

Scripture Over All Church Traditions

A Short eBook
by Dr. Bobby Harrington



HARPETH
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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A popular book by Eve Tibbs which promotes Eastern Orthodoxy is called *A Basic Guide to Eastern Orthodox Theology*. It puts the priority of tradition over Scripture front and center:

“For the Orthodox Church, there is only one source or authority, and it is the Tradition of the Holy Spirit. Since Scripture exists within Tradition, Scripture can never contradict Tradition.”

Holy Tradition might be thought of as the ‘umbrella’ context under which all aspects of faith and life in the Orthodox Church are properly understood. Holy Scripture exists within Holy Tradition, as does a whole panoply of expressions of the Apostolic Christian Faith: The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the dogmatic decrees of the seven Ecumenical Councils, the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, the threefold pattern of ministry.”¹

In a similar way, with a different Tradition, the official Roman Catholic catechism states how they view the role of scripture and tradition.

Catechism 82 - The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."²

Although the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church claim that both tradition and scripture are equal, it has not functioned that way since the 300s. When scripture and tradition conflict in either of these historic churches, scripture takes a second seat to tradition (see more on this point below). The same is true of Mormonism and many other church traditions. So, we must face some difficulties.

The question before us is this: *is our final authority scripture alone or scripture interpreted by tradition?*

Many of us like and agree with the expression *Sola Scriptura* (*only scripture*) from the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s because it makes clear that Scripture alone is our *final* authority. But we are wise not to make Scripture our *only* authority. This is why some like the expression, *Prima Scriptura* - scripture is our first and final authority, but we value the wisdom and learnings of other authorities in history.³ Here is the point - it is important not to skip over history. Instead, we embrace Christian history, and take in the wisdom that comes from creeds, tradition, and even the pitfalls of those who went before us.⁴

As the adage goes, those who learn from history are less likely to repeat its mistakes. At Harpeth Christian Church (and Renew.org Network) we want to learn about creeds, the early church fathers, councils, and historical Christian teachings so we can gain supplemental insights. They help us interpret Scripture, guard against error, and identify the apostolic faith throughout history—even as they are subordinate and always evaluated against Scripture. The Bible is our "first," "primary," and "final" rule, while other sources nurture our faith with the wisdom and insight we gain from those who have gone before us.

In chronological order, here is how the learnings from history usually work in my life. I will typically consult:

1. Scripture first,
2. Top contemporary scholars second,
3. Restoration voices, like Alexander Campbell (1800s) third,
4. Reformation voices, like Martin Luther (1500s) fourth,
5. Early Christian voices (100-400s C.E.) fifth, and,
6. Scripture finally.

Notice how Scripture is my first *and* last source, so that it remains pre-eminent. But, again, I want to make sure that I learn from history, from the earliest Christians, from the Creeds, from the Reformers, from Restoration Movement leaders, and importantly, from the best scholars and spiritual voices today.

I start with Scripture and pray that God will help me get it right. Then I read or listen to the best scholars of the day, as more ancient documents, archaeology, and insight are often available today than most church leaders had in the period of 500 - 1990 AD/CE. Then, I go back through time. What did Alexander Campbell in the Restoration Movement say? What did Martin Luther and the Reformers say? And, on big doctrinal items, what did the early church and Creeds say?

Everett Ferguson and Thomas Oden taught me to listen careful to the earliest voices just after the scriptures were complete – church leaders from 90 AD/CE 325 AD/CE – what is called Paleo-Orthodoxy – because...

