint ed. of the American ed. of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, .. orig. publ. in the United States by the Christian Literature Publ. Comp., 1890 [-1900]. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995), 272–73).

seemed to recognize all thirteen of Paul's letters though he did not list them. He regarded Hebrews as Pauline, but because some churches did not accept it he listed it as disputed. The disputed books were Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, and Jude.<sup>28</sup> Origen was the first writer to mention 2 Peter. He commented on all the books in our New Testament as Scripture but in addition, he added the *Didache*, the *Letter of Barnabas*, and *The Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>29</sup> A final category Origen mentioned was false books. He categorized them as false not only because of their false apostolic authorship but more importantly because of the false doctrine they taught. It should be noted that Origen never expressed any doubt whether these false books were to be excluded.

Eusebius was the greatest Christian historian after Luke. He was responsible for preserving much of what we know from the earliest church fathers. He divided writings into four categories, homologoumena, antilegomena, spurious, and those which are to be rejected altogether.

In the first place should be placed the holy tetrad of the gospels. These are followed by the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. After this should be reckoned the epistles of Paul. Next after them should be recognized the so-called first epistle of John and likewise that of Peter. In addition to these must be placed, should it seem right, John's Apocalypse. To the Books which are disputed, but recognized by the majority, belong the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, the second epistle of Peter and the so-called second and third epistles of John, whether these are by the evangelist or by someone else with the name. Among the books which are spurious should be reckoned the Acts of Paul, the so-called Shepherd, the Apocalypse of Peter and in addition to these the so-called epistle of Barnabas and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles, and moreover, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, should it seem right. For as I said, some reject it, while others count it among the acknowledged books."<sup>30</sup>

---

28. Both James and Jude are spoken of in Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* (10.17) and Origen comments on James also his *Commentary on John* (18.6) (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 193).

29. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 194.

30. *Hist. Eccl* 3.25. (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 198–99).

Eusebius uses spurious in a different sense than we do today. He does not mean they are all pseudepigraphic but merely uncanonical.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Eusebius says the spurious books could be listed with the disputed because they are useful to be read but he prefers them not to be included with the canon. Bruce explains, “The reason appears to be that, while in his day the ‘spurious’ books were not generally included in the canon, yet they were known and esteemed by many churchmen, if not canonical, they were at least orthodox.”<sup>32</sup> This could not be said of the clearly heretical and false books in the fourth category.

A few items to note. If we compare Eusebius’s list to Origen’s we notice not all lists of antilegomena are the same. Second, it appears from Eusebius’s attitude that the orthodox early church was very careful about excluding spurious works. Many modern authors act as if it were all the rage in the ancient world to write a book and sign someone else’s name to it, but this was not the case. Finally, the antilegomena are placed in a category above “spurious” works that Eusebius considered orthodox. To Eusebius then, the antilegomena are to be used for more than just edification.

Eusebius accepted Hebrews as one of Paul’s letters and canonical but he qualifies the book earlier in his writings, “Paul’s fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul.”<sup>33</sup>

Revelation is especially interesting in Eusebius’s list. One might expect it to be among the disputed books. Instead, Eusebius places it with both the accepted and spurious books, “if it

---

31. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 200.

32. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 200.

33. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.3. (Eusebius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 134–35).

seems right.” Bruce explains, “Eusebius’s apparent inconsistency arises from the fact that the apocalypse was acknowledged by those churches whose opinion he valued most, whereas he himself was unhappy about it—he could not reconcile himself to its millenarian teaching.”<sup>34</sup>

As for the remaining antilegomena, James and Jude were disputed because not many of the ancients mention them, though many churches read them publicly.<sup>35</sup> Eusebius only reports that 2 and 3 John were disputed and that they may or may not have been written, along with Revelation, by a different John than the gospel writer.<sup>36</sup> His opinion on 2 Peter is that it does not belong in the canon, but because it has appeared profitable to many it has been used with the other Scriptures.<sup>37</sup>

A short story from Eusebius’s life helps illustrate the attitude toward the canon in his day. Not long after 330, Emperor Constantine wrote to Eusebius asking for fifty Bibles. We are not told what books were included in these Bibles. Bruce, however, has no doubt they were same twenty-seven books in our copies of the New Testament, because the emperor would have quickly discovered if a book which he believed to belong to the Scriptures were left out.<sup>38</sup>

Constantine’s Bibles would seem to indicate that there was a generally accepted canon at this time, a canon which even went beyond personal opinions of theologians. Eusebius’s treatment of 2 Peter supports this. While he held it to be uncanonical, he nevertheless included it in the Canon with the antilegomena.

---

34. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 199.

35. *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23. (Eusebius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 128).

36. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.24. (Eusebius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 154).

37. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.3. (Eusebius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 133).

38. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 204.

### **The Canon is Set**

Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, is the first known person to list the twenty-seven books of the New Testament without making any distinction between the antilegomena and homologoumena. In his Easter letter of 367, he lists the generally accepted canon of the time. While much of the East did not accept Revelation until the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>39</sup> Athanasius seemed to have been convinced of its canonicity during his trips to the West.<sup>40</sup> He may not have made any distinction among the canonical books but he did distinguish the accepted books from what he calls the Apocrypha. Those were the books listed as spurious by Eusebius.

Some Greek manuscripts of the Council of Laodicea, which met in 363, contain a list of the New Testament books. If the list is genuine, then it includes the same books we have today except for Revelation. It is probable, however, that the list of books was added at a later date to explain canon 59 which forbids the reading of uncanonical books in church.<sup>41</sup> Latin versions of the council consistently do not contain the list of the New Testament books.

In the West, the canon as we know it today essentially became fixed with the widespread acceptance of the Vulgate. Jerome who played a role in the translation of the Vulgate, wrote a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola, in 394, in which he explained in detail the books of the Old Testament and then more briefly the books of the New. He lists the New Testament books as we know them today without distinction.

---

39. Because Montanists drew upon Revelation for their heresy the East was reluctant to accept the book. Today we recognize the heresy is a misinterpretation and may ask if this is sufficient cause to doubt the book.

40. David J Valleskey, "The Holy Scriptures—Source and Norm of All Doctrine" (n.d.): 8.

41. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 231.; "Synod of Laodicea" Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 14. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., (1900).

For Jerome, the canonicity of books was not dependent on known apostolic authorship.<sup>42</sup>

In 414, Jerome wrote a letter to Dardanus, prefect of Gaul, in which he talks about the authority of some of the antilegomena.

This must be said to our people, that the epistle which is entitled ‘To the Hebrews’ is accepted as the apostle Paul’s not only by the churches of the east but by all church writers in the Greek language of earlier times, although many judge it to be by Barnabas or by Clement. It is of no great moment who the author is, since it is the work of a churchman and receives recognition day by day in the churches’ public reading. If the custom of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical scriptures, neither, by the same liberty, do the churches of the Greeks accept John’s Apocalypse. Yet we accept them both, not following the custom of the present time but the precedent of early writers, who generally make free use of testimonies from both works. And this they do, not as they are wont on occasion to quote from apocryphal writings, as indeed they use examples from pagan literature, but treating them as canonical and ecclesiastical works.<sup>43</sup>

Jerome acknowledges questions of authorship concerning James and 2 Peter.<sup>44</sup> Like Eusebius, he believed 2 and 3 John to be written a different John than the gospel.<sup>45</sup> He writes that Jude is rejected by many “because in it he quotes from the apocryphal book of Enoch... Nevertheless by age and use it has gained authority and is reckoned among the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>46</sup>

In Jerome’s time, personal opinions about books of the canon had less effect on the contents of the canon than it did for earlier writers. Bruce writes,

Jerome gives the impression that on one or two of the canonical books he has private reservations, but by this time the canon was something ‘given’ and not to be modified because of the personal opinion of this or that churchman, however eminent. Similarly he gives the impression that he thought one or two of the ‘outside’ books worthy of

---

42. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 227.

43. Jerome, *Epistle* 129.3 quoted in Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 226-27.

44. *De viris illustribus* 1, 2 (Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, trans. Thomas Halton, vol. 100 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 5–7).

45. *De viris illustribus* 9, 18 (Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 19, 37).

46. *De viris illustribus* 4 (Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 11).

inclusion in the canon, but by this time they were decidedly outside, and it was not for him, or anyone else, to add them.<sup>47</sup>

Augustine also lists the same books of the New Testament we have today in *De doctrina christiana*. He does not make a specific distinction but he does have this to say about the canon:

He will keep to this method in canonical Scriptures, therefore preferring those which are accepted by all Catholic Churches to those which some do not accept. Among those which are not accepted by all, let him favor those which the greater number of more eminent churches accept, rather than those upheld by a minority of churches of less authority. If he discovers that some are accepted by the greater number of churches and others by the more important ones, although he cannot discover this easily, I believe the authority of the two cases should be considered equal.<sup>48</sup>

Augustine, like Jerome, did not base canonicity entirely on apostolic authorship but also on the authority of the consensus of the church catholic that recognized them as canonical whether to a greater or lesser degree.

The Council of Hippo in 393 was the first church council to limit the extent of the canon. It was repeated in the Council of Carthage in 397.

And further it was resolved that nothing should be read in church under the name of the divine scriptures except the canonical writings. The canonical writings, then, are these:... of the New Testament: The four books of the gospels, the one book of the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen epistles of the apostle Paul, the one to the Hebrews, by the same, two of the apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, John's Apocalypse—one book.... Let it be permitted, however, that the passions of the martyrs be read when their anniversaries are celebrated.<sup>49</sup>

Bruce summarizes the effects of Jerome and Augustine: "The prestige of Jerome and Augustine ensured that their canon prevailed in the west." In the East, the debate continued for another hundred years due to a reluctance to accept Revelation. According to Professor

---

47. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 228.

48. *De doctrina christiana* 2.8 (Augustine, "Christian Instruction," in *Writings of Saint Augustine*, trans. John Gavigan, vol. 4 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (New York: Cima Publishing CO., Inc., 1947), 69–70).

49. Council of Carthage, Canon 47 quoted in Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 233.

Gawrisch, “For all practical purposes the issue was settled around the year 500 when all of the antilegomena were included in the Peshitta, the Syriac Bible, by Philoxenus.”<sup>50</sup> The canon of the Scriptures was essentially set.

### **Closing Thoughts on the Canon**

Inclusion in early lists did not guarantee a book would one day be accepted as canonical and exclusion did not guarantee it would not be canonical. The number one criterion for canonicity for the early church was apostolic authority. A book had to either have been written by an apostle or have the approval of an apostle.

Bruce also lists a couple of auxiliary criteria. Closely related to apostolicity, the books had to be old enough to be from the apostolic age. When so many books were appearing that claimed to be of apostolic origin, canonical books had to agree in teaching with the rule of faith and those books which were undoubtedly from apostolic origin. Canonical books had to have a certain degree of catholicity and a long tradition of being used as Scripture. Even if a book had been known for generations, if it was not used as Scripture it would be difficult to classify it as Scripture.

We can see from the above criteria and from the writers we have examined that the early orthodox church carefully weighed all the evidence available to them. While Eusebius notes that James and Jude were not quoted often in the ancient church, the fact that they were widely used as Scripture pointed to an apostolic origin. Eusebius accepted Hebrews, in part due to the Roman tradition of Pauline authorship, but he did not disregard the concerns many churches had about the book. Jerome was not as concerned about the authorship of Hebrews because to this he added the weight of the ancient church’s use of authoritative quotations from Hebrews. Jerome

---

50. Wilbert R Gawrisch, “How the Canonicity of the Bible Was Established” (1973): 13.

acknowledges Jude's quotation of the Apocrypha but this is trumped by its "age and use."

Augustine carefully balanced both widespread acceptance and acceptance by churches with influential history to establish canonicity. The early church was anxious about the provenance of the epistles to confirm apostolic origin because they were anxious about having God's genuine Word. The church never created the canon, it acknowledged the canon that was already there.

This brief review shows that while, as far as human convictions can go, we have a high degree of certainty concerning our Bible, and while we can be confident in our use of the antilegomena, the historical development of the canon is not a simple, clear-cut matter. We cannot brush over the doubts some had in the early church. Nor can we simply brush aside the plain evidence of history. Even the early church was not confident enough to ignore the doubts that were extant in their own day. In the next section, we will see how some of the fathers of the Lutheran church have handled the antilegomena.

## LUTHER AND THE POST REFORMATION DISTINCTION

For a thousand years after the council of Carthage, the question of the canon was settled. With the rise of humanism, it was reopened.<sup>51</sup> Many scholars and theologians returned to studying the Scriptures in the original languages. The history of the canon came under close scrutiny. Doubts concerning the antilegomena were remembered. This section will look first at Luther's treatment of the New Testament Apocrypha followed by Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov, Quenstedt, and Hollaz to show the gradual shift in opinion regarding the antilegomena.

