

The Bible Rooted in History

1) Historical Myths

- a) There was a council under Emperor Constantine that voted on and settled the disputes over which books would be in the Bible.
 - i) Most point to Nicea in the 4th century
 - (1) There is no record that this event or any like it (voting over or on the NT Canon) ever happened.

2) The truth that we have looked at

- a) The development of the New Testament canon begins with the writings of the apostles. It should be remembered that the writing of Scripture primarily occurs in connection with God's great acts in redemptive history¹
 - i) The Old Testament closes with the expectation of the Messiah to come (Mal. 3:1–4; 4:1–6). The next stage in redemptive history is the coming of the Messiah, and it is not surprising that no further Scripture would be written until this next and greatest event in the history of redemption occurred.²
 - ii) Therefore, the New Testament consists of the writings of the apostles.¹⁹ It is primarily the apostles who are given the ability from the Holy Spirit to recall accurately the words and deeds of Jesus and to interpret them rightly for subsequent generations.³
 - (1) Jesus promised this to His disciples
 - (a) **John 14:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
 - (b) **John 16:13–14 (ESV)** ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
 - iii) Because the apostles, by virtue of their apostolic office, had authority to write words of Scripture, the authentic written teachings of the apostles were accepted by the early church as part of the canon of Scripture. If we accept the arguments for the traditional views of authorship of the New Testament writings,²³ then we have most of the New Testament in the canon because of direct authorship by the

¹ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

² Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

¹⁹ A few New Testament books (Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Jude) were not written by apostles but by others closely associated with them and apparently authorized by them: see the discussion below, pp. 62–63.

³ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

²³ For a defense of traditional views of authorship of the New Testament writings, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

apostles. This would include Matthew; John; Romans to Philemon (all of the Pauline epistles); James;²⁴ 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Revelation.⁴

(1) Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude were accepted by the early church on the basis of their close association with the known Apostles

(a) Mark- Peter

(b) Luke – Paul

(c) Jude – James and half-brother of Jesus

(d) Hebrews – Paul

(i) The author of Hebrews was known by the first church and they readily accepted it

(ii) Later generations did not know the author, then begins the debate.

iv) For a book to belong in the canon, it is absolutely necessary that the book have divine authorship. If the words of the book are God’s words (through human authors), and if the early church, under the direction of the apostles, preserved the book as part of Scripture, then the book belongs in the canon.⁵

3) History

a) The Apostolic Period (70-150)

i) These writers are important because their writing overlaps with that of the Apostles. An examination of these writings shows an early and widespread acceptance of what we call the New Testament

(1) The Testimony of the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* (c. 70–130)¹

(a) The title of the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* indicates that it was later wrongly ascribed to Paul’s first associate. This work cites the gospel of Matthew (26:3) after stating that it is what “God saith” (5:12). The same writer refers to the gospel of Matthew (22:14) by the New Testament title “Scripture” in 4:14, which the New Testament says is “inspired” or “breathed out” by God (2 Tim. 3:16).⁶

(2) Clement of Rome’s *Epistle to the Corinthians* (c. 95–97)

(a) Clement of Rome, also a contemporary of the apostles, wrote his epistle after the pattern of Paul. In it he quotes the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32) after calling them “Scripture” (chapter 2). He urges his readers to “act according to that which is written” (“for the Holy Spirit saith, ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,’ “chapter 1, quoting Jer. 9:23). He further appeals to “the Holy Scriptures, which are true, given by the Holy Spirit”

²⁴ James seems to be considered an apostle in 1 Cor. 15:7 and Gal. 1:19. He also fulfills functions appropriate to an apostle in Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12: see p. 908 below.

⁴ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

⁵ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.

⁶ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

(chapter 45). The New Testament is included as Scripture by the formula “It is written” (chapter 36), and as being written by the apostle Paul “with true inspiration” (chapter 47).⁷

(3) Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 110–135)

(a) Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John. He referred to the New Testament several times in his epistle, introducing Galatians 4:26 as “the word of truth” (chapter 3) and presenting citations of Philippians 2:16 and 2 Timothy 4:10 as “the word of righteousness” (chapter 9). In chapter 12, Polycarp cites numerous Old and New Testament passages as “the Scriptures.”⁸

(4) Papias (c. 130–140)

(a) Papias wrote five books titled *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, which is the same title given to the Old Testament by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:2, revealing Papias’s high regard for the New Testament as the very Word of God. (In the *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* he included the New Testament.)⁹

ii) In addition to these early books there are several others that allude to it as scripture

(1) The writings of Ignatius of Antioch 110

(2) The Shepherd of Hermas 115-140

(3) The Didache 100-120

(4) Epistle to Diognetus 150

iii) Taken together, this important early material demonstrates that by about a.d. 150 the early church, both East and West, accepted the New Testament claim for divine inspiration. The Fathers looked upon those books with the same high regard as the New Testament writers did the Old Testament Scriptures, namely, as the inspired, authoritative, and absolutely true Word of God.¹⁰

b) Early Patristic Period 100-500

i) After the apostolic period the beginning of the second century and following provided further testimony to the authority of scripture and the trustworthiness of the NT

(1) Justin Martyr (d. 165)

(a) In his first *Apology* (c. 150–155), Justin Martyr spoke of the Gospels as the “Voice of God” (chapter 65). He added, “We must not suppose that the language proceeds from men who were inspired, but from the Divine Word which moves them” (1.36). Elsewhere, he declared that Moses wrote in the Hebrew character by the “divine inspiration” and that “the Holy Spirit of prophecy taught us this, telling us by Moses that God spoke thus” (*JHOG*, 12, 44).¹¹