1. They spoke and read the same language—with all of its nuances—as the apostles and others who wrote the New Testament.
2. They lived in the same culture as the apostles and others who wrote the New Testament.
3. Many were directly and individually disciplined by the apostles (in the last part of the first century).
4. They were in the churches that had been established by the apostles and knew the practices that had been established in those churches.⁵

One of the most helpful resources for how these early, “Paleo-Orthodox” church leaders (100-early 300s) understood the big issues of the day, is the book *Early Christians Speak*. It is a summary by Everett Ferguson, the eminent early church history expert and Restoration Movement scholar. It is now a free download ([available here: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/acu_library_books/3/](https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/acu_library_books/3/)).⁶ I find Ferguson’s work to be not only helpful but reassuring, for it shows what the early Christians after the apostles believed—and it affirms many of Harpeth Christian Church (and Renew.org Network) beliefs and practices (baptism as an expression of faith for the forgiveness of sins, weekly communion, a plurality of elders leading the local church).

How Did We Get the New Testament?

I believe that the words of the apostles and the development of the canon of scripture in the earliest parts of church history support the 27 books of the New Testament as the highest and final authority, even over the traditions of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Mormon churches, etc.

The words of Jesus himself, in the great commission, are our starting point. He entrusted his teachings to the apostles.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis mine).

This is why the early church focused upon the teaching of the apostles.

They devoted themselves *to the apostles’ teaching* and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

The apostle Paul described the authority of his words in his writings. Here are two clear passages:

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, *I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*. (Galatians 1:11-12)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, *but as it actually is, the word of God*, which is indeed at work in you who believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

So, naturally, the written words of the apostles were automatically accepted as the Word of God in the earliest church. The first churches were built on the foundation of the apostles (Ephesians 2:20).

The books that became the New Testament were all written before the end of the first century (before 100 A.D.).⁷ When the apostles died, their writings were therefore naturally cherished, relied upon and followed by the earliest Christians. Michael Kruger, an expert in the formation of the canon of Scripture, describes the attitude of the church's leaders in the period just after the apostles:

Early Christians had a high view of the apostolic office, viewing the apostles as the very mouthpiece of Christ himself. Thus, any document containing apostolic teaching would have been received as an authoritative written text (and the beginning of the canon).⁸

Everything went back to the apostles and the Scripture they had written.

Notice the teachings of 2 Timothy 3:14- 4:5 which includes both the Old Testament scriptures and the Word spoken by the apostles, like Paul:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 - In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

It was natural, then, that the writings of the apostles, and those closely associated with them, quickly assumed the status of inspired scripture. Even when they were written, the writings of the apostles (or those associated with the apostles) were given special status.⁹

- The apostle's writings were to be read in the meetings of the church; they were authoritative alongside the Old Testament. (Colossians 4:16)
- The apostle Peter referred to Paul's writings as "scripture." (2 Peter 3:14-16)

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the

wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

- The apostle Paul referred to the Gospel of Luke as scripture (along with the Old Testament in 1 Timothy 5:18).

Through the writings of the apostles, God ensured that there was a written record of Jesus' teachings--given through the apostles--and made available for all people in an objective form.

It is natural then that the earliest Christian leaders and writers after the apostles died took the teaching of the apostles as authoritative. *Between AD 80–98*, Clement of Rome wrote: "Let us set before our eyes the good Apostles," whom he names Peter and Paul. He also stated,

The apostles have preached the gospel *to us from the Lord Jesus Christ*; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost*, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand.¹⁰

St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote the following around AD 110: "Not as Peter and Paul did, do I command you. They were Apostles, and I am a convict."¹¹ And the famous martyr, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of the apostle John, wrote the following:

For neither can I nor anyone like me match the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul. When he was among you, face to face with the men of that time, *he expounded the word of truth accurately and authoritatively*; and when he was absent he wrote letters to you, the study of which will enable you to build yourselves up in the faith which was given to you, a faith which is the mother of us all.¹²

Comments such as these illustrate the high regard the earliest church leaders and churches had for apostolic writings. Note, again, because they were written by apostles, they were automatically authoritative for the early church, when they were first written.

The Concept of the Canon of Scripture

Soon, in early church history, the writings associated with the Apostles were not the only ones which were being read in the churches. False teachings emerged. Consider two clearly identified sources of heretical teaching.

