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Basic information REMINDER related to the introduction to the New Testament – based on Fr. Felix Just Courses, Loyola University, CA

Eight Tips about the Canonical Arrangement of the NT (*to help you learn the correct order of the 27 NT books*):

- The 27 books of the New Testament are **NOT** listed in *chronological* order (the order in which they were written historically); several *other* principles were operative.
- The **overall** order begins with the *life of Jesus* (four Gospels), then deals with the *beginnings and expansion of the Church* (Acts), then addresses particular *issues and problems in early Christianity* (Letters, Epistles), and finally focuses on the *Eschaton or "End Times"* (as described symbolically in the Book of Revelation).
- The **four Gospels** are listed in what *was* traditionally regarded as their chronological order (i.e., Matthew was thought to be the oldest Gospel); most scholars today, however, believe that *Mark* was the first written Gospel (or at least the oldest of the four canonical Gospels in their full versions, as we know them today).
- The **Acts of the Apostles** was originally the second volume of Luke's two-volume work; but when the four Gospels were grouped together, Acts was placed after John.
- The **Pauline Letters** (written by, or at least attributed to Paul) are divided into two sub-groups: those written to communities and those addressed to individuals; within each sub-group, the letters are arranged *not* in chronological order, but rather in *decreasing order of length* (more or less, although Galatians is slightly shorter than Ephesians).
- The anonymous "**Letter to the Hebrews**" comes immediately after the Pauline letters because people *used* to think it too was written by Paul; it may have been written by one of his followers but was almost certainly *not* written by Paul himself.
- The **Catholic or General Epistles** are also listed in decreasing order of length, although letters attributed to the same apostle are grouped together.
- The **Book of Revelation** (singular! *not* "Revelations"!) closes out the NT canon, since it concludes with a description of the end of time (New Heavens, New Earth, New Jerusalem, etc.)

Ten Stages of NT Formation and Transmission

1. **The Historical Jesus** - words are spoken and deeds are performed by Jesus himself during his lifetime on earth.
2. **Oral Tradition** - traditions and beliefs about Jesus are developed and passed on by early Christian communities.
3. **Written Sources** - some of the miracles and/or sayings of Jesus are compiled and recorded in early written documents.
4. **Written Texts** - individual letters, full Gospels, etc., are written with particular messages for particular situations.
5. **Distribution** - some writings are copied and shared with other Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean.
6. **Collection** - certain Christians begin collecting the letters of Paul and gathering together several different Gospels.
7. **Canonization** - four Gospels, several collections of letters, and a few other texts are accepted as authoritative scriptures.
8. **Translation** - biblical texts are translated into ever more ancient and modern languages: Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, etc.
9. **Interpretation** - the meaning of the scriptures is investigated on various levels: literal, spiritual, historical, social, etc.
10. **Application** - communities and individuals use the NT for practical purposes: liturgical, moral, sacramental, theological, etc.

Four Criteria for Canonicity

1. **Apostolic Origin** - attributed to and/or based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their closest companions).
2. **Universal Acceptance** - acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the Mediterranean world (by the end of the fourth century).
3. **Liturgical Use** - read publicly along with the OT when early Christians gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).
4. **Consistent Message** - containing theological ideas compatible with other accepted Christian writings (incl. the divinity *and* humanity Jesus).

Four-Fold Role of the Evangelists as Authors

1. **Selectors** - from among the many things Jesus said and did, they chose which stories they wanted to include and which to omit.
2. **Arrangers** - they organized the materials in a particular sequence, not necessarily chronologically but often in thematic blocks.
3. **Shapers** - they adapted and edited the individual stories from their sources so as to emphasize the themes they wanted to stress.
4. **Proclaimers** - they were not objective historians but preached the "good news" about Jesus in ways appropriate to their audiences.