(2) Athenagoras of Athens (c. 177)

⁷ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

⁸ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

⁹ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹⁰ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹¹ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

- (a) “I think that you also, with your great zeal for knowledge, and your great attainments in learning, cannot be ignorant of the writings either of Moses or of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets, who, lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute.”⁵¹²

(3) Tatian (c. 110–180)

- (a) A disciple of Justin, Tatian called John 1:5 “Scripture” in his *Apology* (chapter 13). In this work Tatian made a passionate defense of Christianity and regarded it as so pure that it was incompatible with Greek civilization. He also wrote a harmony of the Gospels, *Diatessaron* (c. 150–160), which reveals his high regard for their divine authority.¹³

(4) Irenaeus (c. 130–202)

- (a) Irenaeus is reported to have actually heard the teachings of Polycarp, disciple of the apostle John. In his treatise *Against Heresies* (3.1.1), Irenaeus referred to the divine authority of the New Testament, declaring,
- (i) “For the Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to his apostles, through whom we have come to know the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God.... This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be “the pillar and ground” of our faith.” (*AH*, 3:67.)
- (b) In fact, Irenaeus affirmed his belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, proclaiming “the Faith in Scripture and Tradition,” in which he acknowledged the apostles to be “above all falsehood” (3.5.1). He called the Bible “Scriptures of truth,” and he was “most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they are spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit” (*ibid.*, 2:28.2; 2.35).¹⁴
- (i) “If, however, we cannot discover explanations of all those things in Scripture which are made the subject of investigation, yet let us not on that account seek after any other God besides Him who really exists. For this is the very greatest impiety. We should leave things of that nature to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit; but we,

⁵ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 9 (ANF 2:133).

¹² Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 96. Print.

¹³ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹⁴ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

inasmuch as we are inferior to, and later in existence than, the Word of God and His Spirit, are on that very account destitute of the knowledge of His mysteries.”⁶¹⁵

(5) Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215)

(a) Clement became head of the Church School at Alexandria in 190 but was compelled to flee in the face of persecution in 202. He held to a strict doctrine of inspiration, which can be seen in his *Stromata*:

(i) “There is no discord between the Law and the Gospel, but harmony, for they both proceed from the same Author ... differing in name and time to suit the age and culture of their hearers ... by a wise economy, but potentially one ... since faith in Christ and the knowledge ... of the Gospel is the explanation ... and the fulfillment of the Law.” (Westcott, *AISG*, 439.)

(ii) “He who believeth then the divine Scriptures with sure judgment, receives in the voice of God, who bestowed the Scripture, a demonstration that cannot be impugned.”⁷¹⁶

(b) Clement of Alexandria also called the gospel “Scripture” in the same sense as the Law and the Prophets, as he writes of “the Scriptures ... in the Law, in the Prophets, and besides by the blessed Gospel ... [which] are valid from their omnipotent authority.” He went so far as to condemn those who rejected Scripture because “they are not pleased with the divine commands, that is, with the Holy Spirit” (Geisler, *DFY*, 31–32).¹⁷

(6) Tertullian (c. 160–220)

(a) Tertullian, the “Father of Latin Theology,” never wavered in his support of the doctrine of inspiration of both the Old and the New Testaments. In fact, he maintained that the four Gospels “are reared on the certain basis of Apostolic authority, and so are inspired in a far different sense from the writings of the spiritual Christian; all the faithful, it is true, have the Spirit of God, but all are not Apostles” (Westcott, *AISG*, 434). For Tertullian,

(i) “[T]he apostles have the Holy Spirit properly, who have Him fully, in the operations of prophecy, and the efficacy of [healing] virtues, and the evidences of tongues; not particularly, as all others have. Thus he attached the Holy Spirit’s authority to that form [of advice] to which he willed us rather to attend; and forthwith it became not an *advice* of the

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.2 (ANF 1:399).

¹⁵ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svingel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 96. Print.

⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2 (ANF 2:349).

¹⁶ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svingel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 96. Print.

¹⁷ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

Holy Spirit, but, in consideration of His majesty, a precept.” (“OEC” in Schaff, *NPNFCC*, 4)¹⁸

- (ii) “We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God’s precepts we confirm good habits.”⁸
- (iii) “The statements, however, of holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth. A corrupt tree will never yield good fruit, unless the better nature be grafted into it; nor will a good tree produce evil fruit, except by the same process of cultivation.”⁹
- (iv) “On the whole, then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule of faith the Galatians were brought for correction; what the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians read by it; what utterance also the Romans give, so very near (to the apostles), to whom Peter and Paul conjointly bequeathed the gospel even sealed with their own blood. We have also St. John’s foster churches. For although Marcion rejects his Apocalypse, the order of the bishops (thereof), when traced up to their origin, will yet rest on John as their author. In the same manner is recognized the excellent source of the other churches. I say, therefore, that in them (and not simply such of them as were founded by apostles, but in all those which are united with them in the fellowship of the mystery of the gospel of Christ) that Gospel of Luke which we are defending with all our might has stood its ground from its very first publication.... The same authority of the apostolic churches will afford evidence to the other Gospels also, which we possess equally through their means, and according to their usage—I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew—whilst that which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter’s whose interpreter Mark was. For even Luke’s form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul.”¹⁰¹⁹

(7) Hippolytus (c. 170–236)

¹⁸ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

⁸ Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46).

⁹ Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul* 22 (ANF 3:202).

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5 (ANF 3:349–350).