- Marcion was a popular teacher who decided to reject some of the writings of both

the Old Testament and the apostles, somewhere around 150 AD. He was rejected as a heretic in the early church. The early church leaders said that Marcion had two ways of nullifying the scriptures: 1) “he used the knife to excise from the scriptures whatever did not conform with his own opinion,” or 2) he perverted its “meaning by misinterpreting it.”¹³ Although he was an ancient heretic, he seemed to be doing, at an early time, the same thing sadly done today by liberal scholars.

- Some other gospels were written in the late second and third centuries (late 100s and 200s), long after the biblical gospels were written.¹⁴ They are known as the *Gnostic Gospels*, as found in the *Nag Hammadi* documents. They were rediscovered in Egypt after the Second World War, but were well known as heretical writings to the early, established church. They were not only written a long time after the original gospels they depended on the true gospels and make outlandish claims about Jesus, while having the feel of being fake compared to the originals when you read them.

In order to protect Christians from false teaching after the death of all the apostles, the early church leaders wanted to delineate those writings which were authoritative from those which were not. This is the concept behind the word, “canon.” It is “the rule” or “measure” measure of the faith.

By 150 A.D. the Church leader Justin Martyr affirmed the four gospels.¹⁵ Around 170-180 A. D./C.E. Irenaeus delineated the authoritative books.¹⁶ So that by the end of the second century (late 100s), the concept of a full New Testament Canon became firmly established, along with a recommended list of books, as can be seen in the *Muratorian Fragment*.¹⁷ Final clarification of the canon took almost 200 more years, with Athanasius’ letter in 367 A.D./C.E. but the main contours were in place, based upon the teaching of the apostles, from the earliest times.

The early Christian leaders highly valued conservative tradition associated with the apostles, accepting as scripture only those documents as canonical that were believed in the churches “everywhere, always, and by all.”¹⁸ This expression was key: “everywhere,” “always,” and “by all.” The early Christians recognized as authoritative those books which met at least four key criteria:¹⁹

- 1) Apostolic - they had apostolic authors (or were closely associated with apostles).
- 2) Orthodox - they taught the well-known faith of the apostles.
- 3) Ancient – they had been accepted in the churches from the beginning.
- 4) Universal – they were used broadly, in all the churches.²⁰

When the early church clarified the final list of authoritative books, they affirmed that the church itself had been established by the words and work of Jesus communicated by the apostles (Ephesians 2:20). The written works associated with the apostles were the objective norm by which the church was to measure and evaluate herself.²¹

This standard naturally excluded those books which had previously been agreed upon as false, but it also excluded some books that contained other good teachings – and had been used by many in the Church. Books like *The Didache* and *The Epistles of Ignatius* were relegated to a second-class status. The books that were excluded, after some consideration, were books that contained teachings that many valued, but they failed to meet the criteria of “everywhere,” “always,” and “by all.”

Please note this fact - the New Testament was well on its way of coming together by AD 200. The early church expert Everett Ferguson writes:

By the end of the second century there was a core canon recognized virtually everywhere in the great church: four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen letters of Paul, and varying other apostolic writings. In general, Revelation was accepted in the West but not in the East; Hebrews was accepted in the East as a writing by Paul, but not in the West. Of the general epistles, the widest acceptance was given to 1 Peter and 1 John; the others were less well known.²²

Over time, however, these discrepancies would smooth out, and the church achieved a strong consensus for what would become our 27 New Testament texts. Again, the letter of Athanasius in 367 A.D./C.E. is pointed to as the date the canon was agreed upon, but the basis of the canon goes back to the teaching of the apostles.

Here is the crucial point - Whatever an apostle wrote it automatically had authority – it was the words of an apostle! Those words came hundreds of years before any church authority officially acknowledged them.

