

Sunday, November 25, 2018—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 67 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model, Part 6 (Implications)

### Introduction

- In [Lesson 62](#) we began discussing the Self-Authenticating Model for establishing the boundaries of the canon. In doing so, we saw that this view holds that the scriptures authenticated themselves in the hearts and minds of believers when they were written.
  - “A self-authenticating model of canon would take into account something that the other models have largely overlooked: the *content* of the canon itself. Rather than looking only to its reception (community-determined), or only to its origins (historically-determined), this model would, in a sense, let the canon have a voice in its own authentication.” (Kruger, 89)
- The self-authenticating model maintains that God has created the proper epistemic (truth) environment wherein belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed. In his book *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, Michael J. Kruger argues that this epistemic (truth) environment includes the following three components:
  - *Providential Exposure* (Corporate Exposure)
  - *Attributes of Canonicity*
    - Divine Qualities
    - Corporate Reception
    - Apostolic Origins
  - *Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*
- Once again Kruger states the following regarding these three components:
  - “These three components must all be in place if we are to have knowledge of the canon. We cannot know canonical books unless we have access to those books (providential exposure); we need some way to distinguish canonical books from other books (attributes of canonicity); and we need to have some basis for thinking we can rightly identify these attributes (internal work of the Spirit).” (Kruger, 94)
- Last week, in Lesson 66 we considered the final Attribute of Canonicity by looking at the *apostolic origins* of the New Testament books. Today, in Lesson 67, we want to conclude our study of canonicity by looking at the implications of a Self-Authenticating Model as well as offer some summative thoughts on the subject.

## Implications of a Self-Authenticating Canon

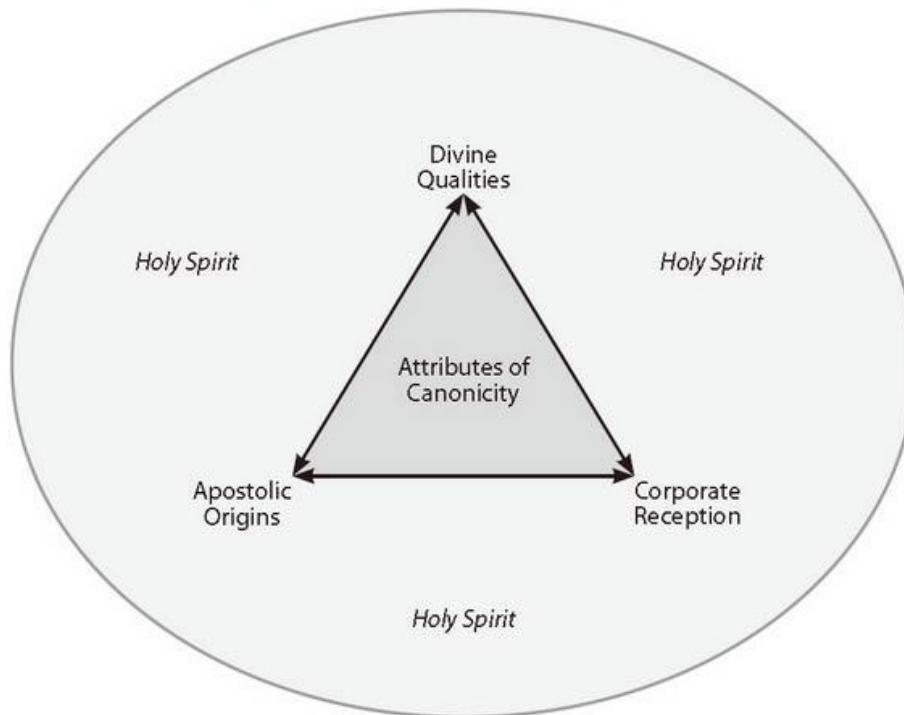
- Over the past five Lessons we have studied Kruger’s argument for the self-authenticating nature of the canon. While we have found Kruger’s central thesis to be overall sound and scriptural, we have, however, made some modifications, additions, and adjustments along the way.
- Therefore, it seems prudent to consider the implications of the Self-Authenticating Model upon the broader subject of canonicity before moving on to new material. In this section we want to note how “(1) the attributes of canonicity relate to each other in a mutually reinforcing manner, and (2) it provides a basis for affirming multiple and complementary definitions of canon.” (Kruger, 115)