¹⁹ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svelig. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 97. Print.

- (a) Hippolytus, a disciple of Irenaeus, exhibited the same deep sense of reverence toward Scripture. Speaking of the inspiration of the Old Testament, he said,
- (i) “The Law and the Prophets were from God, who in giving them compelled his messenger to speak by the Holy Spirit, that receiving the inspiration of the Father’s power they may announce the Father’s counsel and will. In these men therefore the Word found a fitting abode and spoke of Himself; for even then He came as His own herald, showing the Word who was about to appear in the world.” (Westcott, *AISG*, 431–32.)
- (b) Of the New Testament writers, Hippolytus declared,
- (i) “These blessed men ... having been perfected by the Spirit of Prophecy, and worthily honoured by the Word Himself, were brought to an inner harmony like instruments, and having the Word within them, as it were to strike the notes, by Him they were moved, and announced that which God wished.... [For] they did not speak of their own power (be well assured), nor proclaim that which they wished themselves, but first they were rightly endowed with wisdom by the Word, and afterwards well foretaught of the future by visions, and then, when thus assured, they spake that which was [revealed] to them alone by God.” (Westcott, *AISG*, 432.)²⁰
- (ii) “The Scripture deals falsely with us in nothing.”¹³
- (iii) “Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn.... Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures, so let us discern them.”¹⁴²¹

(8) Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

- (a) Origen, a successor of Clement at the Alexandrian School, held that God “gave the law, and the prophets, and the Gospels, being also the God of the apostles and of the Old and New Testaments.” He wrote, “This Spirit inspired each one of the saints, whether prophets or apostles; and there was not one Spirit in the men of the old dispensation, and another in those who were inspired at the advent of Christ” (Schaff, *NPNFCC* 4:240).
- (b) Origen’s view of the authority of the Scriptures is “that the Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have a meaning ... not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the words of wisdom and knowledge” (*ibid.*, 241). He went on to

²⁰ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹³ Hippolytus, *Fragments on Susannah* 52 (ANF 5:193).

¹⁴ Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of Noetus* 9 (ANF 5:227).

²¹ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 98. Print.

assert that there is a supernatural element of thought “throughout all of Scripture even where it is not apparent to the uninstructed” (Geisler, *DFY*, 28–30).²²

(i) “We, however, in conformity with our belief in that doctrine, which we assuredly hold to be divinely inspired, believe that it is possible in no other way to explain and bring within the reach of human knowledge this higher and diviner reason as the Son of God, than by means of those Scriptures alone which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Gospels and Epistles, and the law and the prophets, according to the declaration of Christ Himself.”¹¹

(ii) “We must, in order to establish the positions which, we have laid down, adduce the testimony of Holy Scripture. And that this testimony may produce a sure and unhesitating belief, either with regard to what we have still to advance, or to what has been already stated, it seems necessary to show, in the first place, that the Scriptures themselves are divine, i.e., were inspired by the Spirit of God.”¹²²³

(c) Origen also gave an early canon of the gospels

(i) ‘Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that first was written that according to Matthew, who was once a tax collector but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who published it for those who from Judaism came to believe, composed as it was in the Hebrew language. Secondly, that according to Mark, who composed it in accordance with the instructions of Peter, who in the catholic Epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, “She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, salutes you, and so does Mark, my son” (1 Pet. v. 13). And thirdly, that according to Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul (cf. 2 Cor. viii. 18) and composed for those who from the Gentiles [came to believe]. After them all, that according to John.’²⁴

(9) Cyprian (c. 200–258)

(a) Cyprian was an important bishop in the Western church during the time of Roman emperor Decius (249–251). In his treatise *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, Cyprian appeals to the Gospels as authoritative, referring to them as the “commandments of Christ.” He also adds the Corinthian letters of Paul to his list of authorities and appeals to Paul’s Ephesian letter (4:4–6). In the same location, he reaffirms the inspiration of the New Testament as he writes, “When

²² Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹¹ Origen, *On First Principles* 1.3.1 (ANF 4:252).

¹² *Ibid.* 4.1.1 (ANF 4:349).

²³ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Savigel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 98. Print.

²⁴ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (p. 308). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

the Holy Spirit says, in the person of the Lord....” Again, he adds, “The Holy Spirit warns us through the apostle” as he cites 1 Corinthians 11:19 (*TUCC*, 5:126). These and several other, examples in his writings lead to the conclusion that Cyprian held that both the Old and New Testaments are “Divine Scriptures” (*EACN*, 5:328).²⁵

(10) **Novatian (c. 250)**

- (a) “We ought to pass over no portion of the heavenly Scriptures, since indeed also we ought by no means to reject those marks of Christ’s divinity which are laid down in the Scriptures, that we may not, by corrupting the authority of the Scriptures, be held to have corrupted the integrity of our holy faith.... Unless, therefore, we hold all this with fitting veneration and lawful argument, we shall reasonably be thought to have furnished a scandal to the heretics, not assuredly by the fault of the heavenly Scriptures, which never deceive; but by the presumption of human error, whereby they have chosen to be heretics.”¹⁵²⁶