But People Did Not Personally Own Bibles

The apostle's writings were considered the final authority in doctrinal disputes and teaching during the 100s and 200s AD (the 2nd and early 3rd centuries), but not in the modern sense of every individual owning and privately interpreting a personal Bible. That idea would have been impossible for practical reasons. Instead, authority operated through the church community, where apostolic writings (what we now call the New Testament, plus the Old Testament in Greek translation) were publicly read, taught, and used to settle controversies—especially against heresies like Gnosticism.

Practical realities: No one had a "personal Bible"

- Literacy was low, but not as low as some think. The scholar Craig Evans demonstrates that in Israel there was a surprisingly high literacy rate. He shows that, contrary to what most people think, everyday people in Jesus' time were typically literate. Historians have learned that first-century Jewish people had tremendous respect for Scripture. They believed God had commanded them to teach the Old Testament writings to their children, *so children were required to learn to read and write*. Josephus wrote about

Jewish people and their children. He said that God's law "orders that (children) shall be taught to read and shall learn both the laws and the deeds of their forefathers."²³ The early church was typically close to the synagogue, so even if only 10% of people could read in 100 AD, there were many literate Christians associated with Jews (or Jewish converts). So, community literacy – in the sense that many people coming from the synagogue – could read for the people.

- *Manuscripts were rare and expensive.* There was no printing press so every copy was handwritten on papyrus or parchment scrolls/codices. A full set of Gospels or Paul's letters might cost as much as a worker's annual wage. But churches, especially those associated early on with Synagogues, would likely follow the synagogue practice. This is exactly what Justin Martyr describes in about 155 C.E. The average believer never owned a Bible, but the churches had copies of the apostle's teachings.
- *The New Testament wasn't fully available yet, but the apostle's teachings were widely circulated.* Core texts (Gospels, Paul's letters, some others) circulated among churches by the mid-2nd century, but the exact 27-book list we have today wasn't universally agreed upon until the late 300s. "Scripture" at this time mainly meant the Old Testament (Septuagint) plus these emerging apostolic writings.

How Did Ordinary Christians Encounter "Scripture" as Authoritative?

How it actually worked: Public reading, preaching, and community teaching. From the earliest surviving descriptions, Scripture was experienced **collectively** in their gatherings:

- *Weekly public readings in church assemblies.* Again Justin Martyr (writing around 155 C.E. in Rome) gives the classic picture of a typical Sunday service:

"The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."

This was standard. Everyone heard the texts read aloud—Gospels, letters of Paul, Old Testament prophets. Over time, regular attendees absorbed large portions through repetition, just as people today remember song lyrics or movie quotes without owning the script.
- *Preaching and catechesis explained it.* Bishops, presbyters (elders), or the "president" of the assembly would then preach, applying the readings to daily life and doctrine. New converts (catechumens) went through months or years of oral and instruction apostolic reading instructions before baptism, learning key passages and the "rule of faith" (a summary of core beliefs drawn from Scripture).
- *Memorization and oral culture.* People in the ancient world were far better at memorizing than we are. Jewish and Greco-Roman education emphasized it.

Christians memorized Psalms, sayings of Jesus, and key apostolic teachings. Oral tradition reinforced the written texts.

"Final authority" in practice: Used by leaders against false teachings.

Church fathers like Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) and Tertullian (c. 200 AD) repeatedly called Scripture the "ground and pillar of our faith," "perfect," and the ultimate standard for truth. They appealed to it constantly in writings against heretics.

What Happened with Athanasius and 367 CE?