### **Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

In his German New Testament of 1522, Luther numbered 2 and 3 John and 2 Peter together with the twenty books of the homologoumena but he separated Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation and gave them no number. Luther's much-quoted treatment of these four books was not a unique attitude during his day.<sup>52</sup> He never excluded them from the New Testament, but he did not speak favorably of them in his prefaces.

He questioned Hebrews based on its authorship and his difficulty reconciling Hebrews 6, 10, and 12 with the rest of Scripture.<sup>53</sup> James, he called, "an epistle of straw."<sup>54</sup> Though he does add, "I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone

---

51. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 133.

52. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 134.

53. Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," in *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament I*, ed. Theodore Bachmann, trans. Charles Jacobs, vol. 35 of, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 394.

54. Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament," 362.

from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him.”<sup>55</sup> He questioned Jude because he felt it was a copy of 2 Peter, and because it contains a reference to the book of Enoch.<sup>56</sup> Finally, about Revelation, he wrote,

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... 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... Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.<sup>57</sup>

Luther removed his “epistle of straw” evaluation after 1546.<sup>58</sup> Yet Michael Reu contends he never changed his mind entirely.<sup>59</sup> As late as 1540, Luther still writes, “Only the Papists accept James on account of the righteousness by works, but my opinion is that it is not the writing of an apostle... Someday I will use James to fire my stove. We can adorn and excuse it, but only with great difficulties.”<sup>60</sup> And in 1542, “The Epistle of James we have thrown out of this school [Wittenberg] because it has no value. It has not one syllable about Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Because James lacked authority, Luther even refused to accept the use of a verse from it during a 1543 disputation.<sup>62</sup> Luther’s position on these books was later fiercely attacked by Trent.

---

55. Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” 397.

56. Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” 397–98.

57. Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” 398-399.

58. Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” 395–97.

59. M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1944), 42–43.

60. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, 43.

61. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, 43.

62. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, 44.

For Luther, canonicity was a combination of the historical witness of the church and “*was Christum treibet*.” “What teaches Christ,” was always the primary criterion of the two. He says in his preface to James, “Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.”<sup>63</sup> Christocentricity became a standard Lutheran criterion of apostolicity and continues to be today.

Some have argued Luther’s opinions about the antilegomena compromised his idea of inspiration.<sup>64</sup> No doubt Luther’s lifelong fight with the Papists on the article of justification by faith was part of the reason for his harsh views about a book like James. Luther, despite his strong opinions, never omitted the books he doubted from his translation.<sup>65</sup> He did not keep others from holding their own opinions about the aforementioned books. Klug writes, “Speculate aloud about their place in the canon, this he did. But never did he usurp for himself the right to do any excising from the canon. Problems there were, but in his typical style as a believing and trusting Bible critic, he felt they were the Holy Spirit’s problems, not his.”<sup>66</sup>

Examining Luther’s treatment of James specifically, Klug points out,

While he did state that, ‘that epistle of James gives us much trouble’ and that he was inclined at times to throw ‘Jimmy into the stove,’ the fact remains that he did not do so and primarily argued that whatever it contained had to be interpreted ‘according to the

---

63. Luther, “Prefaces to the New Testament,” 396.

64. Hermann Sasse, “Luther and the Inerrancy of the Scriptures,” 1951, 5, <https://e-resources.alc.edu.au/Documents/1951-Sasse-Luther-and-the-Inerrancy-of-the-Scriptures.pdf#search=hermann%20sasse>.

65. We cannot make too much of this because he never excluded the apocrypha from his Old Testament translation either.

66. E. F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 22.

sense of the rest of scripture’ for the simple reason that ‘the papists embrace it alone and leave out the rest.’<sup>67</sup>

He may have criticized James but he often used it and handled it the same way as the undisputed books. Klug writes,

Luther’s actual theological pursuit, for example, in the *Galatian Commentary*, will tell more of his attitude towards the *Epistle of James*, by his citations from it as authoritative, inspired Scripture, than a few isolated, critical remarks, however damaging they may seem. Whatever problems, therefore, Luther encountered with the canon and with the *antilegomena*—and they are problems that remain to this day for every Biblical scholar!—his general estimate of the books of the Bible remained always the same, namely, that “every word of Scripture,” as he stated in his *Galatians Commentary*, “comes from the revealed God.”<sup>68</sup>

The question of whether Luther regarded the antilegomena as authoritative is highly contested by scholars today. At times he seems to regard them as canonical. Other times he refuses to accept them. Suffice it to say, his attitude towards the antilegomena never affected his view of inspiration and he never intended his opinion to be binding on anyone else.

### **Martin Chemnitz (1522-1592)**

Luther died on February 18, 1546. On April 8, the Council of Trent listed the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament along with the Apocrypha and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and declared, “If anyone does not accept these books, whole, with all their parts, as they have customarily been read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the old Vulgate Latin edition, as sacred and canonical, and knowingly and intentionally despises the above-named traditions, let him be anathema.”<sup>69</sup> Chemnitz responds to the Council of Trent in his

---

67. Martin Luther, “The Licentiate Examination of Heinrich Schmedenstede, 1542,” in *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Lewis Spitz, trans. Lewis Spitz Sr., vol. 34 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 317. quoted by Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*, 22.

68. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*, 23.

69. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:168.

*Examination of the Council of Trent*, in which he lays out how he believes the antilegomena ought to be treated.

For our purposes, we begin with Chemnitz’s answer to this question: “whence the Scripture has canonical authority?” In answer to the papist’s claims that Scripture gets its authority from the church, Chemnitz explains,

The canonical Scripture has its eminent authority chiefly from this, that it is divinely inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, that is, that it was not brought forth by the will of men but that the men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, both spoke and wrote, 2 Peter 1:21. But in order that this whole necessary matter might be firmly established against all impostures, God chose certain definite persons that they should write and adorned them with many miracles and divine testimonies that there should be no doubt that what they wrote was divinely inspired... The Scripture therefore has its canonical authority chiefly from the Holy Spirit, by whose impulse and inspiration it was brought forth; thereafter from the writers to whom God gave sure and special testimonies of the truth. After this it has authority from the primitive church as from a witness at whose time these writings were published and approved.<sup>70</sup>

Chemnitz then divides the church into three categories: the primitive church which received the apostolic writings first hand, the church which followed immediately after them and received the primitive church’s testimony, and the present church. He concludes that if the later church can show the witness of those who received and knew the witness of the very first church, then we believe what the later church has to say about the canon. But if the later church cannot provide reliable documents from the testimony of the primitive church, then it has no power to decide anything about the sacred writings.<sup>71</sup>

After considering the early church’s testimony he asks, “Can the present church make those writings concerning which the most ancient church had doubts because of the contradiction of some, because the witness of the primitive church concerning them did not agree—can the

---

70. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:176.

71. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:177.

present church, I ask, make those writings canonical, catholic, and equal to those which are of the first class?"<sup>72</sup> Chemnitz answers himself. Where the men who lived not long after the earliest church cannot produce reliable testimony, human decrees of today are of no avail.<sup>73</sup>

After establishing that the church does not have authority over the Canon, he asks, "which books are in the canon and which are not in the canon?" His focus is not on false writings but specifically the books found in the Vulgate, the Apocrypha, and antilegomena. The reason for not including the Apocrypha is easy: they do not have adequate testimony and they come from a period after the time of the prophets. For the books of the New Testament, Chemnitz gives a brief summary of the ancient church's testimony about each of the antilegomena.

For Chemnitz, the whole dispute revolves around this, "Whether it is certain and beyond doubt that those books on which this controversy turns were either published or approved as divinely inspired Scripture by prophets and apostles who possessed this authority from God."<sup>74</sup> His answer is no. But this does not mean he wants the antilegomena to be simply rejected and condemned. Why bring up the dispute then? "That the rule of faith or of sound doctrine in the church may be sure."<sup>75</sup> The ancient church judged doctrine by the canonical books of Scripture alone. The early church wanted these books read in church but not used as an authority for the confirmation of any doctrine in controversy. Therefore Chemnitz resolves,

No dogma ought therefore to be drawn out of these books which does not have reliable and clear foundations and testimonies in other canonical books. Nothing controversial can be proved out of these books, unless there are other proofs and confirmations in the canonical books. But what is said in these books must be explained and understood

---

72. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:180.

73. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:181.

74. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:188.

75. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:189.

according to the analogy of those things which are clearly taught in the canonical books. There is no doubt that this is the opinion of antiquity.<sup>76</sup>

Chemnitz writes the most and the strongest about the distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena. He begins his argument with the source of Scripture's authority—itsself. He also follows Luther in saying all Scripture preaches Christ yet does not go as far as Luther concerning, “*was Christum treibet.*” Nor does Chemnitz speak as harshly about the antilegomena as Luther. Not everyone understands Chemnitz's distinction the same way. J.A.O. Preus says Chemnitz does not rely on the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*.<sup>77</sup> We could say he never mentions it in the section on the antilegomena and that he perhaps relies too heavily on the testimony of the ancient church when he insists, “For this whole matter depends on sure, firm, and harmonious testimonies of the first and ancient church.”<sup>78</sup> The testimony of the ancient church can only produce a *fides humana*. Yet it is important to remember the atmosphere in which Chemnitz was writing. Hoenecke says the reason Chemnitz spoke this way was so that Trent might not have a leg to stand on concerning the Apocrypha.<sup>79</sup> Chemnitz emphasizes history but he does not entirely ignore the other criteria. J.A.O. Preus summarizes Chemnitz's overall criteria for the canon as, “The inspiration of the books, apostolic authorship or apostolic commendation, and the witness of the early church.”<sup>80</sup>

Chemnitz speaks strongly about the distinction and even calls the antilegomena apocryphal at one point, yet it is important to look at how he uses the antilegomena in order to

---

76. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:189.

77. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 139.

78. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:187.

79. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 1:506.

80. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 139.

understand exactly how he means for them to be treated.<sup>81</sup> Almost ironically, Chemnitz quotes 2 Peter in support of inspiration as the chief criteria for canonicity. In both his *Loci Theologici* and his *Examination of the Council of Trent* as well as in the *Formula of Concord*, Chemnitz quotes antilegomena to establish doctrinal points.<sup>82</sup> He argues against the papist use of James 5 for extreme unction and Hebrews for purgatory not by rejecting them as antilegomena but by exegesis of those passages.<sup>83</sup> Chemnitz relies on only Hebrews 5, 7, 9, and 10 to argue against the Roman mass.<sup>84</sup> Although J.A.O. Preus suggests he uses the epistle to “prove a point which is not nearly so clearly or easily proved elsewhere in scripture,” one could argue Chemnitz is merely using Hebrews to dispute the Papacy’s use of Hebrews.<sup>85</sup> Regardless, Chemnitz goes on to call Hebrews the Word of God.<sup>86</sup>

Klug, contrary to J.A.O. Preus, suggests that the concept of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit was in Chemnitz’s writing. He points to *Section IV* of Chemnitz’s *Examination* where Chemnitz uses the antilegomena to support inspiration. He seeks to show, “testimony must come out of the Scriptures themselves, through which the Spirit bears record not only that we are the sons of God but that these things are true—specifically that these writings of the

---

81. Luther Poellot explains in a note that while Chemnitz calls these books apocryphal we would call them antilegomena. (Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 43–45).

82. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 139.

83. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 146.

84. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 2*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2:466–67.

85. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 146.

86. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 2*, 2:468.

apostles and evangelists are the very Word of God.”<sup>87</sup> The inspiration of Scripture is known only from the Spirit’s testimony given through the Scriptures themselves. This is nothing else than *autopistia* and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.

In *Section IV*, Chemnitz cites Hebrews as authoritative saying, “Let us add here also an observation from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Regarding the author we shall not now dispute. He correctly defines the doctrine of the Gospel, which was in the beginning proclaimed by the Lord and was afterward preached and confirmed by the apostles.”<sup>88</sup> He speaks about both 1 and 2 Peter as though they were written by Peter and quotes from both of them equally. For example, “In the Second Epistle [2 Peter] he [Peter] sets forth in more words and more clearly the reason for writing.”<sup>89</sup> Chemnitz likewise quotes Revelation, Jude, and 2 and 3 John.<sup>90</sup> The only antilegomena left out is James. Chemnitz does make a distinction between the books of greater importance, but Klug surmises, “No part of inspired Holy Writ is to be discounted, and so Chemnitz may be found turning up every corner. He feels every effort, even the smallest, is important, if the Scripture’s inspiration, authority, and sufficiency are to be fittingly presented.”<sup>91</sup>

One may object by saying that merely quoting someone does not mean it is being equated to Scripture, even when quoted in support of doctrine. Chemnitz makes frequent use of church fathers and Apocrypha in his writings as well. We would not say he holds them at the same level as Scripture. Yet beyond doubt, in several places, he assumes the authors of antilegomena are

---

87. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*, 172.

88. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:134.

89. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:141.

90. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:146–47.

91. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*, 172.

apostolic, uses them without the support of homologoumena, and even calls passages from them the Word of God. In his citations of the antilegomena, he is clearly citing them as Scripture.

Chemnitz's position is that the canon must be left open.<sup>92</sup> The antilegomena cannot be declared to be undisputedly canonical, yet they are not considered in the same category as the rejected books and Apocrypha.<sup>93</sup> Human beings cannot declare them to be inspired if they are not. At the same time, Chemnitz does not raise personal doubts about their inspiration, only historical doubts. The antilegomena cannot be used to establish doctrine not set forth in the homologoumena, yet Chemnitz does not hesitate to use the antilegomena in much the same way as he does the homologoumena. It seems the best phrase to summarize Chemnitz's own view of the antilegomena is this, "What is said in these books must be explained and understood according to the analogy of those things which are clearly taught in the canonical books."<sup>94</sup> Much the same way we use the clear passages of Scripture to interpret the unclear passages, we use the certain books to interpret the uncertain. Chemnitz has no problem using the antilegomena because he finds nothing in them contrary to the homologoumena. Klug summarizes the view of both Luther and Chemnitz this way: "Both Chemnitz and Luther used the antilegomena, citing freely from these writings, simply because they were in perfect harmony with the

---

92. There seems to be two ideas about Chemnitz. The first is that he doubts canonicity of the antilegomena. The second is that he himself does not doubt their canonicity but because of the historical doubt, he will not use them for doctrine so that the rule of faith may be sure for everyone.

93. While Chemnitz does call the antilegomena apocryphal, it is apparent from the *Examination* he does not put them on the same level as the Old Testament apocryphal books. (Chemnitz, *Ministry Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, 45).

94. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:180.

homologoumena, and the church, thus, could in no way be faulted for basing its teaching on writings which could be challenged in any way.”<sup>95</sup>

Although many theologians from this period held a similar view toward the antilegomena as Chemnitz, the distinction soon began to soften.<sup>96</sup> Leonard Hutter, Conrad Dietrich, and Balthasar Mentzer, who write not long after Chemnitz, lessen the distinction and begin to give antilegomena scriptural authority in matters of doctrine. Johann Gerhard, however, in his 1622 *Loci Theologici*, is often the one credited with producing the change in attitude among Lutheran theologians due to both the volume and influence of his writing.<sup>97</sup>

### **Johann Gerhard (1582-1637)**

We have already seen how Gerhard treats the authority of Scripture. Scripture has authority only from itself because it is the Holy Spirit’s book. For us to recognize it as inspired, however, we include the testimony of the ancient church.<sup>98</sup>

So when Gerhard begins his chapter on the New Testament books, he asks, “Among the books contained in the biblical codex of the New Testament, must we also determine the sort of difference that some be called canonical and some apocryphal?”<sup>99</sup> Gerhard notes there appears to be disagreement about this question among Lutherans. The papists had seized this inconsistency

---

95. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*, 176.

96. For a fuller summary of theologians from Chemnitz to Hollaz see J.A.O. Preus’s article *The New Testament Canon in the Lutheran Dogmatics* in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Spring 2010.

97. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 141.

98. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 67–84.

99. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 225.

and attacked the Lutherans with it. Gerhard, however, sees no problem and says, “But with the help of a distinction, we can reconcile this, as we shall see a little later.”<sup>100</sup>

Gerhard demonstrates the various ways his question has been answered. He quotes Chemnitz, Hunnius, Ossiander, and Haffenreffer who clearly distinguish between the homologoumena and antilegomena, and Dr. Mentzer and Dr. John Shroeder who both consider the antilegomena equal in authority to the homologoumena.<sup>101</sup> Gerhard concludes,

*First*, we certainly must establish some distinction among the books that are contained in the biblical codex of the New Testament. After all, one cannot deny that some people in the primitive church spoke against certain of these books... *Second*, those books against which some speak are called “apocryphal” unsuitably... first, because in the primitive church there was doubt not so much about their canonical authority as about the secondary author of those books... *Second*, “apocryphal” is an unsuitable word because the authorship of those books was doubtful not to all churches and theologians but only to some... *Third*, the fathers who acknowledge the apocryphal books of the Old Testament exclude no New Testament book from the canon. *Third*, for the sake of instruction, therefore, we can draw a distinction between the canonical books of the New Testament of the first rank [protocanonical] and of the second rank [deuterocanonical]. Canonical books of the first rank are those about whose authors or authority there has never been any doubt in the church but have always been considered canonical and divine by unanimous agreement... Canonical books of the second rank are those about whose authorship some in the church had doubts at some time.<sup>102</sup>

Gerhard did not consider any New Testament books uncanonical, yet he did rank them.

From here Gerhard examines the history of each book of the New Testament—first the homologoumena and then the antilegomena. In Gerhard’s judgment of their history, while the antilegomena were spoken against, they are all apostolic and canonical.

Chemnitz and Gerhard understood the historical development of the canon differently. Chemnitz emphasizes that some doubted whether the antilegomena were apostolic and so their

---

100. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 225.

101. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 226.

102. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 228.

inspiration and therefore canonical authority was doubted.<sup>103</sup> Gerhard asserts the ancient's doubt was primarily the human author and not the book's inspiration.<sup>104</sup> If what Gerhard claims is true, that inspiration was never doubted, there would have been no reason for doubt because inspiration is the only criteria for canonicity.<sup>105</sup> Apostolicity was primarily how the early church determined a book was inspired. If their author was doubted it usually meant their inspiration was doubted. Perhaps what Gerhard is saying is that while authorship was doubted, most recognized the teaching in these books as orthodox and in line with apostolic tradition. Gerhard also emphasizes authorship was only doubted by "some in the church at some time." Because they were orthodox, they were widely used. Orthodoxy and catholicity were both criteria that supported apostolicity even though authorship was doubted.

The difference ends up being this: Chemnitz, regardless of his personal opinion, does not call the antilegomena canonical, but uses them as if they were, because there is no doctrine taught in them not found in the homologoumena. Gerhard calls them canonical because the early church recognized them as orthodox but ranks them lower than the homologoumena. The doctrinal outcome is the same. The fact that Gerhard can quote all his predecessors with approval shows there is nothing remotely doctrinally unsound in their opinions to disapprove of. Gerhard softens the distinction but he does not remove it. The change between him and his predecessors then, while historically significant, is doctrinally insignificant. It results from a difference of emphasis concerning the historical doubt of the antilegomena.

---

103. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, 1:187.

104. Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, 228.

105. Gerhard's claim may be true of Jerome but not of those who questioned the canonicity of antilegomena books to the point of excluding them.

Those who followed Gerhard softened the distinction even further. We will now look at Johann Quenstedt and Abraham Calov for their great influence, and at David Hollaz because many consider him to mark the end of the age of orthodoxy.

### Later Theologians

Johannes Quenstedt required apostolic authority for canonicity, yet it was unimportant for him to know exactly who the author was. “For even if Philip or Bartholomew had written that gospel which is read under the name of Matthew, it does not affect saving faith.”<sup>106</sup> He echoes Gerhard with respect to the distinction and the doubt held by the early church.<sup>107</sup>

Abraham Calov, the son-in-law of Quenstedt, enumerates his criteria for canonicity in this manner,

1) With reference to the *principium* it is required that a canonical book be inspired by the Holy Spirit; 2) with reference to the instrumental cause, that it be written by a prophet or an apostle; 3) with reference to the material, that it contain divine mysteries and not fables; 4) with reference to its internal form, that it be God-breathed; 5) with reference to its external form, that it be in Hebrew in the Old Testament and in Greek in the New; 6) with reference to its limits, that it possess the testimony of the church, either the Jewish or early Christian. Moreover you will note that these requisites are to be taken collectively.<sup>108</sup>

J.A.O. Preus notes two important aspects of Calov’s list. First, he does not stress Luther’s emphasis on Christological content, although in another place Calov does mention Christocentricity as a criterion.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, he does list divine mysteries as a requisite,

---

106. Johannes Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-polemica sive Systema Theologicum*, (Lipsiae, 1702), I.235. quoted in Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 143.

107. Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-polemica sive System Theologicum*, I.96. quoted in Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 143.

108. Abraham Calov, *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*, (Lunebergi, 1684), 29. quoted in Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 144.

109. David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acromaticum*, (Holmiae et Lipsiae, 1741), 131. quoted in Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 144.; Abraham Calov, *Criticus Sacer vel Commentarii*

which, to a Lutheran, implies the gospel. Second, he states that these criteria must be taken collectively.<sup>110</sup>

By the time of David Hollaz (1648-1713), pietism had begun to take hold in Germany. During this time the study of the Canon went into decline.<sup>111</sup> Hollaz writes, “Since at the present time all evangelical teachers assign divine authority to these deuterocanonical books, there seems to be no occasion any longer for that distinction.”<sup>112</sup>

Hollaz appears to be saying that during the time of Luther and Chemnitz some had doubts about the antilegomena, and because of the lack of agreement, it was then necessary to make a distinction. Since in his day there is no disagreement, there is no longer a reason to make a distinction. It appears Hollaz’s position ignores the historical distinction and almost adds consensus of the modern church as a reason for canonicity. However, this may be too harsh a criticism. He never declares the deuterocanonical books to be indisputably canonical on the basis of modern judgment. He merely sees no practical need for a distinction. We might characterize this as our current attitude in the WELS.

### **Possible Reasons for the Change**

Why did this distinction fade? J.A.O. Preus suggests several reasons. First, the antilegomena were considered valuable and even Luther and Chemnitz used them constantly. Second, at the

---

*Apodictico-elenchtici super Augustanam Convessionem Evangelicarum Novissimi Temporis Symbolu vere Augustum Prothuron*, (Leipzig, 1646), I, 234. quoted in Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:306.

110. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 144.

111. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 144.

112. David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acromaticum*, (Holmiae et Lipsiae, 1741), 131. quoted in Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 144.

end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the church favored the inclusion of these books, a tradition hard to break.

Third, attacks from the papists on Luther's position were embarrassing to the Lutherans.<sup>113</sup>

Robert Preus suggests,

The reason for the uncritical change of position we find in the later dogmaticians is undoubtedly due to their fear of allowing a historical judgment concerning the authenticity of authorship of a book to affect saving faith. To them the canon must remain above all historical and ecclesiastical judgment. The testimony of history in respect to the authorship of an anonymous book such as Matthew cannot be made a matter of doctrine. Thus we observe that in its polemic against Rome, in its attempt to maintain that the canon was created by the Spirit of God and not the church, Lutheran theology grossly oversimplifies the problem of the New Testament canon and fails to be faithful to the historical data.<sup>114</sup>

Philipi has a similar opinion to Robert Preus about the later theologians. "Philipi faults the later men for emphasizing the authorship of the Holy Spirit, even of the antilegomena, so strongly that the distinction between the two classes of books made in the early church and revived by Luther and Chemnitz was largely forgotten."<sup>115</sup> August Pieper warns that it was the later loss of the distinction that opened up not only the deuterocanonical but also the protocanonical books to attacks from rationalists.<sup>116</sup>

There is another extreme to worry about. It may be true, on the one hand, that the later dogmaticians overemphasized the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. But on the other hand, the earlier theologians may have emphasized history too much. R. Preus asks,

Why the great emphasis on the criteria of Scripture that we find in the earlier dogmaticians? At best these criteria can produce only an intellectual assent (*fides humana*) to the divine origin and authority of Scripture. The emphasis no doubt springs from an attempt to make the authority of Scripture reasonable and knowable. Such a

---

113. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 145–46.

114. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:305–6.

115. Philipi, F. A., *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, (Stuttgart, 1854), vol.1, 108. cited in Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 147.

116. See also appendix.2 (Pieper, "Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper," 6).

procedure is highly questionable, for it invariably tends to minimize the importance of the witness of the Holy Spirit and the ἀποπιστία of Scripture which alone can work a faith in Scripture's authority. Here we have one of the most unfortunate concessions to rationalism in the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>117</sup>

We may look back and critique Lutheran theologians for overemphasizing either the historical or faith side of the canon, but both aspects are at least consistently mentioned.