### *Attributes of Canonicity as Mutually Reinforcing*

- What is unique about the Self-Authenticating Model is that the three attributes of canonicity all related to each other. Kruger explains how the attributes of canonicity are not independent of each other:
  - “These are not three independent and disconnected qualities that canonical books happen to possess, but each attribute implies and involves the other two. Thus, you cannot really speak of one attribute without, in a sense, speaking of the others. They are all bound together. Divine qualities exist only because a book is produced by an inspired apostolic author. And any book that has an apostolic author, due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will inevitably contain divine qualities. In addition, any book with divine qualities (and apostolic origins) will impose itself on the church and, via the work of the *testimonium*, be corporately received. And if any book is corporately received by the church, then that book must possess divine qualities that would cause the church to recognize the voice of Christ in it (again through the *testimonium*). Thus, if a book is examined that has one of these attributes, then that implies that the book also has the other two.” (Kruger, 115)
- Not only are these attributes not independent of each other, but they work together to form a unit or “*web of mutually reinforcing beliefs*,” according to Kruger.
  - “Any given attribute not only implies the other two, but is also confirmed by the other two. So, apostolic origins not only imply divine qualities and corporate reception, but divine qualities and corporate reception are part of the way we know a book has apostolic origins. Likewise, corporate reception not only implies the existence of apostolic origins and divine qualities, but is confirmed by the existence of apostolic origins and divine qualities. And divine qualities do not simply imply apostolic origins and corporate reception, but apostolic origins and corporate reception are part of how we know a book has divine qualities. What this means is that the self-authenticating model, at its core, is both self-supporting and self-correcting. One attribute not only gets support from the other two, but can also be corrected by the other two (e.g., a person may think he recognizes divine qualities in a book, say the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but this is corrected by the lack of apostolic origins and corporate reception.)” (Kruger, 115-116)

- For Kruger, the core strength of the Self-Authenticating Model is found in the fact that it is three-dimensional.
  - “In contrast, the other models above [Community Determined Model and Historically Determined Model] tend to be one-dimensional and seek to authenticate canon by appealing to only a single attribute. These models are to be commended for correctly identifying attributes of canonicity, but the problem is that these attributes, biblically speaking, are not meant to work in isolation. When the three attributes are split apart, distortions are inevitable. If we only consider corporate reception in isolation, we might get the impression that canon is merely a discussion about the church and its desires and decisions—canon is just the books we prefer. If we only consider apostolic origins, we might think that the canon is all about history, facts, and historical processes. In the end, we are just left holding a bag of raw data. And if we only consider divine qualities, we might get the impression that the canon is just an instance of generic revelation given straight from heaven, with no historical manifestation at all. This not only would ignore the historical process of canonization, but would leave us with a canon that does not connect to (or come from) the real world.” (Kruger, 116)
- In the end, Kruger maintains that the Self-Authenticating Model unites the various canonical models by acknowledging that no one attribute is ultimate over the others.
  - “Because these three attributes are so interdependent, one can look at the entire question of canon through the lens of just one attribute. Thus, in a sense, all three attributes are about apostolic origins. Apostolic origins are not only about the historical background of a book, but also about the qualities produced by apostolic origins and how it leads to corporate reception in the church. Likewise, all three attributes are, in a sense, about divine qualities. Divine qualities are not only about the internal marks of a book, but also about where the divine qualities come from and the impact those qualities have on the church. And, in a sense, all three attributes are about corporate reception. Corporate reception is not only about the response of the church to a book, but also about those things that make that response possible, namely, the divine qualities and apostolic origins of a book. Thus, all three attributes are critical if we are to have a biblical understanding of canon.” (Kruger, 117-118)
- Please consider Kruger’s diagram of the Mutually Reinforcing nature of the Self-Authenticating model on the top of the next page.

Figure 1. The self-authenticating model



- The diagram in Figure 1 depicts how the various Attributes of Canonicity mutually reinforce each other. Also, note the role the Holy Spirit plays in helping a believer make all of the connections. Recall that the Holy Spirit was active in the process of identifying the boundaries of the canon on both the individual and corporate levels. The Holy Spirit’s witness through the ministry of the New Testament prophets equipped the body of Christ to establish the boundaries of the canon before the end of the first century.

