

The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority. By Lee Martin McDonald. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007. Pp. xli, 546. Paperback. US \$29.95. ISBN 1-56563-925-6.

This book is a thoroughly revised third edition of a book published in 1988, titled *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (second revised edition in 1995). Lee Martin McDonald is Professor of New Testament Studies of Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, Canada. His comprehensive and cautious presentation and discussion of all available material concerning the canonization process of the Old and the New Testament appears to be primarily addressed to his evangelical and conservative colleagues. In an elegant and reassuring way the writer accustoms the reader to the in the end inevitable conclusion that the traditional ideas about the biblical canon do not stand modern academic scrutiny. Instead of the well known idea of a three-stage development of canonization of the Old Testament, beginning in around 400 B.C.E. (Pentateuch), 200 B.C.E. (Prophets) and 90-100 C.E. (Writings), comes the opinion that the canon of the Old Testament was not closed before the sixth century C.E. This means that Jesus did not give his followers a closed or fixed collection of scriptures. With regard to the New Testament the traditional Christian reader has to acknowledge that most of the New Testament collection was not fixed by the end of the second century, but that the canon was open at least two more centuries.

McDonald presents his case with a wealth of material and he used the revision of his book to include especially the discussion of recent publications on this subject. He also broadens the issue by paying attention to matters like text criticism, translation, and the production of texts. In this way he shows that canonization is part of a long and dynamic process. The fact that McDonald's book itself also had its own process of growth and revision left too many traces. This does not only concerns the three lengthy prefaces. One finds many repetitions throughout the book, which, added to the redundant style of writing, becomes irritating. The book could easily be cut back to about half of its length and in this way be made more suitable as an introduction for the average student. For instance, most of the lengthy citations from modern scholars could easily be left out, as most of them are already summarized. It is, moreover, confusing that these citations are formally not distinguished from the much more useful citations of primary sources.

The emphasis of this book is on the New Testament. The author appears to be less at home in the field of the Old Testament and seems to be not familiar with the relevant recent discussions about the late dating of big parts of the Old Testament and its redactions, and the recent tendency among Old Testament scholars to value the Septuagint as an important and independent source next or even prior to the Hebrew text as it is preserved in the Massoretic tradition. It would also have been interesting when he had taken into account recent studies about the scribal culture in ancient Israel. He does mention the book of P. R. Davies (*Scribes and*

Schools, wrongly dated in 1988 instead of 1998), but only in the bibliography. Recently also K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (2007) made clear the impact of this research upon the reconstruction of the process of canonization. With regard to the New Testament McDonald rightly points to the importance of the growing use of codices, but this at first sight insignificant custom may have had a greater impact on canonization than McDonald indicates.

McDonald pays much attention to the (fully quoted) Codex Muratori (369-378). Following the suggestions of A. C. Sundberg and extensively discussing all counter arguments he does not want to date it at the end of the second century but in the fourth century. One gets the impression that McDonald is lead here by the fact that such a date for this document with its clear cut canonical list better fits into his theory about the late establishment of the New Testament canon.

At the end of his book McDonald gives a list of criteria employed by the church in the process of canonization. They are all positive: apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, use, adaptability, and inspiration. On the basis of the good survey of the material given by McDonald himself, one could add that canonization was also influenced by the struggle between different parties in the early Christian church. Perhaps McDonald should have taken the question whether the present biblical canon mirrors the relative strength of these different early Christian parties more seriously. One could also regard it as the strength of this book, that it even gives answers to questions not explicitly put by the author.

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