Chemnitz, who speaks strongest on history, asserts Scripture's authority is found in itself alone and the only true criteria for canonicity is inspiration. Calov lists several criteria beyond the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. No orthodox Lutheran dogmatician ever attacks another on these points. J.A.O. Preus concludes, "It appears that the consensus among them was that while some emphasize one aspect and some another, yet all spoke the truth."<sup>118</sup>

Regardless of the reason for the change in emphasis, it appears that Pietism and Rationalism are the reasons the change stuck. J.A.O. Preus had noted Pietism resulted in a lack of study in the canon. August Pieper writes that only with the rise of Pietism does the distinction disappear.<sup>119</sup> According to August Tholuck and Philip Schaff, Lutheran theologians developed a tendency to use proof passages for previously conceived dogmas.<sup>120</sup> Inspiration had to be defended against the attacks of Rationalism. The history of the canon's development was mostly left to historical critics. The distinction between the antilegomena and homologoumena was not seriously considered again until C.F.W. Walther.<sup>121</sup>

---

117. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:303.

118. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 147.

119. "Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper," 6.

120. August Tholuck, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. James Hamilton and Jonathan Edwards Ryland (Harvard University: T. Clark, 1842), 1:56–57.; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: The German Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1910), VII:40.

121. Preus, "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics," 143.

## THE DISTINCTION IN THE WELS, LCMS, AND ELS

### **The Resurgence of Confessional Lutheranism 1800-1900**

J. P. Koehler, in *The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present*, traces the attitudes and emphases among Lutherans from the end of the age of orthodoxy up until the time of Walther.<sup>122</sup> The orthodox dogmatics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gave way to Pietism. Pietism emphasized exegesis and history, “which the older dogmaticians naturally had neglected.” Yet Pietism did not live up to its promise, and so the fruits of their exegesis and history deteriorated even before Rationalism appeared. Rationalism put the final nail in the coffin. Winer and Gesenius dominated exegesis for the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Confessionally conscious Lutherans considered themselves restricted to historical dogmatical work. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new confessional movement began, but its starting point was the writings of the fathers. Rather than setting “exegetical work in motion,” it emphasized the dogmatics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of time, Walther became acquainted with Luther and this confessional movement.<sup>123</sup>

Being familiar with Luther’s attitude toward the antilegomena, Walther wrote an article which appeared in *Lehre und Wehre*, July 1856 titled *Is He to Be Declared a Heretic or Dangerous False Teacher Who Does Not Hold and Declare as Canonical All the Books Found*

---

122. C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887)

123. J. P. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis Jahn, vol. 3 of (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, n.d.), 430–32.

*in the Scroll of the New Testament?* In it, he responded to comments made about Pastor Roebbelen who had, along with Luther, rejected Revelation as canonical.

Walther disagrees with Luther and Chemnitz regarding the canonicity of the antilegomena, but says this is no black mark on the Lutheran church. Instead, he asserts, it shows how much care was taken by men of our church regarding what the rule of faith should be. He speaks harshly about anyone who would formally declare antilegomena to be undisputed Scripture.

The summary decrees of papists and Reformed that every Christian on the pain of losing his salvation must accept also all antilegomena as canonical is not only no testimony to reverence for the Word of God in these denominations but is in fact a demonstration of how easy it is for those who want to see Scripture interpreted either in a blind collier's faith according to the church's (i.e., the pope's) whim or according to the principles of reason to receive something into the canon.<sup>124</sup>

Walther quotes Chemnitz at length to show that doubts about the canonicity of disputed books were held by men whose Lutheran orthodoxy no one would question. His conclusion is that we ought not to immediately suspect anyone who has doubts about the antilegomena of opposing the Word of God when they cling to all other articles of faith and the universally accepted books. Rather, he hopes that,

If there is no unchristian procedure in the discussion of this question, and if the poor people are not confused by dishonest treatment of this issue through partisan exploitation of a thesis which the people will have great difficulty understanding—which is very easy in this case—then a treatment of this question can only serve to arouse Christians to serious searching and be used as an opportunity to establish them more deeply and more firmly in their faith.”<sup>125</sup>

---

124. C. F. W. Walther, “Is It Heretical to Question the Canonicity of Some New Testament Writings?,” in *Editorials From “Lehre Und Wehre,”* ed. August Suelflow, trans. Herbert Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 24.

125. Walther, “Is It Heretical to Question the Canonicity of Some New Testament Writings?,” 26.

Walther is against doubting any of the antilegomena but does distinguish them in this way: one may have doubts about them and still be considered an orthodox Lutheran. The same is not true of the homologoumena.

Walther is a giant in the history of the Lutheran church. His counterpart in the WELS, Adolf Hoenecke, while not as influential, was arguably just as intellectually gifted. That being said, his treatment of the antilegomena is somewhat lacking. He says that Chemnitz spoke so strongly so the papists would have no argument for the Apocrypha, while Mentzer, Gerhard, Calov, Quenstedt, and Baier made the distinction for the sake of academic discussion. Hollaz finally dropped the distinction because there was no longer any doubt. Hoenecke finishes, “And that is today the position of the Lutheran church in general.”<sup>126</sup>

Both Walther and Hoenecke put more emphasis on a historical presentation of the dogmaticians than exegesis and history. It seems that the greater one’s emphasis on history the more likely one is to make a distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena. Hoenecke comes to a different conclusion than Walther perhaps because Hoenecke did not have to deal with a practical issue regarding the antilegomena in the same way Walther did.

Following Walther and Hoenecke, historical studies increased even more. According to Koehler, dogmatics ruled supreme in the Lutheran church in America from 1840-1880. It was only after the election controversy in the Synodical Conference that historical studies were truly set in motion again. Hoenecke is the one who called attention to the need for careful exegesis in doctrinal controversies. Dr. George Stöckhardt, who taught at Concordia Seminary, put it into

---

126. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 1:506–7.

practice. Soon, “everywhere a strength of originality showed itself which was ready to investigate underlying causes and reach independent conclusions.”<sup>127</sup>

This does not mean history and exegesis up to this point were unimportant. It would be safer to say that there was a shift in emphasis. When speaking about the difference between Walther and Stöckhardt, August Pieper writes, “Walther produced chiefly the Lutheran doctrine and then proved it from the Scriptures; Stöckhardt produced the scriptural doctrine and then showed that it was also the doctrine of Luther and the Confessions.”<sup>128</sup> Neither Koehler nor A. Pieper fault the men who put a heavier emphasis on dogmatics. Koehler even hypothesizes dogmatics was a necessary emphasis in early American Lutheranism.<sup>129</sup>

No doubt it was a combination of Walther’s influence and the renewed emphasis on history and exegesis that led to greater prominence being given to the antilegomena distinction by Franz Pieper and by the Wauwatosa theologians.

### **Renewed Emphasis in Historical Studies 1900-1940**

Moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that the homologoumena/antilegomena distinction is far more pervasive. Franz Pieper covers the distinction in his influential *Christian Dogmatics*, first published in German from 1917-1924. While many suggest Gerhard’s ranking of proto and deutero-canonical books did away with the distinction, F. Pieper’s opinion is that this ranking is essentially making a distinction. He addresses several concerns about the antilegomena. To those concerned that the very existence of antilegomena means we cannot know what the *norma* of

---

127. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” 433–34.

128. August Pieper, “Stöckhardt’s Significance in the Lutheran Church of America,” in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis Jahn, vol. 3 of, n.d., 422–23.

129. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” 434.

Christian doctrine is, he responds, “When Christ asks us (John 8:31-32; 17:20; and Eph. 2:20) to continue in His and His Apostles’ doctrine, He presupposes the continued existence and possession of this doctrinal basis.”<sup>130</sup> To those concerned that if someone were to regard the antilegomena as canonical they would obtain new and different doctrine, he responds that there is no doctrine found in the antilegomena which is different or which goes beyond the homologoumena.<sup>131</sup> He goes so far as to say the book of Matthew contains the revelation of every doctrine in the Book of Concord. But, he goes on, we are to thank God for the fuller exposition of the saving doctrine which he gives us in the remaining books of the New Testament.<sup>132</sup>

F. Pieper shows a healthy balance between faith and historical accuracy. He can make a hermeneutical and historical distinction without making a big deal about the antilegomena. If someone were to include the antilegomena in the canon, he knows that no new doctrines are added and God promises we have everything we need for salvation.

Both Stöckhardt and Pieper taught at Concordia, St. Louis. There they influenced August Pieper, J.P. Koehler, and John Schaller. These three men, in turn, became highly influential as professors in the Wisconsin Synod. Their theology was marked by an emphasis on the historical studies and exegesis of the Scriptures. These are the so-called “Wauwatosa theologians.”

The first of the three we will look at is August Pieper, Franz Pieper’s little brother. His students recorded his evaluation of the distinction in *Vollstaendige Isagogik des Neuen Testaments*.<sup>133</sup> A. Pieper says that while the homologoumena are undoubtedly apostolic

---

130. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I:336–37.

131. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I:337.

132. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I:337.

133. A collection of his manuscripts and lectures printed in 1933 and 1937. See appendix.2.

according to origin and spirit, the certainty is missing from the antilegomena. The Lutheran church “wisely failed to determine formally the extent of the New Testament canon.”<sup>134</sup> The faithful Lutheran church of America rightly emphasizes the difference, if not from the pulpit, then in its theology. A. Pieper holds the antilegomena in the same regard as Chemnitz.

The second man, J.P. Koehler, treats the subject of antilegomena in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course*. The crux of his hermeneutic is this, “We bring to Scripture through faith in the forgiveness of sins the assurance given us by the Holy Spirit that everything which Scripture says about itself is true.”<sup>135</sup>

Determining the canon, however, is a matter of human history. He writes, “As for the New Testament canon, we must bear in mind not only the distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena, but also other questions about the differences in the canon accepted by the Church, questions which have not as yet been answered.”<sup>136</sup> He follows this statement with three rules,

1. The exegete must be aware of these questions in order to be on his guard against a legalistic manner of conducting his investigation.
2. The strength of his position toward the individual books of Scripture in their connection with the canon does not, however, rest upon intellectual decisions, but in his faith in the forgiveness of sins, which he had gained from the entire volume.
3. He will not allow a statement of the homologoumena to be restricted by a statement taken from the antilegomena.<sup>137</sup>

Koehler maintains the historical distinction while at the same time placing all authority on faith in the forgiveness of sins. This is essentially the same as Luther’s “*was Christ treibet*,”

---

134. My translation (Pieper, “Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper,” 6).

135. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course,” 197.

136. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course,” 202.

137. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course,” 202.

and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. He gives the antilegomena free rein in matters of doctrine unless they contradict the homologoumena. This allows for a more unbiased exegesis.

The third man of the Wauwatosa triumvirate is John Schaller. In 1904, he wrote a German introduction to the Bible called *Kurze Bibelkunde*. It was later translated, revised, and reprinted in 1990 as the *Book of Books* and serves as an introduction to the *People's Bible* series.

With an audience of lay readers, Schaller does not go as in-depth as some writers on the topic. While discussing the New Testament in general, Schaller summarizes the issue,

It is obvious the historical fact reported by Eusebius cannot be discarded by an ecclesiastical decree. Consequently we preserve the distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena... as a matter of record. Nevertheless, we receive the latter, though of "the second degree of canonicity," as inspired apostolic writings because it appears that the doubts concerning their origin were not sufficiently substantiated.<sup>138</sup>

He affirms twice more in two separate sections that the antilegomena, because of the doubts around it, will always remain books of the second rank.<sup>139</sup> His opinion is closest to Gerhard's.

All three men are in agreement in regard to the distinction, yet all three approach the topic from slightly different angles. You can almost see their complementary personalities in these writings: A. Pieper, bold and fond of hyperbole, Koehler, reserved and intentionally unspecific, and Schaller the tactful mediator.<sup>140</sup>

### **The Distinction Continues 1940-1960**

In the 1940s-1960s, we see no significant change in the distinction. Though perhaps with the benefit of hindsight we can pick out areas where we see hints of the simplification of history that later appeared in our synod. One such example is in Professor Blume's 1941 article on the

---

138. Schaller, *The Book of Books*, 199.

139. Schaller, *The Book of Books*, 232, 282.

140. Immanuel P Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863-1963," n.d., 17-18.

formation of the New Testament. He writes, “Sometimes [the one expressing doubt about certain books] was misinformed; sometimes his own theological position was not beyond reproach. But we shall see that these objections were but minor jogs in the straight road that eventually led to the full recognition of the twenty-seven book canon as we know it today.”<sup>141</sup> While Blume’s essay is very helpful for understanding the development of the canon, the above line of thought gets exaggerated by later theologians. While I believe Blume still made some sort of distinction, it is not addressed in his paper.

Another interesting variation comes from John Mueller. His book on dogmatics is based upon F. Pieper’s, yet it does not follow Pieper exactly. Mueller minimizes historical doubt to support the inclusion of the antilegomena, declares there is nothing new taught in the antilegomena, and yet holds the distinction as strongly as Chemnitz.<sup>142</sup>

The Franzmann brothers each wrote helpful introductions to the New Testament. Werner Franzmann’s introduction, however, was unpublished, undated, and is similar in thought to his younger brother’s book, *The Word of the Lord Grows*. Which came first is hard to tell.