#### *Balanced Definition of Canon*

- One of the ongoing debates in the realm of canonical studies is establishing a formal definition of the canon. Kruger believes that the Self-Authenticating Model provides assistance with this task as well.
  - “. . . canon can be defined in three different ways: exclusive (canon as reception), functional (canon as use), and ontological (canon as divinely given). These three definitions for canon generally correspond to the three attributes of canonicity in the self-authenticating model. If one looks at the canon from the perspective of corporate reception, then canon is most naturally defined as the books received and recognized by the consensus of the church (exclusive). If one looks at the canon from the perspective of divine qualities, then canon is most naturally defined as those books that are used as authoritative revelation by a community (functional). And if one looks at canon from the perspective of apostolic origins, then the canon is most naturally defined as those books given by God as the redemptive-historical deposit (ontological). The self-authenticating model, then, accommodates *all three* definitions of canon and acknowledges that each of

them has appropriate applications and uses. Biblically speaking, there is no need to choose between these definitions (and their corresponding dates) because each of them captures a true attribute of canon and also implies the other two. It is only when certain canonical models absolutize just one of these three definitions (e.g., Sundberg's exclusive definition) that distortions can arise." (Kruger, 118-119)

- Kruger points out how this discussion has implications for assigning a date for the historical origins of the canon.
  - "When did the New Testament books become canonical according to the self-authenticating model? It depends on which definition one uses. On the exclusive definition, we do not have a canon until the third or fourth century [a notion I reject]. On the functional definition, the extant evidence suggests that we certainly have a canon by the mid-second century (if not before) [I believe it was by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century]. On the ontological definition, a New Testament book would be canonical as soon as it was written, giving a first-century date for the canon. When these three dates are viewed as a whole, they nicely capture the entire flow of canonical history: (1) God gives his books through his apostles; → (2) the books are recognized and used as Scripture by early Christians; → (3) the corporate church achieves a consensus around these books. The fact that these three dates are linked in such a natural chronological order reminds us that the story of the canon is indeed a *process*, and therefore it should not be artificially restricted to one moment in time. Put differently, the story of the canon is less like a dot and more like a line. If so, perhaps we should consider a shift in terminology. Rather than a myopic focus on the "date" of canon (and the ensuing debates that creates), perhaps it would be better to focus on the "stage" of canon. The former term suggests that canon can mean only one thing, whereas the latter term suggests that canon has a multidimensional meaning." (Kruger, 119)
- Much of what Kruger argues above makes sense. The formation of the canon was no doubt a process that moved along in various stages.
  - *Inspiration*—recording the word of God on paper.
  - *Corporate Exposure*—copying God's word, thereby exposing the body of Christ to what God wrote down.
  - *Corporate Reception*—the local churches throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire identify and receive God's inspired word and lay aside false and uninspired documents. This process was facilitated by the ministry of the New Testament prophets.
  - *Geographic Exposure/Reception*—copies of God's word reached certain places before others. Therefore, different local assemblies could have been at different stages in the canonical process at different times. For example, it makes perfect sense that churches in the geographical center of Paul's ministry radius around the Aegean Sea came to a consensus on the boundaries of the canon before those in more remote or outlying areas. That being said, God the Holy Spirit, working through the ministry of the New Testament

prophets, placed His stamp of approval on the same books throughout the empire before the seeds of the organized hierarchal church were planted in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

- In terms of the definitions of canon discussed above, Kruger seeks to illustrate them via an interesting discussion of speech-act philosophy.
  - “Speaking (and therefore divine speaking) can take three different forms: (1) *locution* (making coherent and meaningful sounds or, in the case of writing, letters); (2) *illocution* (what the words are actually doing; e.g., promising, warning, commanding, declaring, etc.); and (3) *perlocution* (the effect of these words on the listener; e.g., encouraging, challenging, persuading). Any speaking act can include some or all of these attributes. These three types of speech-acts generally correspond to the three definition of canon outlined in the self-authenticating model. The ontological definitions of canon refers to the actual writing of these books in redemptive history and thus refers to a *locutionary* act. The functional definition refers to what the canonical books do as authoritative documents and thus refers to an *illocutionary* act. And the exclusive definition refers to the reception and impact of these books on the church and thus envisions a *perlocutionary* act.

Speech-act theory helps clarify, once again, that the disagreements over the definition of canon often prove to be a matter of emphasis in any given canonical model. For example, the community-determined models tend toward viewing canon as a perlocutionary act and, therefore, often resist calling something canon until there is an impact or response from the believing community.” (Kruger, 119-120)

