EVANGELICAL VERSUS ISLAMIC CANONIZATION

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The 9/11 attacks by Muslims on New York and Washington, D.C posed a question about canonical authority in Islam. Since Islam is ultimately based on the Qur’ān, it is crucial to define and assess the concept of canonization in Islam. Canonization as a theological concept consists of the principles according to which something is originally established and subsequently recognized by adherents as foundational standard for faith and practice. In this essay, Islamic canonization is contrasted with Evangelical canonization. The principles implicit in Islamic recognition of the Qur’ān as canon are observed, followed by the principles in Evangelical recognition of the Bible as canon.

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Introduction

The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. have resulted in more focus on the theology and practice of Islam. Those who planned and participated in the attacks were Muslims who firmly believed that they were doing the will of Allah as acts of jihad (“struggle”). Many Muslims state that Islam is non-violent.¹ However, the hijackers, who intentionally perished in the attacks, believed that they were dying as martyrs in a jihad against those who opposed Allah and his Prophet, Muhammad. They and Osama bin Laden, their organizational leader, believed that they were bound to wage war against the unbelievers, especially since the

infidels (non-Muslims) were corrupting the holy land of the Arabian peninsula.\(^2\)

One question that the events of 9/11 posed to the non-Muslim world, and especially to Evangelicals, is what authority guided the beliefs and commanded the behavior that produced such horrific acts. At the root of these actions is the concept of canonicity in Islam. So, first, that must be addressed. However, beyond consideration of religious bases for violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, for evangelistic and missiological purposes, the Islamic concept of canonization must be compared to the concept of canonization in Evangelicalism.

The purpose of this essay is to contrast the Evangelical concept versus the Islamic concept of canonization. Incidental to this purpose is the contrast between the Evangelical canon and the Islamic canon, so this contrast will be specified only to the extent needed to contrast the two differing concepts of canonization.

**Definition of Canonization**

The term “canon” in theology refers to the foundational, authoritative standard(s) for faith and practice in a specific religion. Canonicity as a theological concept refers to the character of something that is canonical (fundamental and governing standard) based on principles according to which that something was made canonical, i.e., originally established and subsequently recognized by adherents as the foundational standard for faith and practice.\(^3\) Canonization is the process of making something canonical through establishing it as canon and having it recognized as canon.

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For both Christianity and Islam, canonicity and canonization focus on the writings accepted by adherents as the foundational standard for belief and behavior. This study does not concern Evangelical and Islamic canons per se, but rather focuses on the principles that each of these religions asserts, explicitly or implicitly, as divinely establishing and divinely guiding and compelling adherents to recognize their respective holy writings as canon, since both of these religions claim to be founded on and standardized by scriptures.

**Canonization in Islam**

To evaluate Islam’s concept of canonization, there must first be an awareness of what writings have canonical authority in Islam.

*Qur’ān* as Supreme Islamic Authority

The ultimate standard of authority in Islam is the *Qur’ān*, even though Muslims also appeal to the Tradition (*hadīth*), as a secondary source for faith and life. Both are claimed to be from Muhammad, who is asserted to be the ultimate prophet of Allah. The *Qur’ān* is said to be the actual words of Allah revealed to and through Muhammad, and the *hadīth* consists of reports of Muhammad’s words and deeds as well as those of some early Muslims. Arthur Jeffery notes that the *Qur’ān* is the true canon for Muslim beliefs and life, and the *hadīth* is only a “supplementary” authority and “no more lessens the unique authority of the *Qur’ān* as Scripture than does the fact that both Jews and Christians also use supplementary sources . . . lessens the Scriptural authority for them of the Old and New Testaments.” Assessing Islamic canonization means evaluating the principles inherent in recognizing the *Qur’ān* as uniquely divine revelation. The validity of the claim for any authority of the *hadīth* is dependent on the validity of the *Qur’ān* as canon.

**Principles of Islamic Canonization**

To properly consider Islam’s concept of canonization, one must note the principles implicit in Islam’s claim of canonical authority for its holy writings.

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4 R. Marston Speight, “Hadith,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (ed. John L. Esposito; 4 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2:83. Speight (p. 85) notes that *hadīth* are used to provide information about Muhammad’s life, including his personality, family, and work. Because of this content, *hadīth* are used to interpret the *Qur’ān* and to show how the *Qur’ān* was applied to life, because of which application *hadīth* serve as a source of Islamic law (*shari’ah*). See also Ignaz Goldhizer, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 37–43, 46–47.

Divine Transcendence Without Personal Communication

Islamic theology is founded on the principle of the monadic transcendence of Allah. And this transcendence admits little or no personal intimacy. Indeed, lists of the attributes of Allah by Muslim proponents omit any mention of love. So, the canonical authority of the Qur’an is believed in Islam to be directly from Allah, since Allah revealed the Qur’an. However, Allah did not give the Qur’an directly, but through the angel Gabriel.