Martin Franzmann parallels the work of his older brother by carefully analyzing the historical evidence for each book of the canon. For example, he honestly shares the doubts and troubles with 2 Peter’s canonicity and candidly proclaims the church cannot erase the line between antilegomena and homologoumena. He warns weaknesses of the historical witness to 2 Peter cannot and should not be ignored, but a rational balancing of history alone will never give you the whole answer:

The most important fact about the Second Letter of Peter is in the last analysis the fact that it has in generation after generation “strengthened the brethren” of Peter in a

---

141. Blume, “The Formation of the New Testament Canon,” 284.

142. John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen*, (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Pub. House, 1934), 129–31.

genuinely apostolic way... Whatever the historical difficulties attending it, the Second Letter of Peter has had, and has, an undeniable part in that peculiar history which gives meaning to all history, the history of the growing and victoriously prevailing word of the Lord.<sup>143</sup>

M. Franzmann calls the terms antilegomena and homologoumena a description of the history of the books in the church, not primarily or even necessarily a judgment of their value.<sup>144</sup> He has a beautiful conclusion to his survey of the formation of the canon, in which he states that the New Testament has a curiously informal and almost casual sort of history. It does not come into the world the way we would expect it to, like the *Book of Mormon*. Only God himself could bring his Word into the world the way he did.

[The 27 book canon] established itself in the early centuries of the church and maintained itself in the continued life of the church. It survived questionings of both humanists and reformers in the sixteenth century... and it will maintain itself henceforth. The question of the limits of the canon may be theoretically open; but the history of the church indicates that it is for practical purposes closed... in the last analysis, the church of God can become convinced and remain assured that they are indeed the wellspring of salvation only by drinking of them.<sup>145</sup>

### **The Distinction Fades 1960-1990**

The following thirty years show a mix between retaining the historic distinction and questioning the value of that distinction. As with the previous periods discussed, those who make a distinction still consider the antilegomena canonical.

Pastor John O. Lang, in an essay for *This Steadfast Word*, is the first to question the distinction.<sup>146</sup> Lang's primary goal is the defense of Scripture's sole authority in all matters of

---

143. Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 232.

144. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, 287.

145. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, 295.

146. *This Steadfast Word* is a compilation of essays from a Lutheran free conference edited by Carl Lawrenz in 1964.

doctrine. He minimizes the historical doubts about the antilegomena and on these grounds says, “Therefore there is no doubt that they are a part of the inspired and inerrant New Testament.”<sup>147</sup> He also adds that the antilegomena do not add anything doctrinally to the homologoumena anyway. Lang’s opinion is that the distinction has been overemphasized and can shake people’s faith if it is not understood correctly. He also quotes Lenski who says, “Chemnitz goes farthest in this direction, but the church has not followed him; it has taken these Books into the Canon in spite of the doubts which some had concerning them.”<sup>148</sup>

Others who question, deny, or advise against making a distinction are Professor Rudolph Honsey of the ELS in 1978 and the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in 1980.<sup>149</sup> The Department of Systematic Theology advised pastors that while the antilegomena distinction is not destructive of faith, it should not ordinarily be discussed among the laity.

Many pastors and professors from this time still kept the distinction. Pastor Gary Baumler presented an essay in 1970 in which he sees little theological import in the discussion because it endangers neither doctrine nor authority. And while he accepts all twenty-seven books he does not sweep away the historical doubt. He sees at least some value in struggling with the distinction to help us make sure of the basis of our faith.<sup>150</sup>

---

147. John Lang, “The Authority of Scripture,” in *This Steadfast Word: Essays on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Carl Lawrenz (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965), 88–110.

148. Lenski, “Mimeographed Dogmatics Notes,” n.d., 32. Cited by Lang, “The Authority of Scripture,” 101.

149. Rudolf Honsey, “Exegesis of Psalm 8:3-6,” *Lutheran Synod Q.* XVIII.2 (1978): 33.; “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology: Apostolicity, Inspiration, and Canonicity,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44 (1980): 49.

150. Pastor Gary P Baumler, “The Canon—What Is The Import Of The Distinction Between The Canonical And Deuterocanonical (Antilegomena) Books?” (n.d.): 7.

Professor Gawrisch's paper presented in 1973 follows the same line of thought but adds some important aspects. He reports the opinions of Luther, Chemnitz, and the later dogmatists before saying that we have a better picture of the early church than them thanks to the discovery of certain ancient documents and careful scholarly research.<sup>151</sup> Ultimately, though, the historical investigation is secondary to that of faith. The autopicity of Scripture caused the canonical books to be separated from the Apocrypha and other non-canonical writings, "Just as in a blast furnace the heavier molten iron separates itself from the lighter slag, so the inspired Scriptures separated themselves from the non-inspired writings."<sup>152</sup> We see a greater degree of emphasis on *autopistia* in his paper.

While Baumler and Gawrisch essentially follow what has already been said by orthodox Lutheran theologians, Pastor Paul Huebner presented a rather idiosyncratic paper in 1984. The purpose of his paper was to give a better understanding of verbal inspiration and to guard against any doubts raised by those espousing the historical-critical method. He provides five criteria for canonicity that reflect the internal and external criteria of the dogmatists to some degree, but he presents them in a unique way.<sup>153</sup> He concludes that because many of our members do not understand the historical process by which God gave the church the Scriptures, it would be beneficial to teach more about the antilegomena to prepare our people for anyone who would use the antilegomena to cast doubt.

Overall we can see that during this period the distinction is usually considered a historical matter that does not have much import for today. Most of the essayists are not concerned about

---

151. Gawrisch, "How the Canonicity of the Bible Was Established," 15-16.

152. Gawrisch, "How the Canonicity of the Bible Was Established," 17.

153. His criteria are: 1. Authoritative (claims to be from God) 2. Prophetic (or apostolic) 3. Authenticity (no errors) 4. Dynamics (offers hope and direction) 5. Wide acceptance (Paul E. Huebner, "The Implications of the Antilegomena Today" (1984): 2).

the canon for two reasons. First, because it does not affect our doctrine, which is true. But the second reason provided is that we have a more certain picture of the historical development of the canon than the reformers. While many advances have been made since the time of the reformers, it would be hard to argue that we have more certainty than men like Eusebius, Origen, and Augustine who lived far closer to the original autographs.

A final item to note is the textbook used for dogmatics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the “Dogmatics Notes.” The oldest edition of the notes I was able to examine comes from the late 1980s.<sup>154</sup> There are a few significant changes between the 1980s edition and the one used in 2018. The relevant portions of the notes can be found in appendix.1 with the changed portions in italics.

The newer edition is closer to Gerhard’s position than the former and maintains *autopistia* as a more separate concept, distinct from the internal criteria. The dogmatics notes do not help us with how or whether we ought to distinguish between the homologoumena and antilegomena, but they have changed in a positive direction by moving away from human certainty of the canon based on historical facts.

### **The Distinction Disappears 1990-2015**

By the 1990s, with the exception of an excellent essay by Pastor Stephen Valleskey and a thesis by Timothy Schmeling of the ELS, the distinction has been largely homogenized.<sup>155</sup>

Valleskey is critical of Gerhard’s use of the terms deuterocanonical and protocanonical. Valleskey is of the opinion Gerhard blurred the distinction and ultimately led to its loss. We have

---

154. The only changes in the pertinent section between the 1980s edition and the former one appear to be formatting.

155. Schmeling qualifies his own use of 2 Peter as biblical evidence because it is antilegomena which suggests that he is mindful of the antilegomena distinction in his theology. (Timothy Schmeling, “Life in Christ: A Study of the Unio Mystica and Its Relation to Theosis” (Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2002), 15).

already seen Valleskey's warning about subjectively using the internal testimony of the Spirit. He concludes that nothing today can alter the fact that the antilegomena were spoken against very close to the time of their writing. He concurs with Chemnitz that we should not take any dogma from these books, but adds, "At the same time we affirm that we find nothing in the disputed books contrary to the canonical Scriptures, and commend them without reservation to our churches for their reading, preaching, and devotional study to the edifying of the faith."<sup>156</sup>

Three men who are all highly distinguished in the Wisconsin Synod each minimize the antilegomena distinction: David Kuske, Lyle Lange, and Daniel Deutschlander. Kuske and his book, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way*, have positively molded the hermeneutics of entire generations of pastors, which makes his treatment of the antilegomena all the more influential. He talks about the historical doubts and says, "When one considers the doubts or objections that have been expressed... it becomes clear that the problem lies either with the person's lack of understanding or lack of information."<sup>157</sup> He writes that Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov, and Quenstedt accepted the antilegomena as canonical and merely cautioned the use of them to establish doctrine. "In essence this merely applied the principle that Scripture must interpret Scripture in a somewhat more restrictive way to these books."<sup>158</sup> Kuske takes Blume's statement that "sometimes [an objector] was misinformed," perhaps even to an extreme. He seems to be excusing rather than acknowledging the post-reformation theologians' treatment of the antilegomena.

---

156. Valleskey, "The New Testament Canon: Cur Alii Prae Aliis," 13.

157. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation*, 33.

158. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation*, 33.

Another influential book in the Wisconsin Synod is Professor Lange's *God So Loved the Word*. It is a dogmatics book for laypeople and Martin Luther College uses it as a doctrine textbook for those studying to become teachers. Lange says that the canonicity of the antilegomena was questioned in the early church but today there is no reason to doubt any of them. He acknowledges that famous Lutherans have expressed concern over the antilegomena but today there is little doubt they belong to the canon of Scripture. These books have generally impressed themselves on the church as the Word of God.<sup>159</sup> Once again we see an emphasis on the fact that there was formerly doubt, but that doubt is no longer necessary today.

Moving on to Professor Deutschlander, who also wrote a dogmatics book for laypeople: *Grace Abounds*. He says that the New Testament canon is assured beyond any legitimate doubt. Some questioned the authorship of the antilegomena in the early church but most recognized their authority. If someone today were to have serious doubts about the antilegomena, no doctrine would change. "There is no doctrine taught in the antilegomena that is not also taught in the homologoumena. Thus, there is no practical difference in their authority or acceptance by orthodox Lutherans."<sup>160</sup>

The three books above are either specifically aimed at the layperson or at least have them in mind as an audience. Not getting bogged down in the formation of the canon is then a practical concern in their writing. Nonetheless, I do not think they do the issue justice.

As far as the Missouri Synod is concerned, Dr. Charles Gieschen of Concordia Theological Seminary recently published an article in CTQ in 2015. Using Revelation as a test

---

159. Lyle W. Lange, *God so Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee, Wis: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005), 56–57.

160. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds*, 24.

case, he argues pastors should focus on increasing respect for the entire New Testament rather than appealing to the distinction which can create even more doubts.

### **500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation**

With the recent 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses, several publications have come out which take a historical look at the theology of the Reformation. Several of these warn us not to abandon the historically Lutheran distinction.

Concordia Publishing House recently published *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* by Dr. Alvin Schmidt. Dr. Schmidt is critical of Gerhard's "canon of the second rank" for eliminating the distinction in Lutheranism.<sup>161</sup> He is of the opinion Lutherans should not use any books which have had their apostolicity doubted. In fact, if a pastor were to read Hebrews, James, or Revelation in church they have "unwittingly and ironically accepted the council of Trent's decree that dictated the acceptance of the antilegomena books as canonical."<sup>162</sup>

Dr. Schmidt's book seems to have been influential on one of our own pastors, Paul Seager who wrote a paper on the subject for the 2017 South Central District conference. His paper echoes many of the concerns in Dr. Schmidt's book. However, Pastor Seager mentioned in an email that he wrote the paper "with a little 'edge' to try and promote some discussion on the conference floor."<sup>163</sup> The paper supports renewing the distinction of the Reformers and the early church in the same way as Chemnitz. He asks us to think about our use of the antilegomena in doctrine, preaching, and teaching. He does not in any way advocate getting rid of them, but

---

161. Alvin J. Schmidt, *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 85.

162. Schmidt, *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity*, 91.

163. Paul Seager, "Re: Antilegomena," 5 November 2018, 1.

wants them used in such a way that we are mindful of the distinction so we can say with confidence, “This is the Word of the Lord.”<sup>164</sup>

Following Dr. Schmidt’s book, and also Pastor Seager’s paper, would require a drastic change in the attitude and education of both the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. Dr. Schmidt makes suggestions that it would be difficult to argue even Chemnitz would be in support of. While this paper has been critical of those who make too little of the antilegomena distinction, Dr. Schmidt’s book is an example of the other ditch. Using the antilegomena in our teaching and preaching is far from acquiescing to Trent’s decree.

