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The Integrity of the New Testament Canon

A Thesis Submitted to Dr. Fred Smith In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Master of Theology APOL 690

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Thesis Statement

The New Testament canon is authentic and reliable: there has been no exclusion of qualified writings, and the original writings have not been changed.

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CHAPTER 1

CURRENT OBJECTIONS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Critics of the New Testament relentlessly attack the credibility of the New Testament documents. Recent books and movies, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, paint a picture of ecclesiastical conspiracy that attempts to hide the truth. The New Testament is nothing more than a cover-up for years of deception. Teabing, one of the main characters in *The Da Vinci Code*, insists that the Nag Hammadi Library and Dead Sea Scrolls contain the earliest Christian records. He then woefully exclaims, "Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible." He then quotes from the Gnostic Gospel of Philip.² Do older, more reliable gospels exist that contradict the content of the New Testament gospels?

As would be expected, a non-scholarly novel will contain errors of its own. Bart Ehrman, a historian who personally doubts the credibility of the New Testament,³ points out that *The Da Vinci Code* is inaccurate in several points concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library.⁴ Contrary to Teabing's claim, it is highly unlikely that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain any portion of the New Testament. Geza Vermes, a noted authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls, affirms "no New Testament fragment has been discovered in any of the Qumran Caves." José O'Callaghan, a Spanish Jesuit theologian, suggested that some mostly illegible

¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 266.

² Wesley Center for Applied Theology, *The Gospel of Philip*, Translation by Wesley W. Isenberg, http://wesley.nnu.edu/Biblical Studies/noncanon/gospels/gosphil.htm.

³ Ehrman contends that the Bible we have today may look very little like the original autographs. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 59.

⁴ Bart D Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.

⁵ Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 183.

scraps found in Cave 7 could be quotes from several New Testament books; but this hypothesis "has been justly rejected as totally unacceptable by the leading authorities in the field."

The character, Teabing, elsewhere states with authority, "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great." Ehrman acknowledges that Constantine had nothing to do with the formation of the New Testament canon. However, other statements in the novel enjoy the support of noted historians and theologians.

Elimination of Legitimate Books

Claims are frequently made that books from the early church period were unjustly eliminated from the New Testament canon. Authors besides the apostles wrote down sayings of Jesus, resulting in a significant amount of early Christian literature. Early Christian writers frequently quoted from some of these books that are not found in the New Testament canon. This should not be surprising. Writers today will quote the Bible and then quote men such as Spurgeon, never intending that the sermons of Spurgeon are equal with the Scriptures. However, who determined this distinction among the writings in the early church, and how?

It is also stated that a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy did not exist when the gospels were written. Helmut Koester boldly declares, "Only dogmatic prejudice can assert that the canonical writings have an exclusive claim to apostolic origin and thus to historical priority." *The Da Vinci Code* follows this lead in revealing that Jesus' plan to have a woman

⁷ Brown, 251.

⁶ Ibid.

⁸ Ehrman, Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code, 24.

⁹ David Ewert, *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations: A General Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 116-117.

¹⁰ Ray Summers, *The Secret Sayings of The Living Jesus: Studies in the Coptic Gospel According to Thomas* (Waco: Word Books, 1968), 21.

¹¹ Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), xxx.

lead the church was thwarted.¹² *The Gospel of Mary*¹³ and *The Gospel of Thomas*,¹⁴ two Gnostic writings from the early church period, paint the same picture. According to these accounts, Peter rejects the teaching and leadership of Mary Magdalene.¹⁵ This was allegedly covered up in part through the elimination of the Gnostic accounts from the New Testament canon.

