

Is the canon open or closed?

The canon is and must be open insofar as whether or not a writing is, in fact, canonical is determined by a principle of canonicity other than and distinct from the judgment by which it is formally acknowledged as canonical.

Why do I say this? I say it because what writings do and do not satisfy the relevant principle of canonicity is and must be open to question. Like all questions that can be answered only by applying a principle to a particular case—or, better, perhaps, showing that a particular case satisfies the principle—this question can be answered only by empirical, or empirical-historical, methods and results pertinent to the particular case. But whether, or to what extent, those methods and results are adequate is and always must be an open question.

Thus, for example, a particular writing—may be judged to be canonical or noncanonical because, given certain empirical, or empirical-historical, results pertinent to it, it is deemed to satisfy or not to satisfy the relevant principle of canonicity. But if the methods and results assumed by the judgment are inadequate, the judgment may be mistaken and open to correction. Or, again, perhaps a writing not included in the canon was not so included, not because it was deemed not to satisfy the relevant principle of canonicity, but simply because it was not even considered for inclusion, being completely unknown by the given methods and results by which it alone could have been known. In either of these instances, the canon would be subject to change by appeal to the very principle by which it was constituted and, in this sense, would not be closed but open—both to the addition of writings not previously included and to the subtraction of writings hitherto included that, given present methods and results, ought no longer to be judged canonical.

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