Bringing our survey to a close is Professor Joel Fredrich’s article for *Reformation 500: An Enduring Legacy*, also published in 2017. Professor Fredrich’s opinion is that the distinction is not merely a matter of historical interest but a guide for theology. If a Bible interpreter sees a problem interpreting Revelation, Hebrews, or James in line with the homologoumena then the solution is clear: keep the apostolic doctrine pure and live with a smaller canon.<sup>165</sup> His closing thoughts are, “The ancient church lived with varying views about the antilegomena because those views did not imperil agreement in the apostolic message, which is amply attested in the homologoumena. A church today that lives by the gospel can do the same.”<sup>166</sup>

### **Trends**

Today, while there are calls to return to the distinction, the norm is to admit there was ancient doubt about some books but we no longer have to worry about it. It is clear this has not always

---

164. Paul Seager, “Sola Scriptura—A Lutheran Watchword for Renewing the Homologoumean-Antilegomena Distinction,” 2017, 21–23.

165. Joel Fredrich, “Luther and the Biblical Canon,” in *Reformation 500: The Enduring Relevance of the Lutheran Reformation*, ed. Jahn Curtis (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 67.

166. Fredrich, “Luther and the Biblical Canon,” 71–72.

been the case in the WELS, LCMS, and ELS. The essays and books we have may not always give us as comprehensive a picture as we would like, for example, if something was recorded second hand or written for laypeople. Even so, we could group how theologians have handled the distinction into two groups: maximalists who follow Chemnitz and minimalists who act as if the distinction once existed but now no longer matters.

Clear maximalists would include Franz and August Pieper, Schaller, Koehler, Werner and Martin Franzmann, Mueller, and Valleskey. Clear minimalists would be Hoenecke, John Lange, Kuske, Lyle Lange, and Gieschen. There are more maximalists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, softer expressions of support for Chemnitz in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and more minimalists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the exception of the recent Reformation writings.

The trend is a slow loss of the distinction similar to that of the post-Reformation period. But this is only a general trend. Orthodox Lutherans have a hard time expressing and agreeing upon what the distinction actually is. Some say Gerhard upheld the distinction, others say he removed it.<sup>167</sup> Some say they hold the distinction but mean only in a historical sense. Some say they hold it in a practical sense and do not use antilegomena for doctrine while simultaneously agreeing that the books are canonical. We can agree with Walther that these testimonies encourage us to strive to be very sure of our faith through conscientious and serious research.

As to why the distinction faded away, this is also hard to say. Elmer Moeller posits from his own experience in the Missouri Synod that the change from Luther's German Bible to the King James Version in the 1930s and 1940s removed the constant exposure of both pastors and

---

167. Schmidt believes Gerhard essentially removed the distinction while F. Pieper believes Gerhard essentially upheld it. Logically, we must agree that inspiration is absolute and there cannot be degrees of inspiration. We must remember, however, that we cannot equate the authority of Scripture with our recognition of Scripture. In my opinion, Gerhard's protocanonical and deuterocanonical distinction refers to canonicity from a human perspective. In this case, speaking of degrees of canonicity is a practical and acceptable description of how we are to regard the antilegomena.

laymen to Luther's distinction.<sup>168</sup> It became easier to speak of the Bible as one inspired unit without having to explain the four antilegomena which Luther had placed at the end. Schmidt suggests something similar. In the 1890s, German Bibles printed in both America and Germany no longer contained Luther's prefaces, and so laypeople were no longer exposed to why seven books of the Bible were doubted.<sup>169</sup>

My own theory is that as historical-criticism and gospel reductionism entered into the Missouri Synod, orthodox Lutherans in Missouri, WELS, and ELS, reacted in much the same way Lutherans had in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. We downplayed the doubts about the antilegomena and emphasize Scripture's *autopistia*. In part, this was out of concern that the distinction might cause confusion and affect saving faith. Biblical illiteracy has been growing in America. It is difficult to go deep into canon history when so many of our people have such a deep need to know what the Bible itself says.

Lutheranism in America has emphasized how God's Word impressed itself upon the church throughout the centuries. While strictly speaking this may seem to be merely an external criterion of the canon, upon more careful analysis one can see that it is almost a hybrid with the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is an external criterion that shows the internal testimony of the Spirit working on the church through history. No matter what doubts have been expressed about the extent of the canon, the twenty-seven books we have today have overcome them. The Holy Spirit has worked through these books to strengthen not just the individual but His whole church over the last thousand years. We can trust when God says the gospel is still the power.

---

168. *The Christian News*, October 14, 1974, pages 11ff. Cited by Mark Bartling, "Luther and James: Did Luther Use the Historical-Critical Method?," 1983, 24, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/251/BartlingLuther.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

169. Schmidt, *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity*, 70–71.

## THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCTION

Lutherans have such a concern for *sola scriptura* that we would expect there to be more concern over the variety of opinions about the antilegomena. How can we expect there to be doctrinal unity when we can have different opinions over whole books of the Bible? Though theologians have shown great concern over the question, “What is God’s Word?” They conclude that the antilegomena distinction makes no difference in our doctrine.

Franz Pieper and Daniel Deutschlander are both adamant that we find no doctrines in the antilegomena that are not found in the homologoumena. We have seen that E. F. Klug is certain Chemnitz also believed this. In the seminary dogmatics notes, essentially lists of doctrines arranged systematically with each one followed by proof passages, the antilegomena are accompanied by homologoumena passages in almost every case. A number of points are made without citing homologoumena passages but the majority of these are either not doctrinal points or are explicit statements of what is implicit elsewhere. More research could be done in this area. For the time being, I am happy to trust Pieper and Deutschlander’s assessments.

Sometimes a passage in the antilegomena will give us more depth of understanding about a doctrine already set forth in the homologoumena. Using antilegomena to expound on doctrines found only implicitly or briefly in the homologoumena falls well within Chemnitz’s own use of the antilegomena. If we ever should find that conforming the antilegomena to the homologoumena yields an unfaithful interpretation of the text, then we ought to take Professor Fredrich’s advice and live with a smaller canon.

Chemnitz and others from his time, August Pieper, John Mueller, and Stephen Valleskey all fall hard on the side of not taking doctrine from the antilegomena not found in the homologoumena. Hollaz, Hoenecke, and many others have all but removed the distinction. Even with these two drastically differing opinions, I have never heard of a disagreement on a point of doctrine because it was taken from the antilegomena.

## ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

We have established the distinction makes no difference theologically, but this does not mean the distinction is unimportant.

One immediate concern may be whether one could make a distinction and still hold to the confessions, our ordination vow, or the Wisconsin Synod's *This We Believe*. All three of these confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments without enumerating or limiting what that canon is.<sup>170</sup> So, for example, when we subscribe to the confessions, we are not subscribing to Revelation being a canonical book. That being said, Lutherans are by no means confessing the canon is open to new additions or careless opinions. The extent of the canon is not considered to be a doctrinal matter among us but a historical one.

A greater concern among theologians has been balancing the certainty of God's Word with concern for the faith of individual Christians. Gieschen and John Lange are of the opinion the homologoumena/antilegomena distinction can create doubt and confusion about the authority of the Bible.<sup>171</sup> The authority and divine origin of the Bible are doubted more and more as it is in our culture. Reason would suggest the best solution is not to cast even more doubt on certain portions of the Bible. It is true, there is a valid difference between the layperson and pastor when it comes to making this distinction. But I believe that, as pastors, if we can find a way to make

---

170. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 248.; Kolb, Wengert, and Arand, *The Book of Concord*, 486.; "This We Believe: Scripture."

171. Charles A Gieschen, "The Relevance of the Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case," *Concordia Theol. Q.* 79 (2015): 285.; Lang, "The Authority of Scripture," 101.

the distinction, let our people know we do, and educate them why we do, it will better prepare them for the opposition to the authority of God's Word so pervasive in our culture.

Consider this. In 2006, the National Geographic Society published a translation of the Gospel of Judas which portrayed Judas as the hero. Also in 2006, Michael Baigent published *The Jesus Papers* which argued Jesus was never crucified and the Vatican was covering it up. Both became *New York Times* bestsellers.<sup>172</sup> That same year *The Da Vinci Code* came out in theaters.<sup>173</sup> The theme uniting them is that Christianity is mistaken or misleading.<sup>174</sup> A 2015 Gallup Poll shows that between 1975 and 2015 the percentage of Americans with a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the church/organized religion has fallen from 68% to 42%.<sup>175</sup> While this fall in confidence is by no means tied to the question of the canon, it certainly cannot help if we are less than transparent to our people about the questions of canonicity that were raised in the past, especially if they should find out about it from some other source as those mentioned. We could be contributing to the appearance at least of concealing the truth.

In academia, the hypothesis that orthodox Christianity as we know it is just one voice of the many legitimate forms of Christianity in the early church is growing.<sup>176</sup> Walter Bauer, for example, argues that if we listen only to the anti-heretical fathers of the post-New Testament Period, we become dependent on the vote of the one party which happened to rise to the

---

172. Troy Troftgruben, "How Not to Fall for the Next Big Jesus Exposé," *Lutheran Forum* 52.4 (2018): 45.

173. Based on the 2003 book of the same name which was also a *New York Times* bestseller.

174. Troftgruben, "How Not to Fall for the Next Big Jesus Exposé," 46.

175. Lydia Saad, "Confidence in Religion at New Low, but Not Among Catholics," *Gallup.Com*, 2015, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/183674/confidence-religion-new-low-not-among-catholics.aspx>.

176. Gieschen, "The Relevance of the Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction," 2–3.

foreground and mute the others.<sup>177</sup> Bart Ehrman’s popular introduction to the New Testament includes a chapter titled, “Jesus from Different Perspectives: Other Gospels in Early Christianity.” The chapter begins, “Many people don’t realize that lots of Christian Gospels did not make it into the New Testament.”<sup>178</sup> His book is the standard textbook for many colleges and universities today.<sup>179</sup> Postmodernists now question even the concept of canon. Stephen Stein writes, “We need a religious community in order to have scripture... Texts without such an interactive group are mere texts, ancient texts perhaps... but not scripture.”<sup>180</sup> In other words, the community creates the canon. To him, canonization is the process of a community ordering and controlling the scripture by manipulating it with commentary and translation.<sup>181</sup> Dr. Matthew Becker, formerly of the LCMS, writes a blog in which he used the antilegomena to question the concepts of “Scripture” and “Bible,” and to open the door for gospel reductionism.<sup>182</sup>

Trust in the church is already low. What happens to those who have been equipped with only a simplified version of the history of the canon when they encounter one of the arguments above? Especially if that history claims the canon was accepted by the uncontested consensus of the church while anyone who disagreed was either foolish or mistaken. Any good post-modernist could deconstruct that “consensus” of the early church and show that it was anything but

---

177. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), xxi.

178. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 195.

179. Gieschen, “The Relevance of the Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction,” 280.

180. Stephen Stein, “America’s Bibles: Canon, Commentary, and Community,” *Church Hist.* 64.2 (1995): 171.

181. Stein, “America’s Bibles: Canon, Commentary, and Community,” 182–83.

182. Matthew Becker, “Talking Points about Doctrinal Authority in the LCMS,” *The Daystar Journal*, 10 November 2013, <http://thedaystarjournal.com/talking-points-about-doctrinal-authority-in-the-lcms-2/>.

consensus. At best, glossing over the distinction creates a false external criterion of Scripture. We do not want to fall into the same pit that the theologians responding to Rationalism fell into. By removing the distinction to protect the canon, we may open up the homologoumena to attack along with the antilegomena, at least in the minds of our people.<sup>183</sup>

Walther once said, “The thought that it is dangerous to make this distinction known to laypeople can only be true if they from the beginning had never been made aware of it.”<sup>184</sup> When we make the distinction it does not mean we must avoid using the antilegomena or declare them all to be non-canonical. It means putting the interpretation of the homologoumena above that of the antilegomena and educating our people about it. By making the distinction we demonstrate historical honesty and accuracy. By making the distinction we demonstrate a deep concern for God’s Word and trust in the Spirit that we have truly received all of God’s Word. By making the distinction, we demonstrate that we are not hiding some secret history of the canon that developed behind closed doors. We show that the Christian need not fear the historical process by which God gave the Church his Word. In fact, the Christian can marvel at the wonderful process. Then, when our members are exposed to those who would attack the canon, they have already heard about the process from us first.