The Da Vinci Code also asserts that Jesus was a mere mortal, was married to Mary Magdalene, ¹⁶ and that a close vote taken at a later church council bestowed deity on him. ¹⁷ Several extant Gnostic writings support the notion that Jesus was a mere mortal by portraying Thomas as his twin brother. ¹⁸ Authors such as Ehrman are not bashful about making the same assertion. ¹⁹

Church historians, such as Earle Cairns, portray the first few hundred years of the church's existence as a time of development and controversy. First, the canon, creed and leadership were developed.²⁰ After the threat of persecutions dissipated, forced unity gave way to theological distinctions and divisions.²¹ Ehrman elaborates that the victors in this struggle rewrote the history to reflect that not much of a struggle took place and that their views were

¹² Brown, 268.

¹³ Wesley Center for Applied Theology, *The Gospel of Mary*. http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/gospels/gosmary.htm.

¹⁴ The Gnostic Society Library, *The Gospel of Thomas*, Translated by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer, http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html.

¹⁵ Marvin Meyer, with Esther A. de Boer, *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene, The Companion of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), viii.

¹⁶ Brown, 264.

¹⁷ Ibid, 253

¹⁸ "The savior said, 'Brother Thomas while you have time in the world, listen to me, and I will reveal to you the things you have pondered in your mind,' 'Now since it has been said that you are my twin and true companion, examine yourself, and learn who you are, in what way you exist and how you will come to be." Wesley Center for Applied Theology, *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, Translation by John D. Turner, http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/acts/tomcntnd.htm.

[&]quot;...I know that thou art the twin brother of the Christ and always abolishest our nature..." The Gnostic Society Library, *The Acts of Thomas*, Translated by M.R. James, http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/library/actthom.htm.

¹⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

²⁰ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981), 115.

always held by the vast majority of Christians.²² Elaine Pagels adds that the Gnostic beliefs became "a suppressed current, like a river driven underground."²³

A conclusion is therefore made that alternative views and writings from the early church period are every bit as legitimate and true as the ones that are found in the New Testament canon. If Nicephorus still accepted the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Gospel of the Hebrews in the 9th century,²⁴ and Toland in 1699 considered the writings of Clement of Rome and Barnabas as authoritative as those of Mark and Luke,²⁵ why should those in the 21st century automatically exclude these writing from the canon? Or does evidence really support limiting the canon to the present twenty-seven books?

An unfortunate fact is that books have actually been burned by those of the orthodox view. *The Da Vinci Code* alludes to this in stating that the Catholic Church rewrote history. ²⁶ The novel mistakenly insists that after Jesus status was upgraded from mortal to deity, "earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned." Historically, some instances of book burning did take place. The Syrian church continued to use the *Diatessaron* (Tatian's harmony of the four gospels) instead of the accepted gospels up until the time the church initiated the burning of the *Diatessaron* manuscripts in 400 AD. ²⁸ Certain heretical books were ordered to be burned following the Nicene Council in 787 AD. ²⁹ John Toland's book, *Christianity Not*

²¹ Ibid, 131.

²² Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

²³ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 150.

²⁴ Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity: From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation*, Translated by James L. Schaff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 112.

²⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 12-13.

²⁶ Brown, 51.

²⁷ Ibid, 254.

²⁸ Aland, 112.

²⁹ R.K Harrison, "Old Testament and New Testament Apocrypha," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Comfort, Philip Wesley (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 91.

Mysterious, was condemned by the Irish Parliament and ordered to be burned because it questioned the authority of certain books in the New Testament.³⁰

Redaction of the Remaining Texts

Critics doubt that the remaining texts accurately preserved the words of Jesus and the apostles. At first, everything was passed along by oral tradition.³¹ Those of Ehrman's persuasion speculate that this oral tradition changed before it was actually written down near the end of the first century.³² If it can be established that the oral traditions were written early in the first century, this argument can be eliminated. Eyewitnesses would have readily revealed inaccuracies. Such is the claim of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

There is good reason to expect some variations in the manuscripts as they were reproduced. It is doubtful that trained scribes wrote the earliest copies.³³ The earliest manuscripts were probably made privately.³⁴ Close supervision and proofreading may have been nonexistent.³⁵ Although Ehrman concedes that the earliest of changes were likely accidental,³⁶ he insists this produced "mistake-ridden copies."³⁷

Rudolf Bultmann, another staunch critic of the validity of the New Testament text, likewise believed that oral traditions prevailed for many years prior to the writing of the original manuscripts. He contends that details were intentionally added from one person to the next, stating "the details are subject to the control of fancy and are usually made more explicit and

³⁰ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 11-12.