In the latter half of the fourth century, the New Testament canon became finally and firmly established. Athanasius—the great bishop of Alexandria—issued his Thirty-Ninth Easter Letter in AD 367, effectively putting any lingering debates to rest. In AD 397, the Third Council of Carthage officially ratified the twenty-seven books of the New Testament that we acknowledge today. Around the year 400, Jerome's Vulgate—his Latin translation of the Bible—simply *assumed* the twenty-seven-book canon in use today. "Jerome treated the New Testament canon as a 'given' not subject to modification."²⁴

Everett Ferguson makes some careful distinctions here that I find tremendously helpful for making my central point:

The organized church did not create the canon but *recognized* it... The canon was in a sense "inherited." Writers from the second century on, repeatedly referred to the canonical writings as the books "handed down to us... Succeeding centuries ratified a situation *already established*. The church, therefore, functioned as a witness, not as the judge in the process of canonization."²⁵

The timeless words of F. F. Bruce put it plainly in his book, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*:

"The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect... What these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities."²⁶

J.I. Packer's great summary of this point:

*"The Church [fathers] no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity... Newton did not create gravity, but he recognized it."*²⁷

But that is not all... the process of affirming the teachings of the apostles in the Canon bound the church for all time to the standard of the canon.

Ferguson's seasoned conclusions are thoughtful and most helpful:

Instead of being an indication that the church has authority over the Scriptures, the church's role in recognizing the canon of Scripture is a testimony against the authority of the church. *Recognizing a canon was an act of placing herself under another authority.* If the church wanted to have unlimited authority, it would not have said, "These books are our authority in doctrine and life." The act of canonization was an act of declaring that the church was not her own authority, but that she was submitting to another authority.²⁸

Ferguson implores us to recognize the authority of the text *over and above* the authority of the church.

In a very important article summarizing the Protestant and evangelical understanding against the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox view, German scholar *Oscar Cullman* pointed to the ultimate authority of the Bible. This highly respected scholar summed up the ultimate authority of the Bible over all other churches with these words:

"The early church did not fix a norm for others, but for itself, and committed the church for all future centuries to this norm."²⁹

By accepting the norm of Scripture, the church declared that there was a standard outside herself to which she intended to be subject for all time. . . . The church can fall into error and needs the Bible to measure herself by. In turn, the church serves the canon by continuing in the truth and faithfully proclaiming the Word of God."³⁰

Here are some of the ways that the Eastern Orthodox and, since they had the same roots until 1054 AD/CE, the Roman Catholic church have added teachings and doctrines beyond scripture during the hundreds of years after the apostolic Word was given between 50 and 90 A.D./C.E.:

- Infant Baptism - late 200s & 300s A.D.
- Icon veneration - 300-600, codified in 878 A.D.
- Praying to Mary - 250 – 431A.D.
- Structure of the Divine Liturgy - 300s-400s A.D.
- Single Bishops over clusters of churches - 300s-600s A.D.
- Adding Archbishops - 300s-400s A.D.

These beliefs and practices, when adopted, erased many of the beliefs and practices of scripture. For example, when infants are baptized, they rarely grow up and experience baptism as an expression of repentance, faith and loyalty to Jesus as is the norm clearly taught in scripture (Acts 2:38-39).³¹ When you have Bishops and Archbishops that oversee

churches, you do not appoint a plurality of elders to lead the local church as scripture teaches (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9, Acts 20). Many other doctrines are also erased by the imposition of traditions over the teaching of scripture.

Some of these doctrinal changes may even effect central gospel teachings. This is a topic for another day.³² But God inspired Jude 3 to warn us about changing the original faith:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

We must be clear on the danger of traditions and why imposing traditions over the teachings of scripture really matter. Please briefly read through Mark 7:5-13 and ask yourself, what did Jesus say about putting traditions as a higher authority than God's Word?

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

⁶ He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'^[b]

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

⁹ And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe^[c] your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,'^[d] and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.'^[e] ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

The apostle's teachings were written to be the primary basis of authority.

In summary, there are two ways to think about the authority of the apostolic word over tradition.

1. Apostolic Writings were inherently the final authority. When an apostle – Paul, Peter, John – wrote a manuscript, it immediately triumphed over all other authorities (see Galatians 1:6-9). No subsequent authority was required to validate an apostle's authority.