(11) **Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263 or 265–340)**

- (a) As the great early-church historian, Eusebius is an important witness to the views of Scripture in the nascent Christian church. He held to the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments and wrote much about God’s Word in his *Ecclesiastical History*. It was Eusebius who was commissioned to make fifty copies of the Scriptures following the Council of Nicea (325).
- (b) Eusebius was a tremendous defender of Scripture, writing extensively on the topic. Related works include *Against Hierocles* (a pagan governor of Bithynia), *The Preparation for the Gospel*, and *Demonstration of the Gospel*. On top of these he wrote a work on the Incarnation titled *The Theophany*, and he penned another book (*Against Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra*) that is a collection of Old Testament passages foretelling the coming of Christ. Also, *Problems of the Gospels* (Schaff, 2nd series, volume 1, 36) and *On the Theology of the Church, a Refutation of Marcellus*. Add to these his treatise on *Easter* and his *On the Names of Places in the Holy Scriptures (Onomastica Sacra)* to round out his massive defense of the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God.²⁷

(12) **Lactantius (c. 300)**

- (a) “In these writings he [Hierocles] endeavored so to prove the falsehood of sacred Scripture, as though it were altogether contradictory to itself; for he expounded some chapters which seemed to be at variance with themselves.... What rashness was it, therefore, to dare to destroy that which no one explained to him! It was well that he either learned nothing or understood

²⁵ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹⁵ Novatian, *On the Trinity* 30 (ANF 5:642).

²⁶ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Savigel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 98. Print.

²⁷ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

nothing. For contradiction is as far removed from the sacred writings as he was removed from faith and truth.”¹⁶²⁸

(13) **Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295–373)**

(a) Known as the “Father of Orthodoxy” because of his successful stand against arianism (the heresy denying Christ’s deity) at Nicea (325), Athanasius was the first to use the term “canon” in reference to the New Testament books, which he called “the fountains of salvation” (Westcott, *AGSHCNT*, 456). Athanasius cites the Scriptures repeatedly as having divine authority with final say in resolving all doctrinal issues.²⁹

(i) “It seemed good to me also ... to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance....

(ii) “These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, ‘Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.’ And He reproveth the Jews, saying, ‘Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.’”¹⁷³⁰

(14) **Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386)**

(a) Cyril offered what he called a summary of “the whole doctrine of the Faith” that “has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures.” Then he proceeded to warn others not to change or contradict his teachings because of the Scripture’s injunction as found in Galatians 1:8–9 (Cyril of Jerusalem in Schaff, 7:32). In his treatise *Of the Divine Scriptures*, he speaks of “the divinely-inspired Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments” (ibid., 26–27). He then proceeds to list all the books of the Hebrew Old Testament (twenty-two) and all of the books of the Christian New Testament except Revelation (twenty-six), saying, “Learn also diligently, and from the Church, what are the books of the Old Testament, and what are those of the New. And, pray, read none of the apocryphal writings.” For Cyril the matter was drawn clearly when he wrote,

(i) With regard to the divine and saving mysteries of faith no doctrine, however trivial, may be taught without the backing of the divine Scriptures.... For our saving faith derives its

¹⁶ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 5.2 (ANF 7:138).

²⁸ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svingel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 99. Print.

²⁹ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹⁷ Athanasius, *Festal Letter* 39.3, 6 (NPNF 2.4:551–552).

³⁰ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svingel. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 99. Print.

force, not from capricious reasoning, but from what may be proved out of the Bible (*ibid.*, as cited in J. N. D. Kelly's *ECD*, 4).³¹

(15) **Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 380)**

- (a) “We however, who extend the accuracy of the Spirit to the merest stroke and tittle, will never admit the impious assertion that even the smallest matters were dealt with haphazard by those who have recorded them.”¹⁸

(16) **Augustine of Hippo (c. 420)**

- (a) “This Mediator [Jesus Christ], having spoken what He judged sufficient first by the prophets, then by His own lips, and afterwards by the apostles, has besides produced the Scripture which is called canonical, which has paramount authority, and to which we yield assent in all matters of which we ought not to be ignorant, and yet cannot know of ourselves.”¹⁹
- (b) “I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the MS [manuscript] is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it. As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason.”²⁰
- (c) “It seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say, that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false. It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive: nay, it is not another question—it is no question at all. For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to anyone difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which, intentionally, and under a sense of duty, the author declared what was not true.”²¹

³¹ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

¹⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 2.105 (NPNF 2.7:427).

¹⁹ Augustine, *City of God* 11.3 (NPNF 1.2:206).

²⁰ Augustine, *Letter (to Jerome)* 82.3 (NPNF 1.1:350).

²¹ *Ibid.* 28.3 (NPNF 1.1:251–252).

(d) “If he [an interpreter of Scripture] takes up rashly a meaning which the author whom he is reading did not intend, he often falls in with other statements which he cannot harmonize with this meaning. And if he admits that these statements are true and certain, then it follows that the meaning he had put upon the former passage cannot be the true one: and so it comes to pass, one can hardly tell how, that, out of love for his own opinion, he begins to feel more angry with Scripture than he is with himself. And if he should once permit that evil to creep in, it will utterly destroy him. ‘For we walk by faith, not by sight.’ Now faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begins to shake. And then, if faith totter, love itself will grow cold.”²²³²

ii) Summary of the Early Fathers on Scripture

(1) Virtually every early church Father enthusiastically adhered to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments alike. J. N. D. Kelly, noted authority on the doctrine of the early church, affirmed,

(a) “There is little need to dwell on the absolute authority accorded to the Scripture as a doctrinal norm. It was the Bible, declared Clement of Alexandria about a.d. 200, which as interpreted by the Church, was the source of Christian teaching. His greater disciple Origen was a thorough-going Biblicist who appealed again and again to Scripture as the decisive criterion of dogma.... “The holy inspired Scriptures,” wrote Athanasius a century later, “are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth.” Later in the same century John Chrysostom bade his congregation seek no other teacher than the oracles of God.... In the West Augustine ... [and] a little while later Vincent of Lerins (c. 450) took it as an axiom [that] “the Scriptural canon was sufficient, and more sufficient, for all purposes” (*ECD*, 42–43)³³

iii) By the end of this patristic period we have a very stable New Testament Canon.