³¹ Ibid, 3.

³² Ehrman, Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code, 117.

³³ Clayton Harrop, *History of the New Testament in Plain Languae*. (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 14.

³⁴ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 70.

³⁵ Ewert, 152.

³⁶ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 55.

³⁷ Ibid, 59.

definite."³⁸ Along this line of reasoning, the intentional changes continue with the first written copies as non-professional scribes took liberty to add or change minor details.³⁹ Although it is admitted that such speculation is hard to prove, it is also suggested that it is just as hard to disprove.⁴⁰

Another speculation is that the original writings were not recognized as sacred. If that were the case, copyists would be more likely to make improvements and create a more popular text. 41 This leads to the popular notion that "Jesus did not say everything ascribed to him in the ancient sources." ⁴² Those who hold such views are quick to point out Origen's frustration with copyists that did not check their work, or who made changes at will.⁴³

Ramifications

The prevailing conclusion in light of these objections is threefold: God did not preserve the words of the Bible, God must not have given the words in the first place, and therefore, the Bible is strictly a human book.⁴⁴ The objective in the following pages is to lay a foundation from which one might reconsider whether or not the New Testament is of divine origin. If equal voices in early Christianity were silenced and their writings destroyed, the New Testament was created by the whim of man. If the text (and by implication the meaning of the text) has significantly changed over the years, then the New Testament of today is the result of the work

³⁸ Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research. Translated by Frederick C. Grant (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 32.

³⁹ Harold J. Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, revised edition (Peabody:

Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 52.

Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking (Nashville: Answers to the Questions Every Nelson Books, 2004), 14.

⁴¹ Philip Wesley Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 21.

⁴² Robert Walter Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 143.

⁴³ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 11.

of man. It would have no more value than any other old book in a museum. However, if the New Testament canon is authentic and reliable (there has been no exclusion of qualified writings, and the original writings have not been changed), it remains possible that God is the author.

Such an endeavor requires objectivity. Each reader, as well as this author, approaches the topic with a bias. Bultmann made a keen observation in recognizing "the apparently objective picture of historical process is always conditioned by the individuality of the observer, who also is historical and can never be a spectator who stands outside of historical time." A former student of Bultmann, Eta Linnemann, made her own keen observation concerning the application of the Historical-Critical Method to the Bible and theology: "the reality of God is excluded from the start, even if the researcher acknowledges that God could bear witness of himself in his Word." Linnemann has captured the heart of the matter. Could the New Testament be the work of God? That is only possible if the New Testament is authentic and reliable.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament & Mythology: and Other Basic Writings*, Translated by Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 156.

⁴⁶ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* Translated by Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 84.

CHAPTER 2

SELECTION OF THE BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

A surprising fact becomes apparent as one delves into the formation of the New Testament canon: there was no unified movement to produce one. ⁴⁷ Canonicity was passive in that man was not intentionally active in recognizing and collecting inspired books. ⁴⁸ Different men in different places at different times considered the value of multiple writings, which eventually produced a collection of "the survival of the fittest." Some books were universally recognized almost immediately as belonging to the canon. Other books, including ones that were eventually left out of the final collection, enjoyed regional acceptance at first. It was a process of elimination through which the writings that were considered authentic grew less in number. ⁵⁰ In time, the churches in the west accepted Hebrews, the churches in the east accepted Revelation, and they all settled on the general epistles. ⁵¹

There was a general progression that took place while the canon was in the developmental stages. ⁵² First, certain men wrote accounts of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the historical beginnings of the church, and instructions to the churches and its leaders. Almost immediately the early church made copies of these writings and taught from the ones they recognized as authoritative. Eventually the church councils officially recognized those books

⁴⁷ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 286.