For these reasons, I cannot agree with the minimalist’s approach to the distinction. I also caution against the position taken by Schmidt which relies heavily on historical evidence to remove the antilegomena in order to avoid following Trent. The best approach seems to be following Chemnitz as interpreted by such pastors as Gerhard, Koehler, Franzmann, and

---

183. Pieper, “Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper,” 6.

184. Francis Pieper, “Dr. Walther’s Stellung zur Offenbarung St. Johannis,” *Lehre und Wehre* (February 1904): 59. translated by Schmidt, *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity*, 91.

Fredrich. We will not necessarily speak about the distinction with the same bluntness that we would in a seminary classroom, but we should not shy away from it. Schaller's *Book of Books* could be a helpful resource for this.

Whether we make a distinction or not, for the reasons above, it is an apologetic concern. We might not have all the answers, but neither does the post-modernist.<sup>185</sup> The post-modern theory about canon and community is reminiscent of the Catholic argument that the church created the canon. The bestselling novels above were quickly discredited. Just reading those "long-lost gospels" is often enough to shake any claim they had to canonicity. Even Bauer admits his theory requires some imagination.<sup>186</sup> Our mission has never been to give an answer to every question but to give God's answer to sin and death. We recognize that certain trust in the Scriptures comes only through faith in the gospel. Having a candid conversation about the canon can provide a way to give the gospel a hearing.

---

185. Further research could be done into Stein's theories about canon and community or Bauer's theory and what modern scholarship has done with it.

186. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 111.

## CONCLUSION

The key to the distinction between the antilegomena and homologoumena is tied up in the balance of faith and history. We can only have certainty in the Scriptures as God's inspired word through Spirit-worked faith in the gospel. Yet which books comprise the Scriptures is not an article of faith. We recognize which books are apostolic and therefore inspired through the careful study of history. We must balance history, by which God revealed Scripture to us, with the Spirit's testimony, by which we have confidence in Scripture.

We cannot subjectively apply *autopistia* to individual books of Scripture without any historical support. But history does not answer every question we have about the development of the canon. The history is not so uncertain that we have no idea what books are inspired, but it is a historical fact that there were doubts surrounding the antilegomena. The antilegomena must, therefore, always remain antilegomena.

Rational balancing of history, however, will never give the whole answer. Whatever historical difficulties attend the antilegomena, they have had "an undeniable part in that peculiar history which gives meaning to all history."<sup>187</sup> They have strengthened the church generation after generation. Despite doubts, the antilegomena have remained a part of the canon. "Just as in a blast furnace... the inspired Scriptures separated themselves from the non-inspired writings."<sup>188</sup> On top of this, there is nothing in the antilegomena, in terms of doctrine, which should give us any pause in accepting them as canonical.

---

187. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, 232.

188. Gawrisch, "How the Canonicity of the Bible Was Established," 17.

Thus, orthodox Lutherans have wrestled with how to treat the antilegomena with varying degrees of emphasis on faith and history. We want to avoid giving the impression there are mathematical criteria by which we can prove exactly which books are canonical. We also want to avoid emphasizing *autopistia* to the point that the historical development of the canon does not really matter. We can say with J.A.O. Preus that while some emphasize one aspect and some another, yet all speak the truth.”<sup>189</sup> Therefore, there is no real theological issue underlying the ancient distinction between the homologoumena and antilegomena. Nevertheless, Lutherans would be wise to maintain it for reasons of historical accuracy and apologetics.

It would be wise to teach our people about the antilegomena without oversimplifying historical difficulties. Christians do not need to fear that learning too much about the development of the canon will destroy faith. It will no doubt take careful and patient instruction, but the outcome is that we are even more assured of where the object of our faith lies. At the very least, it will prepare our people for when they come across arguments from post-modern scholars and conspiracy theories from pop-cultural bestsellers because they already learned about the difficulties from us.

Maybe the gospel message itself is the best illustration we have of how we are to receive the canon. We have apologetic arguments to break down objections to Christ’s resurrection, but it is only the gospel message that can give someone Christian certainty in this historical fact. We have historical apologetic arguments that can break down objections to the authority of God’s Word, but it is only the gospel message that can give someone Christian certainty about this historical fact. The difference is that we have passages from the inspired Word of God that testify to Christ’s resurrection. There are no passages that specify which books we are to receive

---

189. Preus, “The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics,” 147.

as canonical. And so the historical witness takes on a slightly heavier role in our reception of the individual books of the Bible.

I have come to think that this is how the distinction ought to look: we receive the antilegomena as inspired apostolic writing and make use of them in our teaching and preaching without reservation. Our confidence in Scripture does not rest on an intellectual decision but faith in the forgiveness of sins through Christ (*was Christum treibet*). Yet we receive these books as books of the second rank. We do not allow a statement of the homologoumena to be restricted by a statement taken from the antilegomena.

As we wrestle with this matter, it serves as an opportunity to establish us more deeply and more firmly in our faith. We show reverence and concern for what God's Word is, but we need not be concerned whether or not we have God's Word. We have God's sincere promise, "All people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' and this is the word that was preached [εὐαγγελισθῆν] to you" (1 Pe 1:24,25). The living and enduring word of God that brought us to life—the same word that Isaiah preached and the apostles preached—remains alive today wherever the gospel of Christ is proclaimed.

## APPENDIX 1. DOGMATICS NOTES

### Older Edition

4. God, not the Church, has established the canon of the Scriptures.
  - a) Only those books are canonical which have been given by inspiration of God.
    - 1) The Old Testament canon includes only those books which were recognized by the Jews in the days of the apostles as God's Word.  
cf Lk 16:29; 24:44; Jn 5:39; Ro 3:2; 2 Tm 3:15.
    - 2) *The New Testament canon includes only those books which were recognized by external and internal evidence as inspired.*
      - a) *The external evidence was the known fact that they were apostolic, i.e., written by an apostle or a disciple of an apostle.*  
cf Eph 2:20; Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13; 2 Pe 3:16.
        - aa) Homologoumena: generally accepted books
        - bb) Antilegomena: contested books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation)
        - cc) Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha: non-inspired writings
      - b) *The testimony of the ancient church is the basis for human certainty concerning the canon.*
      - c) The internal evidence is the self-authenticating power of the inspired writings (αὐτοπιστία).  
cf Lk 24:32; Jn 7:17.
        - aa) The claim to inspiration. Ex 4:12,22; Jr 23:21–32.
        - bb) The performance of miracles.  
Ex 4:1–5,30,31; 7:11–12; 8:19; 9:11; Mk 16:17,18,20.
        - cc) The fulfillment of prophecy.  
Ex 3:12; Dt 18:20–22; 1 Kgs 22:15–28; Jr 28:9.
        - dd) Agreement with the previously given Word.  
Dt 13:1–9; Is 8:19–20.
      - d) The testimony of the Holy Ghost is the basis for divine certainty concerning the canon.

### Current Edition

4. God, not the church, has established the canon of the Scriptures.
  - a) Only those books are canonical which have been given by inspiration of God.
    - 1) The Old Testament canon includes only those books that were recognized by the Jews in the days of Jesus and the apostles as God's Word. Luke 16:29; Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Romans 3:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:15.

- 2) *The New Testament canon includes only those books that were given by inspiration of God and recognized by external and internal evidence as inspired.*
- a) *External evidence is commonly linked to apostolic authorship, i.e., that books were written by an apostle or a disciple of an apostle. Ephesians 2:20; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:16.*
  - b) *External evidence and the testimony of the ancient church remind us how the church received the canon.*

Consider the listing of categories of New Testament writings from Eusebius (d. ca. 340):

Homologoumena: generally accepted books

Antilegomena: contested books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation)

Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha: non-inspired writings

The Old Testament Scriptures also had what might be called “antilegomena,” e.g., Esther, Song of Songs. The primary question asked was not “Are the books canonical?” but “Why are they in the canon?” There were also Old Testament apocryphal and pseudepigraphic writings that were not considered canonical.

- c) *The internal evidence is the self-authenticating power of the inspired writings (αὐτοπιστία). Luke 24:32; John 7:17*
- d) *Closely related to this self-validating power of the inspired writings are other features.*
  - 1) *The chosen writers’ claim to inspiration testifies to Scripture. 2 Samuel 23:1-2; Psalm 45:1; 1 Corinthians 2:13*
  - 2) *The chosen writers’ performance of miracles testifies to Scripture in some cases. Exodus 4:1-5,30, 31; Exodus 7:11, 8:19. 9:11; Mark 16:17, 18, 20; 2 Corinthians 12:12*
  - 3) *The fulfillment of predictive prophecy testifies to Scripture. Exodus 3:12; Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 28:9; Daniel 9:1-2; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Isaiah 8:19-20*
- e) *The testimony of the Holy Spirit is the basis for divine certainty concerning the canon. This is our conviction, as the following statements declare.*

## APPENDIX 2. VOLLSTAENDIGE ISAGOGIK DES NEUEN TESTAMENTS

### Pages 5 and 6 from the *Allgemeine Einleitung*

X. Stellung der spaeteren Kirche, bes. zur Reformation, zum Kanon.

Die Kirche des Mittelalters bekueemmerte sich wesentlich nicht um den Kanon, da sie von der Tradition lebten u. die Bibel in den Hintergrund draengten. Erst mit dem Humanismus erwachten wieder die alten historischen Zweifel an einzelne Buecher; Joh. Wessel; Erasmus.

Luthers Stellung war einerseits eine unter das unzweifelhaft prophetisch u. apostol. Wort festgebundene, andererseits eine gegen ueber den Antilegom. sehr frei; sie wird aber von modernen Theologen dahin verdreht, als habe er, vom historisch-kritischen Gesichtspunkt absehend, die Kanonizitaet der N.T. Buecher einfach von ihrem christlichen und theol. Wert abhaengen lassen, ob sie von Christo zeugen oder nicht. Luther sagt freilich, was Christus nicht lehrt, das ist noch nicht apostolisch, wenn es gleich St. Petrus oder Paulus waere; was Christum predigt, das waere apostolisch, wenn es gleich Judas, Hannas, Pilatus oder Herodes taete: Aber-, von Worms an bis zu seinem Tode stand er auf den kanon. Schriften, (HOMOLEGOU MENA), als auf dem inspirierten u. unfehlbaren Wort Gottes, macht aber einen Unterschied in bezug auf 2 Dinge: Die histor. Bezeugung u. d. Inhalt der N. T. Schriften: "Ev. Joh. u. 1. Joh., Episteln Pauli, sonderlich an die Roem., Gal., Epheser; 1. Pet.; das sind die Buecher, die den Christen zeigen u. alles lehren, das zu wissen not ist u. selig macht, ob du schon kein anderes Buch siehst noch hoerst."

Aber damit leugnet Luther nicht die Inspiration u. Kanonizitaet der uebrigen gewiss als apostol. bezeugten Buecher. Andererseits schreibt er ausdruecklich ueber die 4. letzten Buecher -Hebr., Jak., Judas u. Offb.: "Bisher haben wir die recht gewissen Hauptbuecher des N.T. gehabt; diese 4 nachfolgenden haben vorzeiten ein anderes Ansehen gehabt." Und nun bezweifelt er aus histor. u. dogmatischen Gruenden ihre Kanonizitaet; Hebr. ist ihm von einem Apostelschueler, c.2,3, geschrieben u. versagt dem nach der Taufe Suendigenden die Busse, (ein Irrtum Luthers!), ist aber sonst ein feiner Brief. Jakobus ist fuer keine Apost.-Schrift zu halten, weil er den Werken die Gerechtigkeit gibt u. des Leidens u. Auferstehens Christi nicht gedenkt. Der Mann ist der Sache zu schwach gewesen; will es mit Gesetzstreiberei ausrichten. Judas ist eine Abschrift von 2.Pet. u. zitiert apokryph. Stellen. Darum sei er aus den Hauptschriften zu weisen, unnoetig unter ihnen. Ueber Offb.: "Die Apostel gehen nicht mit Gesichtern um; niemand weiss gewiss, was es ist, und ist ebenso viel als haetten wirs nicht. Es halte davon ein jeder, was sein Geist gibt. Mein Geist kann sich in das Buch nicht schicken. Christus wird darin weder gelehrt noch erkannt, (ein Irrtum Luthers). Darum bleibe ich bei den Buechern, die mir Christum hell und rein geben." Hiermit ist seine Stellung diese: Ausser d. vier letztgenannten sind ihm die andern N.T. Buecher das unfehlbare apostol. U. unverbruechliche Gotteswort durch den Heil. Geist vom Himmel herab geoffenbart; in allem andern aber laesst er sein Gewissen nicht binden, u. stellt jedem Christen die Annahme der Antilegom. frei.