Revelatory Process Without Human Language Original

Islam is ultimately founded on the Qur’an, which is seen as having been directly revealed over 20 to 23 years to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel and through trances in which he heard a bell-like sound that reflected the original archetype. The title is the key to its mode of revelation. According to Ayoub, Qur’an, means “recitation” and is based on Gabriel’s first command to Muhammad—iqra (“Recite”). It is claimed that the Qur’an is the timeless word of Allah and “unfettered by human sounds and letters” in its original archetype (“the Mother of the Book”). Yet, Muslims say it was then revealed in the form of verbal human words through Gabriel and, more importantly, as a non-verbal power sent into Muhammad’s heart (26:194). Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have been illiterate (96:1–5; 7:157), so he could not possibly have had any cognitive role in the act of revelation other than rote recitation. So Allah’s word was revealed from an eternal, atemporal, non-human

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6 Arthur Jeffery, ed., Islam: Muhammad and His Religion (repr., New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 85. Jeffery (p. 85) says that in the Qur’an, the moral attributes of Allah “are largely overshadowed by the attributes of transcendence.”


10 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, Islam: Faith and Practice (Markham, Ontario, Canada: The Open Press, 1983), 71–74, 78–79. Ayoub states the following concerning the dual modes and the eternal archetype behind the Qur’an: “The Qur’an was communicated to the Prophet Muhammad in two ways. It was taught him by the angel Gabriel in small portions: single verses, groups of verses and entire chapters or surahs, over a period of twenty to twenty-two years. Yet the Qur’an is not only words that can be uttered, heard and recorded, it is also ‘a glorious qur’an preserved in the well-guarded tablet (85:22)’, eternally preserved with Allah. In this form, the Qur’an is the heavenly archetype of which the recited and written Qur’an is only an earthly copy. The Prophet experienced this heavenly Qur’an, as Gabriel did. At such times he fell into a trance-like state, shivering on a hot summer day or dripping with sweat on a cold winter day. Then he heard in his ears sounds like the ringing of a bell, sounds which transformed themselves in his consciousness into human words.

“The Qur’an in this immaterial and timeless form was sent down onto Muhammad’s heart ‘on a blessed night’, the ‘night of determination (44:3 and 97:1).’ The Qur’an in its heavenly archetypal form is the source of Divine revelation throughout human history” (Ayoub, 78–79).
language archetype to Muhammad by two modes: (1) an inner, non-verbal power by which Muhammad heard a bell-like sound; (2) human words through an angel. This revelation involved no human author, but rather an illiterate human reciter. (In fact, the Qur'ān is claimed to have not been compiled in book form until after the death of Muhammad.\(^1\)) Implicit in the assertion of Muhammad’s illiteracy is the belief that these two revelatory modes with their exclusion of any human cognitive literary contribution (but rather was written through a divinely caused and controlled rote recitation) made the Qur’ān canonical—and it would not have been canonical if it were composed in any other way, because thereby the transcendence of Allah would have been compromised.

Prophetic Authority in Only One Man, Muhammad

Islam asserts that Muhammad is the latest and final prophet of Allah. He is said to be in the line of all the previous prophets of Allah, which include Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Some also list Adam as one of the chief prophets. However, Muhammad is viewed as unique among the prophets. All other prophets are said to have been sent “to a particular people, to a particular region of the world and for a certain, limited time.” Yet, Muhammad was the only prophet “sent to the entire world and to all nations on the globe and for all time to come.”\(^1\) Muhammad is said to be “the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets” (33:40).

Muhammad is seen as the ultimate prophet, because he is believed to have received the ultimate and final revelation, the Qur’ān, directly from Allah through the angel Gabriel and the non-verbal sound like the sound of a bell. To Islam, this Book must be accepted by all and seen to abrogate all current forms of previous Books (e.g., the Torah, the Psalms, and the Injil (Gospel)), because all these are considered corruptions of their original text.\(^1\) Islam’s concept of canonicity is that the latest stage in Allah’s historical process of revelation of “the Mother of the Book” is the canon for the world.

Abrogation of Earlier Qur’anic Verses by Later Revelation

As the latest revelation from Allah, the Qur’ān is seen as abrogating all previous revelation, including the Bible.\(^1\) The principle of abrogation (naskh) also operates within the Qur’ān (87:6–7; 2:100, 106; 13:39; 16:98, 101, 103; 22:51). An im-

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\(^1\) Ayoub, Islam, 81–84; Jeffery, Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, 47.

\(^1\) Avdich, Survey of Islamic Doctrine, 9, citing Qur’ān 21:107.

\(^1\) Ibid., 11.

\(^1\) Jeffery, Qur’ān as Scripture, 83.
portant aspect of Qur’anic revelation is that it contains two major portions of recitation—the Mecca portion and the Medina portion. These are not neatly divided from each other. Rather, parts of each portion are interwoven with parts of the other. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a progression in Qur’anic revelation. The progression is said to have taken place totally in the life of Muhammad. And the later (Medina) portions are said to abrogate the conflicting portions of the earlier (Mecca) portions. So, in cases of conflicting passages, the Medina portions are ultimately canonical. Canonicity is established by the latest stage in the revelation of the Qur’ān.

Richard Bell notes that one kind of abrogation in the Qur’ān is when later deliverances are said to modify or annul earlier deliverances. According to Bell, 22:51ff. implies that there may be alterations of verses (ayas). Bell notes that this revision of verses is the explanation of most of the many instances of phenomena in the Qur’ān such as “abrupt changes of rhyme,” unnatural changes of subject, repetitions, breaks in grammar, “abrupt changes” of pronouns, contradictory statements appearing next to each other, passages from earlier and later times appearing next to each other, and “late phrases” being used in verses from earlier times.

