

“If you have been following canon studies over the past three decades or so, you will be familiar with the name Lee Martin McDonald. In *Before There Was a Bible*, McDonald spills his extensive knowledge of the primary sources, tracing the traditions through early creeds, hymns, sacramental affirmations, proto-lectionary materials, and catalogues that eventually came to comprise the Christian Bible. Additionally, he brings vast erudition to bear on the question of whether the categories of canonical and non-canonical retain their utility any longer. This new volume has indisputable value for specialists and non-specialists alike.”

CLARE K. ROTHSCHILD, Lewis University, USA

“Lee McDonald uses the complex history of ancient scriptures as a lens through which to view the emergence of Christianity and its gradual separation from Judaism. Clear and accessible, this would be an excellent undergraduate textbook.”

JOHN J. COLLINS, Yale University, USA

How did authority function before the Bible as we know it emerged? Lee Martin McDonald examines the authorities that existed from the Church’s beginning. He explores the texts containing the words of Jesus, which would in time become the New Testament, the not yet finalized Hebrew Scriptures (referred to mostly in Greek), and the apostolic leadership of the churches.

McDonald traces several sacred core traditions that broadly identified the essence of Christianity before there was a Bible, summarized in early creeds, hymns and spiritual songs, baptismal and Eucharistic affirmations, and in lectionaries and catalogues from the fourth century and following. McDonald demonstrates how those traditions were included in the early Christian writings later recognized as the New Testament, while also showing how Christians did not fully agree on the scope of their Old Testament canon, and that it took centuries before there was universal acceptance of most of the books now included in the Christian Bible.

Furthermore, McDonald illustrates that whilst writings such as the canonical gospels were read as authoritative texts likely from their beginning, they were not yet called or cited as Scripture. What was cited in an authoritative manner were the words of Jesus in those texts, alongside the multiple affirmations and creeds that were circulated in the early Church and formed Christianity’s key authorities and core sacred traditions. This volume is of great value to both undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as seminary students and biblical scholars.

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