- In terms of a succinct definition of canon, Kruger offers the following:
  - “The New Testament canon is *the collection of apostolic writings that is regarded as Scripture by the corporate church*. Of course, as we use the word *canon* throughout this study, we may focus upon just one of the three aspects of this definition at any given time. Therefore, it is important that the reader carefully note the following: while all canonical books (eventually) have all three attributes of canonicity, the term *canon* can still be used for a book *before* it has all three attributes of canonicity. For example, the Gospel of John was “canon” ten minutes after it was written even though it was not yet received by the corporate church. Again, the self-authenticating model is not arguing that the corporate reception of the church *makes* a book canonical. This stands in contrast with the community-determined models, which often make a book’s canonicity contingent on corporate reception. Instead, this model argues that a book can be canonical prior to corporate reception, but cannot be canonical if it never has corporate reception.” (Kruger, 120-121)
- In my opinion, this explanation makes perfect sense. Truly inspired writings were canonical as soon as the writer or amanuenses put down the pen and the ink was still drying on the page even though no other member of the body of Christ was aware of its existence. This is why it is best to view canonicity as a multifaceted process that occurred over time.

## Conclusion

- “The essence of the self-authenticating model is that Christians have a rational basis (or warrant) for affirming the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon because God has created the proper epistemic [truth] environment wherein belief in the canon can be reliably formed.” (Kruger, 121)
- For Bible Believers, Kruger’s conclusions appear to be undeniably true. Yet, their truth value has been questioned even among professing Christians. Even this has not been overlooked by Kruger. In the conclusion to Part 1 of his book, Kruger notes that while there are many “potential canonical defeaters”, three primary defeaters are identified for consideration:
  - *“The challenge to divine qualities: apparent disagreements and/or contraindications between New Testament books.* This defeater is designed to argue against the existence of divine qualities in these books. If New Testament books are inconsistent with one another—as many scholars have claimed—then how could they really be from God? How could canonical books bear internal marks of their divinity if they prove to be a disparate collection of writings with different theologies and different doctrines?” (Kruger, 122)
    - While Kruger does not state this, the answer to this defeater is found in rightly dividing the word of truth and dispensational Bible study.
  - *“The challenge to apostolic origins: a number of the New Testament books were not written by apostles.* Although we have argued here that all canonical books are apostolic, much of modern scholarship argues that a number of our New Testament books are pseudonymous forgeries. For instance, of all of Paul’s epistles, only seven are widely regarded as authentic (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon).” (Kruger, 122)
    - The ministry of the New Testament prophets would have sorted this out. It would not have been hard for them to identify that Luke’s writings, for example, were inspired.
  - *“The challenge to corporate reception: there was widespread disagreement in the early church that lasted well into the fourth century (and beyond).* In this chapter we have argued that the consensus of the corporate church is part of how we identify canonical books because such books would have imposed themselves on the church via the work of the Holy Spirit. But is the significance of the consensus of the church not called into question when we recognize the widespread disagreement and confusion that existed in early Christianity about the extent of the canon?” (Kruger, 122)
    - The New Testament documents themselves would naturally lead a Bible Believer to anticipate a lack of uniformity as to the boundaries of canon just as there was on nearly every other point of doctrine in the first century. A few examples

should suffice: 1) the Corinthians were seeking to minimize the gift of prophecy in their midst in favor of tongues as other assemblies were no doubt doing similar things (I Corinthians 14); 2) false letters as from Paul were circulating in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (II Thessalonians 2:2); and 3) Pauline authority was being abandoned while Paul was still alive (II Timothy 1:15). It would be naive to think that this cluster of corrosive influences would not have negatively impacted the views of some as to the boundaries of the canon.

- Part 2 of Kruger’s book is titled “Exploring and Defending the Canonical Model.” In this section, Kruger goes into more detail in explaining various aspects of the Self-Authenticating Model as well as other pertinent issues. While this material is excellent and worthy of anyone’s time and consideration, it is beyond the scope of what I would like to cover in this class.
- In summation of our ten-week study of canonization, I will leave you with a couple quotes from the pen of Jim Taylor, author of *In Defense of the Textus Receptus*:
  - “. . . the society of believers [body of Christ], have never “determined” canonicity. A book of the Bible does not become the Word of God because it is approved or accepted by the church. No, it is accepted because it is the Word of God. God’s sheep hear his voice. . . Man merely recognized what God had already predetermined. A book was found to be valuable because it had the stamp of inspiration upon it. The people of God canonized the scripture immediately upon reception. We saw this as we studied I Tim. 5:18 and II Pet. 3:15-16. Councils did not create the canon; they merely recorded it.” (Taylor, 84)
- Next week in Lesson 68, we will consider one more point from the second half of Kruger’s book as a transition into a discussion of the transmission of the text.

### Works Cited

Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Taylor, Jim. *In Defense of the Textus Receptus*. Cleveland, GA: Old Path Publications, 2016.