However, Bell observes a more substantive kind of abrogation: the replacement of one assertion by a contradicting statement. An instance of abrogation is the change of a Mecca passage that had allowed for worship of the goddesses of Mecca. In 53:19–23 the last three verses are changed to derisively condemn the goddesses of Mecca. The Qur’anic explanation is that Satan deceived Muhammad and inserted this allowance for interceding with the goddesses as a test for the Prophet.

Jeffery discusses how the doctrine of abrogation has occasioned a Qur’anic science known as “the Abrogators and the Abrogated” (an-nasikh wa’l-mansukh). According to Jeffery, Muslim theologian, Ibn Salama, in his treatise, Kitab an-Nasikh wa’l-Mansukh, says that there are three kinds of abrogation in the Qur’ān: 1) abrogation of both text and prescription; 2) abrogation of the text, but not the prescription; 3) abrogation of the prescription but not the text. Of the first kind, Ibn Salama cites examples of suras that used to be recited in the days of Muhammad but later were divinely removed from memory. As an example of this category, Abdullah Saeed specifies a text ruling that five clear breast-feedings renders a marriage unlawful. This text itself had abrogated a text ruling that ten clear breast-feedings renders a marriage unlawful. The abrogating text (called al-rada) is said to have been in the

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17 Bell, Introduction, 85.
18 Ibid. Cragg, Minaret, 103, n. 6; Geisler and Saleeb, Answering Islam, 193.
19 Jeffery, Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, 66.
20 Ibid., 66–68.
Qur’ān during Muhammad’s lifetime, but this text is no longer in the Qur’ān. The second kind of Qur’anic abrogation (text but not prescription) is witnessed in the elimination of a text from the original Qur’ān concerning stoning as a punishment for adultery. Though the text was eliminated, the prescription remained. The third kind of abrogation (prescription but not text) is found in the text of 63 suras, according to Jeffery. In these cases the text has been maintained, but the prescription has not. Jeffery notes the following examples of this kind of abrogation:

The earlier practice of facing Jerusalem in prayer, mentioned in II, 143/138, was abrogated by the command in II, 144/139 ff. to turn toward the sacred mosque in Mecca; the earlier practice of fasting like the Jews in Muharram ten days of Ashura was abrogated by the command to fast the whole thirty days of Ramadan (II, 183/179 ff.); XLIII, 89, which orders that the polytheists be let alone, and VII, 199/198, which bids the Prophet turn away from the ignorant, are both said to be abrogated by the Verse of the Sword (II, 191/187), which orders their slaughter.

Bell notes that this Qur’anic science has become especially important in Islamic Law in the effort to determine which ordinances in the Qur’ān had been abrogated. Bell notes that there have been differences in establishing rules by which to determine whether an ordinance has been abrogated. Of particular interest for the present is Bell’s comment concerning the restrictions on the doctrine of abrogation: “... it applies only to commands, not to narratives or promises or threats; alterations


22 Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 80–81, quotes the Sahih Muslim, no. 4194, as stating that the original Qur’anic text requiring stoning for adultery was eliminated, but not the requirement: “‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbas reported that ‘Umar b. Khattab sat on the pulpit of God’s Messenger [may peace be upon him] and said: Verily God sent Muhammad [may peace be upon him] with truth and He sent down the Book upon him, and the verse of stoning was included in what was sent down to him. We recited it, retained it in our memory and understood it. God’s Messenger [may peace be upon him] prescribed the punishment of stoning to death [to the adulterer and adulteress] and, after him, we also prescribed the punishment of stoning. I am afraid that, with the lapse of time, the people [may forget it] and may say: ‘We do not find the punishment of stoning in the Book of God’ and thus go astray by abandoning this duty prescribed by God. Stoning is a duty laid down in God’s Book for married men and women who commit adultery when proof is established, or if there is pregnancy, or a confession.”

23 Jeffery, Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, 68.

24 Saeed uses “the recitation” and the “wording” instead of “the text;” and “the ruling” instead of “the prescription” in his naming of these three categories of Qur’anic abrogation. Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 79–82.

25 Jeffery, Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, 68, n. 2. Saheed adds another example: 33:50 allows Muhammad (not believers in general) to take wives from many categories (those whom he purchased; those he claimed out of prisoners of war; daughters of maternal uncles and aunts; any believing woman who dedicates herself to him). This passage was abrogated by 33:52, which forbade Muhammad from marrying any more women, except for any women he already possessed by his “right hand.” Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 80.
of practice, such as the recommendation of patience in Mecca and fighting in Medinah, are not properly included under abrogation, but are rather instances of postponement of promulgation of the full law of Islam because of unsuitable circumstances.”

Humanly Controlled Transmission Without Any Corruption

An assertion of Islamic apologists is that the Qur’ān is the only scripture that has been perfectly preserved, its process of transmission is said to have been kept pure of variant readings by the fidelity of its authorized transmitters, who are assumed by Muslims to have made no mistakes in copying the Qur’ān. Assurance of such a perfect transmission is claimed to be by the uninterrupted recorded isnad (the line of authoritative transmitters of the Tradition) going back to Muhammad. Implicit in this claim is the principle that only a text whose perfect preservation can be historically traced through authorized leaders has truly been made canonical by Allah and is to be recognized as canon.

Coerced Recognition of the Qur’ān as Canon

Implicit in the Qur’ān’s Medina portion with its call for the slaying of infidels is the principle that recognition of the Qur’ān as canon is to be coerced by Muslims. For example, the following passages enjoin Muslims to engage in jihad (struggle) for the spread of Islam, including fighting against and killing those who do not convert or pay tribute – even if they are taken prisoner in battle: 9:1–6; 47:4–12; 9:29; 3:195; 4:95; 5:34–36.