(1) Though always under attack by foes outside the church and deceptive fiends within, orthodox Christians have always held that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Due to its divine origin, the doctrine of Scripture’s complete truthfulness has stood the test of time. From Clement of Rome in the first century to the writers of this book, the pastors and teachers of the church have always held to the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture, even when they differed on its proper interpretation.³⁴

(2) In a.d. 367 the Thirty-ninth Paschal Letter of Athanasius contained an exact list of the twenty-seven New Testament books we have today. This was the list of books accepted by the churches

²² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.37.1 (NPNF 1.2:533).

³² Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svelig. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 99–100. Print.

³³ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002. Print.

³⁴ Blount, Douglas K. et al. “How Firm a Foundation: Revelation, Scripture, and Truth.” *Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God*. Ed. Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svelig. I. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 95. Print.

in the eastern part of the Mediterranean world. Thirty years later, in a.d. 397, the Council of Carthage, representing the churches in the western part of the Mediterranean world, agreed with the eastern churches on the same list. These are the earliest final lists of our present-day canon.³⁵

4) Heresies leading to clarification during this period.

a) Marcion of Sinope

i) c. 85 – c. 160 His theology rejected the deity described in the Hebrew Scriptures and in distinction affirmed the Father of Christ as the true God. The Church Fathers denounced Marcion, and he chose to separate himself from the proto-orthodox church. He published the earliest extant fixed collection of New Testament books,³⁶ making him an important figure in the development of the New Testament canon.

(1) At the end of July, A.D. 144, a hearing took place before the clergy of the Christian congregations in Rome. Marcion, a wealthy Christian ship-owner who had come from Sinope, a sea-port of Pontus along the Black Sea, stood before the presbyters to expound his teachings in order to win others to his point of view. For some years he had been a member of one of the Roman churches, and had proved the sincerity of his faith by making relatively large contributions. No doubt he was a respected member of the Christian community. But what he now expounded to the presbyters was so monstrous that they were utterly shocked! The hearing ended in a harsh rejection of Marcion's views; he was formally excommunicated and his largesse of money was returned. From this time forward Marcion went his own way, energetically propagating a strange kind of Christianity that quickly took root throughout large sections of the Roman Empire and by the end of the second century had become a serious threat to the mainstream Christian Church.³⁷

ii) Marcion's main teaching

(1) The main points of Marcion's teaching³⁸ were the rejection of the Old Testament and a distinction between the Supreme God of goodness and an inferior God of justice, who was the Creator and the God of the Jews.³⁹ He regarded Christ as the messenger of the Supreme God. The Old and New Testaments, Marcion argued, cannot be reconciled to each other. The code of conduct advocated by Moses was 'an eye for an eye', but Christ set this precept aside. Elisha had had children eaten by bears; Christ said, 'Let the little children come to me'. Joshua had stopped the sun in its path in order to continue the slaughter of his enemies; Paul quoted Christ as commanding, 'Let not the

³⁵ Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004. Print.

³⁶ Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Canon of Scripture*. InterVarsity Press. ISBN 978-0-8308-1258-5

³⁷ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (pp. 90-91). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

³⁸ According to Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. I. xxvii. 1–3) Marcion had come under the influence of a Syrian Gnostic Named Cerdo.

³⁹ The classic treatment of Marcion is Adolf von Harnack's *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Texte und Untersuchungen, xlv; Leipzig, 1921; 2nd ed., 1924; reprinted, Darmstadt, 1960). For a critique of von Harnack, see Barbara Aland, 'Marcion. Versuch einer neuen Interpretation', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, lxx (1973), pp. 420–47, who argues that Marcion was closer to Gnostic theologies than Harnack would admit, especially in Marcion's concept of the creator deity and his (non-) use of the Old Testament. At the same time, however, Marcion developed a non-Gnostic soteriology, rejected cosmological mythology, and radicalized Paul's view of human inability to transcend the world. See also comments by Balás (p. 99 n. 50 below).

sun go down on your wrath'. In the Old Testament divorce was permitted and so was polygamy; in the New Testament, neither is allowed. Moses enforced the Jewish sabbath and Law; Christ has freed believers from both.⁴⁰