Daher haben die grossen luth. Theologen des 16. Jahrh. die altkirchliche Unterscheidung zwischen HOMO- u. ANTI-LEGOM. wieder erneuert, weil die Tatsache vorliegt, dass die HOMOLEG. unzweifelhaft apostol. Schriften dem Ursprung u. Geiste nach sind, waehrend diese Gewissheit bei den ANTILEG. fehlt. Diese Theol. waren: Brenz, Rhegius, Flacius u. M. Chemnitz. Sie nennen die 7. Antileg. (1.2.3.Joh. 2. Pet., Jak., Jude offb.) konstant im Streit liegende, oder auch die apokryph. Buecher des N.T. waehrend sie dieselben hoch ueber die A.T. Apokryphen emporheben u. vielfach gebrauchen. Nur zur Begrueundung einer Lehre, die in den gewiss apostol. enthalten ist, lassen sie dieselben nicht. (Cf. Chemnitz, Examen, De Scriptura canonica, Teil I. Pargr. 124.) Aehnlich wie Luther u. seine Schueler standen zum Kanon Zwingli, Ecculumpat u. Muskulus; wie auch Calvin, der die Offb. nicht kommentierte, Hebr. u. Judas nicht fuer Apostol. hielt. Aber er hat eine mechanische Auffassung von der Inspiration. Die reformierte Kirche hat dann in der Confessio Gallicana (Art.3.u. 4. 1561.) u. in der Conf. Bellica (4-6. 1579) den Unterschied ganz aufgehoben, waehrend sie die A.T. apokryphen ausdruecklich verwarf.

Dagegen hat die gesunde luth. Kirche den Unterschied bis auf diesen Tag aufrecht erhalten. In den Bekenntnisschriften bekennt sie sich offiziell "zu den apostol. u. prophetischen Schriften A.u.N.T, als zu dem lautern Brunnen Israels, welche allein die einzige, wahrhaftige Richtschnur ist, nach der alle Lehrer u. Lehren zu rechten u. urteilen sind, (F.C. Epit. 517 u. S.Decl. 568), und hat es weislich unterlassen, den Umfang des N.T. Kanons aeusserlich zu bestimmen. Die Dogmatiker des 17. Jahrh. haben den Unterschied (Anti-u. Homoleg.) ebenfalls nicht fallen lassen. Sie nennen die Antileg. freilich nicht apokryphische, sondern kanonisch zweiten Ranges (Gerhardt), oder auch deuterokanonisch, gegenueber den unzweifelhaften proto-kanonischen. (Calov, Quenstedt.). Erst mit dem Pietismus verlor sich auch in der luth. Kirche diese Unterscheidung, welches dem Rationalismus Gelegenheit gab, die Apostolizitaet der protokan. Buecher mit der deuterokan. in Zweifel zu ziehen. Die treue luth. Kirche Amerikas hat diesen Unterschied, wenn auch nicht auf der Kanzel, so doch in der Theologie, mit Recht wieder betont.

Die Kirche ist gebaut auf den Grund der Apostel u. Propheten, Eph. 2,20., i.e., auf ihr Worts, durch welches der Heil. Geist geredet hat. Sie haben diese Worte nicht nach menschlicher Weisheit, sondern mit solchen, welche der Heil. Geist lehret, (1.Kor. 2,13), geredet u. geschrieben. Von ihren Schriften gilt in einziger Weise: "Wer Euch hoeret, der hoeret mich; u. wer euch verachtet, etc.- Gleichwie mich der Vater gesandt hat, so sende ich euch. Lehret sie halten alles, was ich euch befohlen habe." Was nicht apostolisch u. prophetisch ist nichtmehr u. nicht weniger, das kann auch nicht sicheres Massstab goettlicher Lehre sein, sondern das muss sich selbst an den gewiss prophet. u. apostol. Schriften messen lassen. So stehen wir zu den Antileg des N.T. Wir gruenden sie auf keine Lehre, die nicht bereits in den sicher apost. Schriften gelehrt wird.<sup>190</sup>

---

190. The notes above were compiled by August Pieper's students using his manuscripts and lectures. They contain some typographical errors and mistakes that suggest confusion. For example, Professor Fredrich suggests emending "Wir gruenden sie auf keine Lehre," to "Wir gruenden auf sie keine Lehre," because the latter makes better sense and seems to be what the context requires.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Augustine. "Christian Instruction." Pages 11–235 in *Writings of Saint Augustine*. Translated by John Gavigan. Vol. 4 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. New York: Cima Publishing CO., Inc., 1947.
- Bartling, Mark. "Luther and James: Did Luther Use the Historical-Critical Method?" 1983. <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/251/BartlingLuther.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- Bauer, Walter. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. Edited by Robert A Kraft and Gerhard Krodel. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Baumler, Pastor Gary P. "The Canon—What Is The Import Of The Distinction Between The Canonical And Deuterocanonical (Antilegomena) Books?" (1970).
- Becker, Matthew. "Talking Points about Doctrinal Authority in the LCMS." *The Daystar Journal*, 10 November 2013. <http://thedaystarjournal.com/talking-points-about-doctrinal-authority-in-the-lcms-2/>.
- Blume, Frederic E. "The Formation of the New Testament Canon." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 38.4 (1941): 272–92.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988.
- Calov, Abraham. *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*, (Lunebergi, 1684).
- Calov, Abraham. *Criticus Sacer vel Commentarii Apodictico-elenchtici super Augustanam Convessionem Evangelicarum Novissimi Temporis Symbolu vere Augustum Prothuron*, (Leipzig, 1646), I.
- Chemnitz, Martin. *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*. Translated by Fred Kramer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971.
- Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. "The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century, Article I, Holy Scripture," 2005.
- Deutschlander, Daniel M. *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015.
- Ehrman, Bart. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Eusebius. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Second Printing. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995.
- Franzmann, Martin. *The Word of the Lord Grows: A First Historical Introduction to the New Testament*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961.
- Franzmann, Werner. "Introducing the New Testament," 1900.
- Fredrich, Joel. "Luther and the Biblical Canon." Pages 47–72 in *Reformation 500: The Enduring Relevance of the Lutheran Reformation*. Edited by Jahn Curtis. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017.
- Frey, Immanuel P. "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863-1963," n.d.
- Saad, Lydia. "Confidence in Religion at New Low, but Not Among Catholics." *Gallup.Com*, 2015. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/183674/confidence-religion-new-low-not-among-catholics.aspx>.
- Gawrisch, Wilbert R. "How the Canonicity of the Bible Was Established" (1973).
- Gerhard, Johann. *On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. Theological Commonplaces. Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006.
- Gieschen, Charles A. "The Relevance of the Homologoumena and Antilegomena Distinction for the New Testament Canon Today: Revelation as a Test Case." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 79 (2015): 279–300.
- Heen, Erik M. "The Bible among Lutherans in America: The ELCA as a Test Case." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45.1 (2006): 9–20.
- Hoenecke, Adolf. *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*. Translated by James Langebartels and Henrich Vogel. Vol. 1. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009.
- Hoenecke, Adolf. "Agreement on the Correct View of the Authority of Scripture as the Source of Doctrine: The Way to Unity in the Church." Translated by Martin Westerhaus. *Theologische Quartalschrift* I.4 (n.d.): 177–205.
- Halverson, T. R. "Dr. Becker's Ever Shrinking Word of God." *Steadfast Lutherans*, n.d. <https://steadfastlutherans.org/2015/05/dr-beckers-ever-shrinking-word-of-god/>.
- Hollaz, David. *Examen Theologicum Acromaticum*, (Holmiae et Lipsiae, 1741).
- Honsey, Rudolf. "Exegesis of Psalm 8:3-6." *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XVIII.2 (1978): 6–50.
- Huebner, Paul E. "The Implications of the Antilegomena Today" (1984).

- Jambrek, Stanko. "The Bible in the Time of the Reformation" 1 (2010).
- Jerome, and Thomas Halton. *On Illustrious Men*. Vol. 100 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999.
- Kieta, Geoffrey A. "A Brief Summary of the History of Lutheran Dogmatics" (n.d.).
- Klug, E. F. *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971.
- Koehler, J. P. "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course." Pages 191–220 in *The Wauwatosa Theology*. Edited by Curtis Jahn. Vol. 1 of. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.
- . "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present." Pages 427–44 in *The Wauwatosa Theology*. Edited by Curtis Jahn. Vol. 3 of. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.
- Kolb, Robert, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Kooi, William. "Canon Within and Without the Canon: A Theological Consideration and Apology for Lectionary Readings" 12 (2004).
- Kuske, David P. *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way*. Impact Series. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Pub. House, 1995.
- Lang, John. "The Authority of Scripture." Pages 88–110 in *This Steadfast Word: Essays on the Holy Scriptures*. Edited by Carl Lawrenz. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965.
- de Lang, Marijke H. "The Reformation Canon and the Development of Biblical Scholarship." *The Bible Translator* 67.2 (2016): 184–201.
- Lange, Lyle W. *God so Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005.
- Luther, Martin. "Prefaces to the New Testament." Pages 355–411 in *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament I*. Edited by Theodore Bachmann, Translated by Charles Jacobs. Vol. 35 of. Edited by Helmut Lehmann. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960.
- Luther, Martin. "The Misuse of the Mass, 1521." Pages 133–230 in *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament II*. Edited by Abdel Wentz, Translated by Frederick Ahrens. Vol. 36 of. Edited by Helmut Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Metzger, Peter S A. "A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Dogmatics Notes" (2013).

- Mueller, John Theodore. *Christian Dogmatics; a Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen*. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Pub. House, 1934.
- Olson, Dennis T. "How Lutherans Read the Bible: A North American and Global Conversation." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45.1 (2006): 4–8.
- Philipi, F. A. *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, (Stuttgart, 1854), vol. 1.
- Pieper, August. "Stöckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America." Pages 419–26 in *The Wauwatosia Theology*. Edited by Curtis Jahn. Vol. 3 of, 1997.
- . "Vollstaendige Isagogik Des Neuen Testaments: Nach den Manuscripten und Vorlesungen von Professor A. F. Pieper." Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1933.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol. I. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.
- Piepkorn, Arthur Carl. "Theological Observer." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43.7 (1972): 449–53.
- Preus, J.A.O. II. "The New Testament Canon in Lutheran Dogmatics." *Concordia Journal* 36.2. (2010): 133–53.
- Preus, Robert. *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. Vol. 1. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.
- Quenstedt, Johannes. *Theologia Didactico-polemica sive Systema Thologicum*, (Lipsiae, 1702), I.
- Reu, M. *Luther and the Scriptures*. Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1944.
- Sasse, Hermann. "Luther and the Inerrancy of the Scriptures," 1951. <https://e-resources.alc.edu.au/Documents/1951-Sasse-Luther-and-the-Inerrancy-of-the-Scriptures.pdf#search=hermann%20sasse>.
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church: The German Reformation*. 2nd ed. Vol. VII. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1910.
- Schaller, John. *The Book of Books: A Brief Introduction to the Bible*. Rev. ed. Milwaukee: Northwestern Pub. House, 2002.
- Schmeling, Timothy. "Life in Christ: A Study of the Unio Mystica and Its Relation to Theosis." Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2002.
- Schmid, Heinrich. *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Translated by Charles Hay and Henry Jacobs. 4th ed. Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899.
- Seager, Paul. "Re: Antilegomena," 5 November 2018.

- Seager, Paul. "Sola Scriptura—A Lutheran Watchword for Renewing the Homologoumean-Antilegomena Distinction," 2017.
- Stein, Stephen. "America's Bibles: Canon, Commentary, and Community." *Church History* 64.2 (1995): 169–84.
- Tholuck, August. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Translated by James Hamilton and Jonathan Edwards Ryland. Vol. 1. Harvard University: T. Clark, 1842.
- Troftgruben, Troy. "How Not to Fall for the Next Big Jesus Exposé." *Lutheran Forum* 52.4 (2018): 45–50.
- Valleskey, David J. "The Holy Scriptures—Source and Norm of All Doctrine" (1987).
- Valleskey, Stephen P. "The New Testament Canon: Cur Alii Prae Aliis" (1990).
- Walden, Wayne. "Luther: The One who Shaped the Canon." *Restoration Quarterly* 49. (2007): 1-10.
- Walther, C. F. W. "Is It Heretical to Question the Canonicity of Some New Testament Writings?" Pages 24–26 in *Editorials From "Lehre Und Wehre."* Edited by August Suelflow, Translated by Herbert Bouman. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981.
- Yip, Man-hei. "Text and World, Unity or Division? Questioning Lindbeck's Postliberal Biblical Interpretation." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44.2 (2017): 11–15.
- Zahn, Theodor. *Geschichte Des Neutestamentlichen Kanons*. Vol. I. Erlangen: Junge & Sohn, 1888.
- Christian Worship: Occasional Services*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004.
- "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology: Apostolicity, Inspiration, and Canonicity," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44 (1980): 46-49.
- "This We Believe: Scripture." *WELS*, 1955. <https://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/scripture/>.