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26 Bell, Introduction, 98–99. Others (myself included) assert that the change to violence is a case of abrogation. As part of his overall appeal for more flexible reinterpretation of the Qur’ān to make it more relevant to the lives of Muslims in contemporary societies, Saeed notes that the principle of abrogation (naskh) occurs in Islam outside the Qur’ān through the sunnah (hadīth). [The word sunnah refers to the “normative behavior of the Prophet,” but at times is used as equivalent of the word hadīth. (Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 157)] First, some early Muslim authorities held that hadīth may abrogate a Qur’anic ruling, if the hadīth is a mutawātir (a hadīth “transmitted from a large number of narrators” – not an āhād hadīth, a solitary hadīth). Other Muslim scholars have argued that no hadīth can replace a Qur’anic ruling/prescription, since the Qur’ān is superior to all hadīth. Second, a hadīth may be abrogated by the Qur’ān. Saeed notes that most Muslim scholars allow for this kind of abrogation, since “the Qur’ān is supreme and the sunnah is second to the Qur’ān.” Third, a hadīth may abrogate another hadīth, provided that both hadīth are equal in status – e.g., the abrogating is not an āhād hadīth (a solitary hadīth) and the abrogated is not a mutawātir hadīth (a hadīth “transmitted from a large number of narrators”). Saeed, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 78–79. See Saeed’s entire discussion on abrogation in his chapter 7: “Abrogation and Reinterpretation,” 76–89.


28 Pickthall, Koran, 145–46: (9:5): “Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-duœ, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

147–48: (9:29–30): “(29) Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by his messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low. (30) And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!”

361: (47:4–6): “(4) Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks
This principle of coerced recognition of the Qur'ān is also implicit in the coercive expansion of Islam in history and the violence threatened and perpetrated against Muslims who convert to other religions (apostates). Anderson’s words are sobering:

One more religious duty (other than the Five Pillars) deserves notice: the duty of Jihad or Holy War. It is incumbent in general on all Muslims who are adult, male and free, to answer any legally valid summons to war against the infidels; and he who dies in a Jihad is a martyr and assured of paradise. The Jihad, with the fanatical courage it evokes, has been by no means limited to the inception of Islam, and its possible relevance for the future can scarcely be ignored. . . . From the earliest times Muslims have divided the world into Dar al-Islam, where Islam reigns supreme, and Dar al-Harb (the Abode of War), where the rule of Islam should be extended, if necessary by war. Polytheists were given the option of conversion or death, while the People of the Book (Jews or Christians) were given the additional alternative of submission and tribute.29

In Islam, the Qur'ān has been established in time as canon by Allah partly through the command to coerce belief in its teachings. However, as Friedmann discusses, coercion has not been applied uniformly in the expansion of Islam outside the Arabian peninsula, but coercion has always been a possibility. In places where non-Muslims have been few and without influence, or in places where Muslim rulers have desired tribute money from non-Muslims, relative toleration has been practiced within the confines of enforced tribute and prohibition against proselytizing Muslims. However, there are also traditions in Islamic history that equate the legal status of all Muslim regions with the legal status of the Arabian peninsula, as Friedmann says, “extending the prohibition on the existence of non-Muslim religions beyond the boundaries of the Arabian peninsula and applying it to any Muslim town.”30

until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That (is the ordinance). And if Allah willed He could have punished them (without you) but (thus it is ordained) that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain. (5) He will guide them and improve their state, (6) And bring them unto the Garden which He hath made known to them.”


30 Friedmann, Tolerance and Coercion in Islam, 92–93. See Friedmann’s detailed discussions in his third chapter, “Is There No Compulsion in Religion?” (87–120), and his fourth chapter, “Apostasy” (121–59). James L. Payne compared countries in which Islam was “the dominant religion” with the other countries of the world and concluded based on statistical studies that “the religion and culture of Islam have a bias toward violence which would make it a natural breeding ground for terrorism.” Payne noted that statistical studies showed that countries whose majority population is Muslim had military that is 50% larger per 1,000 population; were involved in twice the number of civil and international wars; comprised the large majority (13 out of 19) of nations with the worst problems of human slave trafficking; had the unusually “brutal punishments, including maiming and branding;” and had a greater incidence of “political murder” (e.g., assassinations and slayings of political opponents). Most germane to the issue of religious coercion was the greater denial of civil rights (e.g., right of association and right of free speech) in Muslim countries: “On a scale ranging from 1 (full respect for civil rights) to 7 (no respect for civil rights), Muslim countries drew an average score of 5.24, and non-Muslim countries a score of 2.96.” (James L. Payne, A History of Force: Exploring the Worldwide Movement Against Habits of Coercion, Bloodshed, and Mayhem (Sandpoint, ID: Lytton Publishing Company, 2004), 154–57. The quote is on p. 156, citing Freedom
Canonization in Evangelicalism

Having looked at Islamic canonization, evaluation of that concept from an Evangelical standpoint must be preceded, first, by a reminder of what writings have canonical authority in Evangelicalism and then by a summary of pertinent principles of Evangelical canonization.

The Protestant Bible as Supreme Evangelical Authority

The ultimate written authority for Evangelicalism is the Protestant Bible – the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. Evangelicalism does not accept the Apocrypha as canonical writings.31

Principles of Evangelical Canonization

In contrasting Evangelical canonization to Islamic canonization, it is important to specify the principles involved in Evangelicalism’s recognition of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as canon.