2. Ancient Christians Subjected Christians of all time to the Apostolic Canon. When the early church acknowledged the canon of scripture, they only affirmed what had been understood from earliest days of the church in the first century. Stated differently, later church

councils only affirmed those books that were questioned on the fringe (for example, Revelation or Hebrews). Other than those books, those later church leaders only affirmed the pre-existence of apostolic authority ... but, once they acknowledged it, they also committed themselves and the church that at that time and throughout the rest of time to the 27 books of the New Testament canon. They were in effect saying, these books are the church's final authority.

We value and learn from history. It helps us to interpret Scripture, guard against error, and to pass on the apostolic faith—but all authority in history and traditions in history are subordinate and must always be evaluated against Scripture.

The Bible is our "first," "primary" and "final" rule.³³ And so, at Harpeth Christian Church we say:

We are people of a book. Our understanding of God is not shaped primarily by experience, tradition, popular opinion, culture or what we're comfortable with. Our understanding of God is shaped by the word of God. It is our first source, our final authority, the greatest rescue story ever written and the best part of all:

It's true!

¹ Eve Tibbs, *A Basic Guide to Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2021) Kindle Edition, 4

² [https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_one/section_one/chapter_two/artcile_2/i_the_relationship_between_tradition_and_sacred_scripture.html#\\$29](https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_one/section_one/chapter_two/artcile_2/i_the_relationship_between_tradition_and_sacred_scripture.html#$29), accessed May 29, 2026

³ I still prefer *Sola Scriptura* along the framework of Anthony Lane, "Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, by Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1994). *Prima Scriptura* is used by some to invoke too much authority from other sources.

⁴ Restoration Movement leaders are well served by learning the lessons described in Hughes and Allen's book, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁵ Everett Ferguson, "Using Historical Foreground in New Testament Interpretation," in *The Early Church and Today 2* (Leafwood Publishers & Acu Press, 2013).

⁶ https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/acu_library_books/3/

⁷ David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 2nd Ed. (IVP Academic, 2018).

⁸ Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 48.

¹⁰ 1 Clement 42.

¹¹ St. Ignatius of Antioch, "Letter to the Romans [ca AD 110]," in Jurgens, 22.

¹² St. Polycarp of Smyrna, "[Second] Letter to the Philippians [ca AD 135]," in Jurgens, 29.

¹³ See F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, p. 145.

¹⁴ See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. XVIII and the incisive critic of Philip Jenkins in *Hidden Gospels* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p 12.

¹⁵ Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, p.85.

¹⁶ Irenaeus delineated the works of heresy and orthodoxy. See Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 110.

¹⁷ See F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, pp. 158-169.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁹ Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1984), 52.

²⁰ In *The Canon of Scripture*, Bruce says that the criteria were 1) apostolic, 2) ancient, 3) orthodox, 4) universal, 5) traditional, and 5) inspirational. Lee McDonald ignores “traditional,” see “Canon” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2nd edition, 1998), p. 209. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²¹ The importance of this historical fact in contradistinction to the claims of the Roman Catholic Church has been definitively stated by Oscar Cullman, “The Tradition,” in *The Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1956).

²² Ferguson, 116.

²³ Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.204; see Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Remains of the Day* (Hendrickson Publishing, 2015), 70.

²⁴ Interestingly, the Syriac church did not recognize 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation until the sixth century, and the Church of the East (Nestorian) has never recognized those books as being canonical, even up to the present. See Ferguson, 117.

²⁵ Ferguson, 120.

²⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 27.

²⁷ Gavin Ortlund, *What It Means to be Protestant: The Case for an Always-Reforming Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024), 88.

28. Ferguson, 120.

²⁹ This point was definitively stated by Oscar Cullman in the advanced debates leading up to Vatican II; see, “The Tradition,” in *The Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1956).

³⁰ Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 81-82.

³¹ Evertt Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Eerdmans, 2013).

³² I plan to make a private paper on the danger to the gospel in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism available in the future.

³³ See Anthony Lane, “Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, by Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1994).