- (2) Indeed, even within the Old Testament itself Marcion found contradictions. God commanded that no work should be done on the sabbath, yet he told the Israelites to carry the ark around Jericho seven times on the sabbath. No graven image was to be made, yet Moses was directed to fashion a bronze serpent. Marcion, therefore, rejected the entire Old Testament. Furthermore, in his opinion the twelve apostles misunderstood the teaching of Christ, and, holding him to be the Messiah of the Jewish God, falsified his words from that standpoint. Marcion explained this corruption of the true gospel based on the Epistle to the Galatians in which Paul emphasizes that there is only one gospel (namely, that which is proclaimed by him, Gal. i. 8—10), and states that false brethren are attempting to turn believers from this gospel (i. 6–9; ii. II). Convinced that among the early apostolic leaders only Paul understood the significance of Jesus Christ as the messenger of the Supreme God, Marcion accepted as authoritative the nine Epistles sent by Paul to seven churches as well as the one to Philemon. These ten Epistles became for him the source, the guarantee, and the norm of true doctrine. As for the Gospels that were current among the churches, the only one that Marcion felt he could trust was the Gospel according to Luke. We cannot say with certainty why he had confidence in this Gospel, but perhaps the reason was that he regarded the author, Luke, as a disciple of Paul and believed him to be more faithful to tradition than the other evangelists. In any case, this was for Marcion the Gospel, without identification as to its human author—a deficiency for which Tertullian castigates Marcion (*Adv. Marc.* iv. 2).⁴¹ But even this short, two-part canon, comprising the 'Evangelion' and the 'Apostolikon', needed pruning and editorial adjustment. Passages that Marcion could regard only as Judaizing interpolations that had been smuggled into the text by false apostles—these had to be removed so that the authentic text of Gospel and Apostle could once again be available. With thorough-going heedlessness of the consequences, Marcion undertook to expunge everything from the text of Luke and the epistles which echoed or otherwise implied a point of contact with the Old Testament. Since Jesus, according to Marcion, had only the appearance of being human, he could not have been born of a woman. Therefore, Marcion omitted most of the first four chapters of Luke (the birth of John the Baptist, the nativity, Jesus' baptism and temptation, with his genealogy, and all reference to Bethlehem and Nazareth). Marcion's gospel began with Luke iii. I, 'In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar,' and continued with iv. 31, 'God descended into Capernaum, a city of Galilee'.

⁴⁰ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (pp. 91-92). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴¹ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (pp. 92-93). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

In the last chapters of Luke the omissions are rather more numerous than in the first; the resurrection of Jesus is passed over in silence.⁴² As for the Epistles, Marcion removed whatever he judged were interpolations—that is, anything that did not agree with his understanding of what Paul should have written. Thus, Gal. iii. 16–iv. 6 was deleted because of its reference to Abraham and his descendants; and 2 Thess. i. 6–8, because God is not concerned with ‘flaming-fire’ and punishment.

iii) Marcion’s Influence

(1) The basis of Marcion’s edition of the Gospel according to Luke and ten of the Pauline Epistles was the so-called ‘Western’ text, which was, it seems, the most widespread, popular text of the New Testament in the second century. In addition to making the deletions of all that involved approval of the Old Testament and the creator God of the Jews, Marcion modified the text through transpositions and occasional additions in order to restore what he considered must have been the original sense. The subsequent influence of Marcion’s text has left its mark here and there on the transmission of (non-Marcionite) copies of Luke and Paul.⁴³ Although textual critics differ as to how many variant readings in the New Testament manuscripts trace their origin to Marcion’s edition, few doubt that, to some extent at least, his shadow must be taken into account in textual evaluation of such passages as the following.

- (a) Luke v. 39 (‘the old wine is better’) was omitted by Marcion, probably because it seemed to him to exalt the Old Testament over the New Testament. The same omission occurs in MS D and the Old Latin.
- (b) In Rom. i. 16 (‘to the Jew first and also to the Greek’) the omission of ‘first’ in several witnesses (B G Old Lat Sah) was probably due to the influence of Marcion, to whom the privilege accorded the Jews was unacceptable.
- (c) In Luke xi. 2 MSS 162 and 700 preserve the Marcionite form of the petition in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Let thy holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us’, replacing the petition concerning the kingdom.⁴⁴

(2) The result

- (a) ‘Marcion forced more orthodox Christians to examine their own presuppositions and to state more clearly what they already believed’.⁴⁵

⁴² For a convenient list of the more significant of Marcion’s omissions and alterations in Luke and the Pauline Epistles, see Ernest Evans, *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*, ii (Oxford, 1972), pp. 643–6..

⁴³ For examples of probable Marcionite textual disturbance in New Testament manuscripts, see August Pott, ‘Marcions Evangelientext’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchen-geschichte*, xlii (1923), pp. 202; Robert S. Wilson, *Marcion. A Study of a Second-Century Heretic* (London, 1933), pp. 145–50; E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London, 1948), pp. 50–2 and 128–71; H.J. Vogels, ‘Der Einfluss Marcions und Tatians auf Text und Kanon des NT’, in *Synoptische Studien*. Alfred Wikenhauser... dargebracht (Munich, 1953), pp. 278–89; and *idem*, *Handbuch der Textkritik des Neuen Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Bonn, 1955), pp. 140–4.

⁴⁴ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (pp. 97-98). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁵ R. M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, p. 126.