Divine Transcendence, Immanence, and Personal Intimacy

Evangelicalism claims that God is transcendent, but also omnipresent. He has ultimate control over everything and is personally, intimately involved in every aspect of His creation. So the Bible was made canon, because the sovereign God willed it to be canon – and because He was ever present and working with people to assure that it included all that He willed and only what He willed.32

The Divine-Human Book, Divinely Produced Through Many Human Authors

A second principle of the Evangelical concept of canonicity is that the Bible was produced ultimately by God—but through human authors. Evangelicalism asserts that the books of the Bible were all equally revealed by God. However, God worked in different modes and through many human authors to reveal His Word. Some portions of the Bible are transcriptions of God’s words. Other portions were produced by humans through the internal moving by God in such a way that what was produced was what God intended, but written by humans and bearing the impress

31 It is not within the scope of this study to trace the history of canonical recognition in the ancient church. However, the only major theologian of the ancient church favoring the inclusion of apocryphal books in the OT was Augustine. Nevertheless, his list omits Baruch and includes 1 Esdras, which was not recognized by the Council of Trent. And Augustine stated that the Apocrypha had a "secondary canonicity" as compared to a "primary canonicity" for the Hebrew canon (City of God, 18.36). For a more complete discussion, see Harris, Canonicity, 178–89; Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 307–310; Grudem, Systematic Theology, 57–59.

of their respective personalities and styles. Each of these books reflects overarching theological themes that the respective human authors used to arrange their material – including the transcribed material. Evangelicalism holds that the canonical authority of the Bible was established by God through the wisest means of establishing and inviting recognition of canonical authority – through various modes of writing and various humans serving as authors, not mere transcribers, of the text.

**The Divine Authority of Jesus Christ**

Ultimately, the Evangelical concept of the origination and recognition of canonicity rests on faith in the divine authority of Jesus Christ. As David Dunbar observes, the authority of Christ was the basis for the church accepting the canonicity of the OT and treasuring the writings of His apostles as expansions of the canon:

> The prominent place that Jesus and the early church gave to the Old Testament indicates that Christianity, from its inception, was a religion whose existence and self-identity were structured (in part) by a canon, a closed collection of uniquely authoritative writings. There was, thus, a canonical consciousness in the church from its very beginning. If this would not have led the church necessarily to expect an expansion of the canonical literature, it would surely have meant that such an expansion could not have seemed foreign or inappropriate. . . . The authority of Jesus for the early church was inseparable from the authority of the apostles. . . . The apostles were the official channels of revelation appointed by Christ Himself. . . . They were to speak for Him, and those who heard them heard Christ. . . . The uniqueness of the apostolic ministry ensured that the words of the apostles would be regarded as a precious deposit entrusted

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33 See Warfield’s explanation of the moment of inspiration as being preceded through all the ages of time by God’s providential preparation of a human author, culminating in the actual moment of “super-induction” by the Holy Spirit (a “Divine operation” in which the Holy Spirit was “flowing confluently in with the providentially and graciously determined work of men”). Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 154–58. (See also Warfield’s conclusion from 2 Pet 1:20f. that one mode of biblical revelation is “concursive operation”: “The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defect they may manifest, but as working confluent in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as his instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach His aim.” Warfield states that in this “concursive operation” the “total personality of the organ of revelation” is employed by the Holy Spirit. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Revelation,” *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 94–95.)

34 For a more complete presentation of the Evangelical concept of the Bible as a divine-human book, see René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 35–42. Pache draws an analogy between the Bible and Jesus Christ as perfect God and perfect man. This analogy is limited in that Christ was deity, but the Scripture is not. Nevertheless, with this limitation in mind, the analogy is helpful. Both incarnation and inspiration originated with the divine will to reveal. Both used human agency for the revelation, without compromising the divine by error while fully including the human. Both produced entities that were divinely perfect and yet fully human. Also, see Warfield’s discussion of this divine-human analogy: Warfield, “Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” 162–63.
Prophetic Authority Given by God to Many Authors Over Many Centuries

According to Evangelical theology, canonicity is eternally established by the Triune God, but it was established in time through verbal revelation directly given to and through specially chosen persons (prophets and apostles). This factor of canonization is implicit in the historical insistence that any book recognized as canonical had to give evidence of having been written by someone with prophetic authority. Without prophetic authority manifested, a book was not canon.

Progressive Revelation Without Deletion of Words

Evangelicalism’s concept of canonical authority includes a principle of progressive revelation. This principle maintains that God gave His Word in historical stages, over many centuries, with each successive stage providing more information about Himself and His will. This principle recognizes that a later stage may have certain commands that make previous commands no longer applicable. However, the replacement does not occur in such a way that the essence and character of God as perfect truth, justice, and holiness is compromised or words removed. This principle also asserts that in a truly progressive revelation, the stages of progression are clearly delineated by contextual indicators. So, the Evangelical concept of canonization includes the principle that, in the case of conflicting commands, the later revelation is directly applicable. Yet, both stages of the revelation are seen as communicating the consistent morally perfect nature of God – and each successive stage as further detailing the revealed nature of God without removing any words. All is canon for faith – and for practice that is not specified in the canon as only temporarily required.

