

Becoming a People of the Book (Jason BeDuhn)

Ballots for Christianity Seminar, Session 1 of 4

1. The citation of a text as authoritative by a Christian writer does not prove anything about the broader authority of the text in the absence of clear evidence that it was actually used in community gatherings.
or: The use of literary resources in scholastic argumentation need have no relation to textual use in liturgical practice, and the latter certainly cannot be proven from the former.
2. The long established assumption that the first Christians carried over a centrality of scripture to their religious life from prior Jewish practices of congregational worship is untenable in light of (a) the lack of evidence for a liturgical role for Torah prior to the destruction of the Temple, and (b) the lack of reference to reading scripture in the earliest accounts of Christian meetings.
3. When Justin Martyr refers to the gospel materials used in his community as *hypomnēmata*, he is expressly denying them the status of authoritative texts.
4. The best model by which to understand the collection of authoritative texts into a “New Testament” is that of charter documents in Greco-Roman voluntary associations.
5. The surprising predominance of letters in the New Testament has no precedent in Jewish scriptures, and derives instead from the role letters had among charter documents of associations.