b) Montanism

- i) A significant factor in the ‘hardening’ of the canon of the New Testament was the influence of Montanism, an enthusiastic and apocalyptic movement that broke out in the second half of the second century. It originated in Phrygia, deep in the hinterland of Asia Minor, and quickly spread through the whole Church, both East and West. It claimed to be a religion of the Holy Spirit and was marked by ecstatic outbursts which it regarded as the only true form of Christianity.⁴⁶
- ii) Montanism first appeared, according to Epiphanius, in the year 156, or, if we follow Eusebius, in 172.⁴⁷ The movement began at Ardoban, a village on the borders of Mysia and Phrygia. Here Montanus, sometimes described as a former priest of Cybele,⁴⁸ fell into a trance soon after his conversion and began to speak in tongues. He announced that he was the inspired instrument of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the ‘Paraclete’ promised in John’s Gospel (xiv. 15–17; xvii. 7–15). Associated with Montanus were two women, Prisca (or Priscilla) and Maximilla, who, being struck by the prophetic afflatus, left their husbands and joined themselves to the mission of Montanus. The fundamental conviction of the New Prophecy in its earliest form was that the Heavenly Jerusalem was shortly to descend upon earth and be located at the little Phrygian town of Pepuza, some twenty miles north-east from Hierapolis.⁴⁹ Here the three of them settled and began to utter prophetic oracles. Their pronouncements were written down and gathered together as sacred documents like the words of Old Testament prophets or the sayings of Jesus.
- iii) Along with their vivid expectation of the near approach of the end of the world, the Montanists also soon developed ascetic traits and disciplinary rigorism in the face of the growing worldliness of the Great Church. Another feature of the Montanist movement was what may be called a democratic reaction against the clerical aristocracy, which from the time of Ignatius was becoming more and more institutionalized. A feature offensive to some in the Great Church was the admission of women to positions of leadership.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cf. P. de Labriolle, *La Crise montaniste* (Paris, 1913); idem, *Les Sources de l’histoire de Montanisme* (Fribourg-Paris, 1913); Agostino Faggiotto, *L’eresia dei Frigi* (Scrittori cristiani antichi, ix; Rome, 1924); F. E. Vokes, ‘The Use of Scripture in the Montanist Controversy’, *Stadia Evangelica*, ed. by F. L. Cross, v (Berlin, 1968), pp. 317–20; Frederick C. Klawiter, ‘The New Prophecy in Early Christianity: the Origin, Nature, and Development of Montanism’, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1975; and H. Paulson, ‘Die Bedeutung des Montanismus für die Herausbildung des Kanons’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, xxxii (1978), pp. 19–52.

⁴⁷ The conflict between Epiphanius (Panarion, xlviii. 1.2) and Eusebius (Hist. eccl. IV. xxvii. 1) has resulted, as would be expected, in a wide diversity of opinion among scholars; for a summary and discussion (which concludes in favour of Eusebius) see T. D. Barnes, ‘The Chronology of Montanism’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. xxi (1970), pp. 403–8, and his monograph entitled *Tertullian, a Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford, 1971), esp. pp. 130–42.

⁴⁸ According to Didymus (De Trin. iii. 41) Montanus had been ‘an idol priest’. The epithets *abscissus* and *semivir* (‘mutilated and emasculated’) applied to him by Jerome (Ep. ad Marcellam, xli. 4) suggest that Jerome may have believed him to have been a priest of Cybele. On the other hand, Wilhelm Schepelern, after a careful examination of literary and epigraphic evidence, concludes: ‘In spite of the Phrygian origin of the New Prophecy, neither our Montanist nor our anti-Montanist sources furnish us a valid basis to support the view that Montanism in its original form was an off-shoot of the Phrygian cult’ (*Montanismen og de Phrygiske Kulter* [Copenhagen, 1920], German trans., *Der Montanismus und die Phrygischen Kulte; eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* [Tübingen, 1929], p. 160).

⁴⁹ The location of Pepuza has been sought by travellers in Asia Minor for nearly a hundred years. The most recent investigator, August Strobel, is convinced that it lay somewhere in or near the upland plain of Kirbasan south of Uşak, north-west of Kinar, and a little to the north of the upper Mæander (*Das heilige Land der Montanisten. Eine religionsgeographische Untersuchung* [Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, xxxvii; Berlin, 1980], pp. 29–34).

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York, 1979), pp. 59–69, and F. C. Klawiter, ‘The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity; A Case Study of Montanism’, *Church History*, xlix (1980), pp. 251–61.

iv) During the following decades, the fate of the Montanists was sealed. First, after some vacillation, the bishop of Rome, then the bishop of Carthage and the remaining African bishops, followed the example of their colleagues in Asia Minor and pronounced the ‘Cataphrygians’ (οἱ κατὰ Φρύγας) to be a heretical sect.⁵¹

v) The effects on the text

(1) The backlash of orthodox Christianity because of the heretical teachings of the Montanists were as follows:

(a) Mistrust of all apocalyptic literature to include John’s Revelation

(b) Mistrust of uses and abuses of the Holy Spirit as a part of worship

(i) Denial that current prophecies hold the same authority as the Apostles

(ii) Denial that scriptures are an ever-growing book considering the closing of canon

(2) Extreme Anti-Montanist’s called for the removal of any text that was used by the heretics

(a) Denial of Pauline authorship for Hebrews

(b) Denial of the Gospel of John

(c) The denials were based solely on the fact that they were used by the Montanist’s

(3) To sum up, the influence of the Montanist movement on the conception of the canon was the opposite of that exerted by Marcion. Whereas the latter had spurred the Church to recognize the breadth of the written corpus of authoritative writings, the insistence of the former on the continuous gift of inspiration and prophecy influenced the Church to emphasize the final authority of apostolic writings as the rule of faith. By rejecting the extravagances of Montanism, the Church took the first step toward the adoption of a closed canon of Scripture.⁵²

5) Eusebius of Caesarea – special contribution to Canon – The History of the Church

a) The name of Eusebius of Caesarea has been mentioned quite frequently in these pages. His Ecclesiastical History gives us access to a host of sources and traditions otherwise long since lost. The ‘Father of church history’ had at his disposal the library at Caesarea which Origen built up after he had been forced to leave Alexandria and take up residence in Palestine. Pamphilus, an enthusiastic adherent of Origen, had sought out and added many volumes to the library, and Eusebius, the pupil, co-worker, and friend of Pamphilus, became his successor when Pamphilus died as a martyr in the Diocletian persecution. Born about A.D. 260, Eusebius became bishop of Caesarea before 315, and died about 340. He wrote his Ecclesiastical History in sections, and issued it, with revisions and additions, several times during the first quarter of the fourth century.⁵³ What renders Eusebius’ work most valuable to us is the marked attention that he directed