Divinely Mediated Transmission Through Fallible Human Copyists

Evangelicalism believes that the Bible was inspired in its original autographs, and that, among all of the MSS, none (many say “few”) of the original readings have been lost in transmission, even though not every MS has every original reading.

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38 For a cogent historical defense of the doctrine of the inspiration of the original autographs of the Bible, see John D. Woodbridge, Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
39 An issue that exists in Evangelicalism is whether preservation of the original readings is marked by “essential purity” (allowing for some loss of the original readings, so long as the salvific message remained intact)– or perfect purity (not allowing any loss of the original readings). For the “essential purity,” “free from serious error” view, see John H. Skilton, “The Transmission of the Scriptures,” The Infallible Word (ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 139; Harris, Canonicity, 80; Daniel B. Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,”
Evangelicalism asserts that copies and translations of the Bible are authoritative only to the extent that they accurately reflect the original autographs. This principle acknowledges God’s preservation of His Word through the years of transmission, yet holds that this transmission has not been a humanly controlled process, but rather a divinely controlled process through the hands of fallible humans. So the process has included some humans accurately preserving certain readings—while other humans accurately preserved other readings. And Evangelicalism asserts that no variant reading has ever corrupted any doctrine. So, the Evangelical principle of divinely mediated transmission affirms that the Bible has been divinely protected as canon and invites recognition of it as canon.  

**Spiritually Induced Human Recognition of The Books of the Bible as Canon**

A final relevant principle of the Evangelical concept of canonization is that its recognition aspect is dependent on internal divine spiritual inducement. Evangelicalism asserts that the Bible is recognized by each believer and by each generation of believers because of the illuminating and regenerating work of God in the human heart, leading people to recognize it as their canon. Evangelicalism specifically teaches that only by internal, divine illumination and inducement accomplished through the actual words of the Bible will anyone truly accept the Bible as canon. Acceptance of the Bible as canon is asserted to be an act of faith. So the temporal process of recognition of the canonicity of the books of the Bible was a spiritually dynamic process—not an assertion forcibly dictated by a human authority.  

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41 Since acceptance of the Bible as canon is dependent on one’s acceptance of its divine inspiration, then acceptance of the Bible as canon is a matter of inner enlightenment and conviction. Bruce says, “We may well believe that those early Christians acted by a wisdom higher than their own in this matter, not only in what they accepted, but in what they rejected. Divine authority is by its very nature self-evidencing; and one of the profoundest doctrines recovered by the Reformers is the doctrine of the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, by which testimony is borne within the believer’s heart to the divine character of Holy Scripture. This witness is not confined to the individual believer, but is also accessible to the believing community; and there is no better example of its operation than in the recognition by the members of the Early Church of the books which were given by inspiration of God to stand alongside the books of the Old
Evaluation

Having set forth some key principles of both the Islamic and the Evangelical concepts of canonization, it now remains to assess the Islamic concept versus the Evangelical. Since the Islamic concept rests ultimately on the trustworthiness of Muhammad as a prophet and his purported revelation, the Qur’ān, and since Islam claims to supersede Christianity and the Bible, Muhammad and the Qur’ān, as well as their canonical recognition, must be the foci of a final assessment.

Evaluating Muhammad as a Prophet

If Muhammad was really the last and most authoritative of all the divinely appointed prophets, he must have passed five tests: definite divine call to be a prophet, fulfilled prophecy, miraculous attestation, moral integrity, and non-contradiction. Muslims claim that Muhammad had all of these characteristics. Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb demonstrate that Muhammad failed all five tests. Muhammad himself originally doubted his call, and the description of the call itself fits the description of ecstatic, occultic experiences. Supposed Qur’anic prophecies do not have the clarity or specificity of meaning that biblical prophecies have. The Qur’ān does not claim that Muhammad did any miracles; indeed, he refused to base his claim to be a divinely appointed prophet upon the performance of miracles. Stories about Muhammad’s supposed miracles are in the hadīth, which do not have the authority of the Qur’ān. Finally, Muhammad was immoral. He sanctioned polygamy; contradicted his own written limit of four wives by having fifteen; advocated holy wars against unbelievers; committed piracy; sanctioned assassinations in retaliation for personal insults; broke promises; and killed the Jewish men of Medina and sold their women and children into slavery. This last point (immorality) is especially important, because advocates of Islam have asserted that prophets have the characteristic of “impeccability” (isma). They are “naturally good and sagacious, such men as shun blameworthy actions and all things unclean. . . . Thus they seem to have an instinctive inclination to rise above things that are blameworthy, and even shrink from them as .

Covenants, the Bible of Christ and His apostles, and with them to make up the written Word of God” (Bruce, Books and Parchments, 113). The spiritually dynamic aspect of recognition of the canon is also articulated well by Kruger in his chapter, “My Sheep Hear My Voice: Canon as Self-Authenticating,” in Canon Revisited, 88–121.

42 This study does not intend to consider the controversy concerning whether Muhammad existed, but, for the sake of engaging Islamic canonicity, seeks to assess whether Muhammad as he is portrayed by Islam is worthy of the status as the most authoritative divinely inspired prophet. The controversy over the historical existence of Muhammad seems to have arisen in the 1970s and intensified in the early 21st century. Sources questioning the existence of Muhammad: Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003); Robert Spencer, Did Muhammad Exist?: An Inquiry Into Islam's Obscure Origins (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2014). Sources asserting the historicity of Muhammad: Michael Cook, Muhammad (Oxford University Press, 1983); Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

43 Geisler and Saleeb, Answering Islam, 154–76.
though such things were repugnant to their inborn discipline.” Based on Muhammad’s failure to qualify as a prophet, any words from or through him cannot be canonical.

Evaluating the Qur’ān as Divine Revelation

The case for the canonicity of the Qur’ān fails not only because of the messenger, but also because of the contents themselves.

Muhammad’s Illiteracy

Its having been given through a supposedly illiterate man does not prove the Qur’ān’s divine origin, since, if he indeed was illiterate, his scribes could have arranged his words – even changed them. And he may not have been illiterate, since the Arabic words, al umni, in 7:158, probably do not mean “can neither read nor write,” but rather “Gentile” (as in 2:73; 3:19, 69; 7:157).

Corrupted Transmission

Second, the Qur’ān has not been perfectly preserved. The Qur’ān was compiled after Muhammad’s death, according to Muhammad’s contemporary follower, Zayd ibn Thabit, who said that originally scribes did not write Muhammad’s statements in a book. Zayn claimed that he gathered the various statements from palm branches, stones, and bones. The text was not standardized until the reign of Uthman ibn Affan, the third Muslim Caliph (d. 656). Before that, there were several competing versions. Uthman decided to canonize the Madinan Codex and destroy all others. Today there are a thousand or more variant readings from only two early non-extant codices. In spite of the efforts of Uthman, today there are indeed differing versions with many variations in each sura. The Ibn Masud Codex of the Qur’ān, used by the Sunni sect, has many variations from the Uthmanic version. Jeffery takes more than 90 pages to demonstrate that the variations involve clauses and sentences. Finally, the Shi’ite sect claims that Uthman excised many verses that spoke of Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, whom they claim should have been Muhammad’s immediate successor. Very early there were competing versions of the Qur’ān, evidence of which is the many variant readings. So the Islamic principle of canonicity asserting the necessity of pristine transmission negates the canonicity of the Qur’ān.

Contradiction by Abrogation

As noted above, the principle of abrogation is important in the Qur’ān. C. G.

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45 Pickthall, Koran, 133, n. 1.
Pfander notes that Islamic tradition states that current verses on suckling are the result of annulment of original verses prohibiting suckling; and 24:2, which assigns 100 stripes as the punishment for adultery, replaced the original requirement for stoning as the punishment. Furthermore, as noted earlier in this study, a revelation in Mecca allowing intercession to some idols was abrogated to become the current 53:21–23. Muhammad said that Satan had deceived him and inserted the previous verses into the revelation. And then there was the abrogation of tolerance for other religions by the new requirement to coerce conversion (contrast 2:256 with 9:5, 29).

The principle of abrogation results in contradiction of Allah, because 10:64 says “there is no changing the words of Allah.” And 6:34 says “There is none that can change the words of Allah.” These verses are directly contradicted by 2:106: “Whatever previous commandment We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We reveal in this Quran one better or the like thereof.”

As Gerhard Nehls points out, any claim that abrogation is simply the adaptation of divine truth to different people in different times is suspect, since the change took place in such a short span of years and within the prophetic career of one man. The changes do not concern what preceded Muhammad. Rather, the changes seem to be convenient corrections. The very Islamic canonicity principle of abrogation results in Allah being a deity that contradicts his own decrees. So this canonicity principle itself disqualifies the Qur’ān from being canon.

Self-Contradiction in Facts

Geisler and Saleeb point out that “there are verses that the Qur’anic abrogations apparently forgot to redact.” Some verses (7:54; 32:4) say that the world was created in 6 days. But 41:9–12 says that it was created in 8 days. Divine canon cannot be self-contradictory.

Evaluating Recognition of the Canonicity of the Qur’ān

All too often in Islamic history, conversion to Islam has been coerced by force. And even today, non-Muslims and converts from Islam are persecuted in many Middle Eastern, African, and Asian nations. Admittedly, Christian-initiated coerced conversion and persecution of non-Christians and between competing sects in Christendom are evident in periods of history. However, this behavior was not commanded

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50 Geisler and Saleeb, Answering Islam, 197.
51 Some examples are Augustine of Hippo’s advocacy that the state should forcibly compel heretics and schismatics to return to the Catholic Church; the destruction of paganism by force in Scandinavia; the burning and torturing of Jews, Muslims, and Protestants by the Roman Catholic Inquisition in France and Spain; the execution of the Unitarian Michael Servetus in the Geneva of Calvin’s day; the burning of Protestants in England in the reign of Queen Mary (“Bloody Mary”); the persecution of Roman Catholic priests in Elizabethan England and Scotland. See the following: Augustine, Epistula 89.1–7; 93.1–3, 5;
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by Christ and the Apostles. Quite the contrary (cf. Matt. 26:52). Islamic coercion is based on the explicit statements of the Medinah verses. Geisler and Saleeb have well noted that Islam’s early expansion was through the use of the sword, but Christianity’s early expansion was without using violence. The only use of the sword that Christianity experienced in its early years was persecution against it by the Roman government.52 Early Christianity (before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire) grew by the spiritually regenerating power of the Gospel; Islam grew by intimidation. So there is an implicit canonization principle of coercion in Islam. However, recognition of canonicity in religion should be a spiritual matter. So coerced recognition is not genuine recognition. And if the Qur’ān’s canonicity depends on coercion, the Qur’ān is not divine canon.