⁵¹ Metzger, Bruce M.. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance (p. 102). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵² Metzger, Bruce M.. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance (p. 106). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵³ For information as to expansions and revisions that Eusebius introduced between 305 and 325, see R. Laqueur, Eusebius als Historiker seiner Zeit (Berlin–Leipzig, 1929), R. M. Grant, ‘Eusebius and his Lives of Origen’, in *Forma futuri; Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Turin, 1975), pp. 635–49, and especially Grant’s *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 10–21. According to T. D. Barnes, Eusebius’ research extended over a still longer period of time: ‘At least five editions

towards all that concerns the history of the Christian Bible. He had read a prodigious number of authors, and in the extracts that he gives from their writings he never fails to note the use they made of Scripture, the lists of books they quote in passing or fully discuss, the judgements they pronounce on them.⁵⁴ If one asks what was the reason for this concern in registering numerous individual testimonies concerning the Scriptures, the answer certainly must point to Eusebius' search for certainty as well as to the absence of any official declaration having an absolute value, such as a canon issued by a synod, or the collective agreement among churches or bishops. Of these there is not a trace in the long series of literary notices, so conscientiously amassed by the historian. But, when all is done, the most that Eusebius can register is uncertainty so great that he seems to get confused when making a statement about it. This may be seen from an analysis of the summary he gives in *Hist. eccl.* III. xxv. 1–7,⁵⁵ to which we now turn.⁵⁶

i) In the absence of any official list of the canonical writings of the New Testament, Eusebius finds it simplest to count the votes of his witnesses, and by this means to classify all the apostolic or pretended apostolic writings into three categories:

(1) Those on whose authority and authenticity all the churches and all the authors he had consulted were agreed;

(a) The books of the first category he calls 'homologoumena', that is, books that were universally acknowledged (ὁμολογουμένα). They are twenty-two in number: the 'holy quaternion' of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles,⁵⁷ 1 Peter, and 1 John. 'In addition to these', he continues, 'should be put, if it really seems proper (εἰ γὰρ φαίνεται), the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time'. Despite the last sentence, Eusebius concludes this list with the statement, 'These belong among the acknowledged books'.

(2) those which the witnesses were equally agreed in rejecting;

(a) The books that fall into the category of the rejected books, which Eusebius calls 'illegitimate' or 'spurious' (νόθα),⁵⁸ include the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the so-called Teachings of the Apostles, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. To these he adds, inconsistently, the Apocalypse of John, 'if it seem

of the Ecclesiastical History must be postulated, to which I would assign the following dates: first edition before 296, second 313/4, third c 315, fourth 325, and fifth after 326'; see the colloquy, *Les Martyrs de Lyons (177)* (Paris, 1978), p. 137

⁵⁴ See C. Sant, 'Eusebius of Caesarea's Views on the Canon of the Holy Scriptures and the Texts he used in his Works', *Melita theologica*, xxiii (1971), pp. 23–37.

⁵⁵ Eusebius gives other, shorter comments in *Hist. eccl.* II. xxii. 23; III. iii. 24; v. viii. 1–9; and vi. xiv. 25.

⁵⁶ Metzger, Bruce M.. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (p. 200-203). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵⁷ In *Hist. eccl.* III. iii. 4 Eusebius declares that 'the Epistles of Paul are obvious and plain', but adds at once, 'yet it is not right to ignore the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed (ἀντιλέεσθαι) by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul'. Eusebius, in agreement with the Alexandrians (who, with the exception of Origen, unanimously accepted the Pauline authorship), looked upon it as a work of Paul but accepted Clement of Alexandria's theory that it was written in Hebrew and translated by the evangelist Luke or Clement of Rome (*Hist. eccl.* III. xxxviii. 2).

⁵⁸ The term νόθα in this passage, in fact, appears to have not only its common meaning 'bastard, inauthentic', that is, fictitious writings, pseudepigrapha, works bearing falsely an author's name, but also to imply works which do not carry, so to speak, the stamp of canonical legitimacy.

proper (εἰ φανεῖη),⁵⁹ which some, as I said,⁶⁰ reject (ἀθετοῦσιν), while others reckon it among the acknowledged books’.

(3) an intermediate class regarding which the votes were divided (see Appendix IV. 3).

(a) The books that fall into the third category (the intermediary class) Eusebius designates as ‘antilegomena’, that is, ‘disputed books, yet familiar to most people of the church’ (ἀντιλεγόμενα γνώριμα δ’ οὖν ὁμῶς τοῖς πολλοῖς). In this category, he mentions the Epistles of James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John.^{61,62}

⁵⁹ Does this curious expression, used both times that Eusebius speaks of the Apocalypse, mean that he does not really know his mind on the subject, or (more likely) that he disliked stating too bluntly an opinion which he knew that many would not like?

⁶⁰ Eusebius here refers to the statement made in an earlier chapter regarding disputes concerning the Apocalypse, about which ‘the opinions of most people are still divided’ (III. xxiv. 18)..

⁶¹ It is surprising, in view of what Eusebius has said earlier about the Apocalypse of John, that this book is not described as disputed. Eusebius, however, being intolerant of apocalyptic prophecy if he could not point to its fulfilment in Constantine, will shortly classify John’s Apocalypse as ‘spurious’. As for his views concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews, see p. 205 below.

⁶² Metzger, Bruce M.. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance (pp. 203-204). Clarendon Press. Kindle Edition.