**Conclusion**

When their respective concepts of canonization are compared, Islam is inferior to Evangelicalism. Islam’s principle of prophetic authority is undermined by the life of Islam’s prophet. Its principle of abrogation itself undermines the claim of Qur’anic canonicity by making Allah and his book self-contradicted. Its principle of revelatory process from heavenly archetype to human copyist without direct revelation in human language does not compel recognition of canonicity, because this was an ecstatic process in which the prophet as human was not encountered in such a way that he could assess the truthfulness of received revelation and cognitively author its writing. Also, in this process there was no confirmation and validation of the prophet by others with equal authority (as there was among the prophets and apostles of the Bible). Finally, Islam’s principle of coercing recognition of canonicity does not result in true spiritual recognition.

Evangelicalism wins the contest of canonicities and canonizations. Its canonization is winsomely balanced, as it is sourced in the God who is transcendently sovereign and yet enters into intimate, even incarnate fellowship with people to reveal His Word. Evangelical canonicity includes the human in the process of revelation, in which God personally prepared and then moved upon the writers, so that they were personally engaged to author what He willed to be written—without violating or suppressing, but rather using their personalities. And this process involved many human authors over 1,500 years, resulting in recognition of the authority of the authors by each other and by the people of God. Evangelical canonization is built on the supreme

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engagement of people by God: the incarnation of God the Son as Jesus Christ, who, as the God-man, validated all the words of the biblical prophets and apostles by His redemptive words and work. Evangelical canonization includes non-contradictory progression in God’s revelation of His Word, so, in this canonization, newly revealed truth never replaced the morality of the God of previous revelation, nor caused words to be deleted, even though at times it did replace economic arrangements. Finally, Evangelical canonicity is based on the true God, who sovereignly and spiritually produced the canon through men, and ever guides its recognition and transmission through believers by His grace of spiritual illumination and regenerating power in their hearts.

**CHRONOLOGY OF EARLY ISLAM**
(source: www.answeringislam.org)

c. 570  
Birth of Muhammad to the tribe of Qureish. His father was Abdullah, who died before he was born. Mother died 6 years later. Raised by grandfather and uncle, Abu Talib, who at one stage of Muhammad’s life protected him.

c. 592  
According to traditions, he began travelling to Syria with trading caravans, and on one of these journeys met Bahira, a Syrian Christian monk.

595  
Married Khadijah, a wealthy widow, who was Muhammad’s employer.

610  
While meditating in a cave on Mt. Hira near Mecca, Muhammad claimed that the angel Garbiel appeared to him to recite (Qur’ân).

615–16  
Persecution from his own tribe of Qureish forced some of his followers to emigrate to the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. Mohammad and his “Companions” stayed in Mecca.

619  
Death of Khadija, and of Abu Talib, Muhammad’s uncle and protector. Muhammad’s position now less secure in the tribe.

622  
Escape to Medina from the hostile Meccans in response to an invitation from a group of Muslim converts (“Helpers”) for him to come to resolve the conflicts between the different communities in Medina. This flight is known as the Hijra, and marks the beginning of Muslim calendar. Muslim dates are marked with A.H.

624  
Muslims began raiding caravans from Mecca. During Battle of Badr Muslims (324 men) defeated Meccans (950 men).

624  
Battle of Uhud - Muslims defeated by Meccans. Some Muslims dismayed with Muhammad.

627  
Battle of Ahjab - Muslims repelled the Meccan attack on Medina.

628  
Treaty of Hudaibiyah between Muhammad and Meccans, enabling him to return for pilgrimage the following year.

629  
Muhammad and the Muslims returned to Mecca on 11 January with 10,000 men. Meccans submitted without fighting. Muhammad declared a general amnesty. All idols in the Ka’aba destroyed. Some traditions say that Muhammad did not destroy the images of Jesus and Mary in the Ka’aba. Muhammad returned to Medina. Beginning of mass movement of tribes embracing Islam.
631 Muhammad’s last pilgrimage to Mecca.

632 Muhammad died in Medina.

632–34 1st Caliph, Abu Bakr: prevented many tribes from breaking away. Defeated Byzantine army in 634.

633 Battle of Yamana against Musailamah Al-Kazzab, who claimed to be a prophet. Several Companions who knew the Qur’ân by heart were killed. Abu Bakr was said to have instructed Zaid b. Thabit to prepare a single copy of the compete Qur’ân, who did so and demanded that there are two witnesses for each piece.

633–44 2nd Caliph, ‘Umar: supposedly carried the collections of the surah of the Quran. Defeated Byzantine army at Battle of Yarmuk (636); captured Jerusalem, and gained control of Syria, Egypt and Persia. Expelled all Jews and Christians from Arabia.

644–56 3rd Caliph, ‘Uthman: appointed Zayd to collect the fragments of the written Qur’ân and established the official text of the Qur’ân. All other texts were ordered destroyed.

653 Campaign against Armenia and Azerbaidjan, and serious differences arose among the Muslims regarding the Qur’ân. It was said that Uthman instructed Zaid b. Thabit and three others to prepare a fresh copy. After this, several copies were sent throughout Muslim lands, and Uthman ordered all other copies destroyed.

656–61 4th Caliph, ‘Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law. At the death of Muhammad, a small party (shi’ah) sympathetic to ‘Ali wanted him to be the caliph, whom the Shi’ites claimed was given this authority by Muhammad. The majority voted instead for Abu Bakr.


750–1228 Abassid Dynasty ruled in Baghdad.