⁴⁸ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 277.

⁴⁹ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 286.

⁵⁰ Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, Translated by Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 66.

⁵¹ Aland, 110.

⁵² James B. Williams, ed., From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Layman's Guide to How We Got Our Bible (Greenville: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2002), 32.

which were already considered to be Scripture. Books were recognized based upon their apostolic authority, conformity to orthodoxy, and widespread use.

Early Oral Tradition

Contrary to the speculation of some, not much time elapsed before accounts of the ministry of Jesus were put into written form. Mark's gospel is possibly the earliest of the written canonical records. It is generally accepted that this gospel was written around the mid 50's.⁵³

According to the early church author, Papias, Mark's gospel embodies the preaching of Peter.⁵⁴

He wrote, "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered."⁵⁵ This means that there was only about twenty years before some of the oral records were committed to written form. Such an early date lessens the probability that the records were exaggerated. This very point is made by Paul in I Corinthians 15:6. He challenges the doubters of Christ's resurrection to confirm his story by consulting any of the eyewitnesses, approximately 500, who were still alive at the time Paul wrote the letter.⁵⁶

Papias confirms that oral traditions and written records co-existed. He is credited with writing a five-book set, *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*, in the early to mid second century. He revealed that his sources were often written accounts, but that he preferred the oral information received from those who were taught by the apostles.⁵⁷ Eusebius quotes Papias:

⁵³ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 21.

⁵⁴ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 106.

⁵⁵ Fragments of Papias 6:25, from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁵⁶ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Chris.* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 249.

Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 52.

"For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice." ⁵⁸

Another example of this period of co-existence comes from Irenaeus in his writing,

Against Heresies. In it he states that Polycarp "...always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true." Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, 60 and referenced the writings of the apostles. He even calls some of the apostles' writings "Scriptures." Polycarp was a disciple of the apostles and referenced the writings of the apostles.

The arguments of form critics such as Bultmann and Dibelius are crippled by the short period of time that elapsed from the ascension of Christ to the writing of the gospels. There simply is not enough time to lengthen and embellish the accounts.⁶³

⁵⁸ Fragments of Papias, (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁵⁹ *Against Heresies 3:3:7*, from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

 ⁶⁰B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 15.
 ⁶¹Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 194.

Some examples of citations are as follows:

Reference to Matthew 26:14 – "... as the Lord has said: 'The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" *The Epistle of Polycarp*, Chapter 7 - Avoid the Docetae, and Persevere in Fasting and Prayer

Reference to Luke 6:20 –"Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God." *The Epistle of Polycarp* Chapter 2 - An Exhortation to Virtue

Reference to Acts 2:24 - "...whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave." *The Epistle of Polycarp*, Chapter 1 - Praise of the Philippians

Reference to I Corinthians 6:2 - "Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world?" *The Epistle of Polycarp*, Chapter 11 - Expression of Grief on Account of Valens (all references from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

References to I Peter 5:5; 2:12 – "Be all of you subject one to another having your conduct blameless among the Gentiles..." *The Epistle of Polycarp* Chapter 10 - Exhortation to the Practice of Virtue (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Reference to I John 4:3 - "For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;" *The Epistle of Polycarp* Chapter 7 - Avoid the Docetae, and Persevere in Fasting and Prayer (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁶² Reference is made to Ephesians 4:26 in *The Epistle of Polycarp*, Chapter 12 - Exhortation to Various Graces "It is declared then in these Scriptures, 'Be ye angry, and sin not,' and, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.'" (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁶³ Carson, 24.

Early Written Records

Copies of the original autographs were in circulation prior to the start of the second century. Peter acknowledges that the recipients of his second epistle were already familiar with the writings of Paul, and calls those writings Scripture (II Peter 3:15, 16). The Apostolic Fathers wrote during 90-160 AD and were acquainted with most of the New Testament books.⁶⁴ The written records of the apostles were as authoritative as the oral traditions,⁶⁵ even though the original audience may not have always recognized the letters as canonical.⁶⁶

References were often made to the written records by early second century church authors. Clement of Rome quoted from Matthew and Luke.⁶⁷ Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John and bishop of Smyrna, referenced Matthew, 1 John, ten of Paul's epistles, and I Peter.⁶⁸ He refers to these books approximately one-hundred times.⁶⁹

Little is known of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in the early second century, outside of his journey from Antioch to Rome for his martyrdom.⁷⁰ He wrote seven epistles at this time, in which he made use of Matthew and Paul's letters.⁷¹

⁶⁴F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 13.

⁶⁵ Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels, 33.

⁶⁶ Geisler and Nix, 282.

⁶⁷ Similarities to Matthew 6:12-15; 7:2; Luke 6:36-38 – "…being especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake, teaching us meekness and long-suffering. For thus He spoke: 'Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.'" *I Clement* Chapter 13 - An Exhortation to Humility (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁶⁸ Geisler and Nix, 291. See sample references to Scripture at footnote 61.

⁶⁹ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 60.

⁷⁰ M.A. Smith *From Christ to Constantine* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 33.

 $^{^{71}}$ Reference to Matthew 12:33 - "For the tree is known by its fruit." *Epistle to the Ephesians* Chapter 14 - Exhortations to Faith and Love

Reference to I Corinthians 1:31 – "But I measure myself, that I may not perish through boasting: but it is good to glory in the Lord." *Epistle to the Trallians*, Chapter 4 - I Have Need of Humility

Reference to I Timothy 2:4 - "For our God is a lover of mankind, and will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, Chapter 3 - Avoid Schismatics (all references from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Justin Martyr, the mid second century apologist, referenced a portion of the Nicodemus story from John's gospel. 72 He showed familiarity with all the gospels, many of Paul's epistles, I Peter and Revelation.⁷³ The written records were regarded as the "memoirs of the apostles"⁷⁴ and "Scripture." He also considered the written gospels more reliable than the oral traditions of his day.⁷⁶

Papias, called "one of the ancients" by Ireanaeus, 77 made reference to at least Matthew, Mark, Hebrews, I John and I Peter. ⁷⁸ Although none of his works are extant, portions have been preserved by those who quoted him, most notably Eusebius.

Some modern authors contend, however, that there are no clear, direct quotations from the written gospels until the late second century.⁷⁹ What is known is that the earliest Christian authors were at least familiar with the content of many of the New Testament books. They made frequent allusions to the books, albeit, not direct, word-for-word quotations. It should also be noted that this is considered to be a legitimate method of quotation by classical civilization standards.80

The four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were recognized as the four authoritative written accounts of the life of Christ by the mid second century. It was at this time

⁷² Bruce, New Testament Documents, 48.

⁷³ Geisler and Nix, 291.

⁷⁴ Dialogue with Trypho Chapter 103 - The Pharisees are the Bulls: the Roaring Lion is Herod or the Devil "... is recorded in the memoirs of the apostles to have come to Him and tempted Him..." (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

75 Harrop, 122.

⁷⁶ Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels, 37.

⁷⁷ F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: The Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," The Master's Seminary Journal Vol 10, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 56.

⁷⁹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J.A Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 121.

80 Geisler and Nix, 291.

that Tatian, an apologist who was influenced by Justin Martyr⁸¹, wrote the *Diatessaron*. The *Diatessaron* is a blending of the four accounts into one. This harmonized account became the preferred gospel version in the Assyrian church for many years, but its authority came from the original gospels.

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp⁸³ and the bishop of Lyon in Gaul. He wrote during the latter half of the second century, quoting from all the New Testament Canon except for Philemon, James, II Peter and III John.⁸⁴ Irenaeus records that the Ebionites thought Matthew wrote the only valid gospel,⁸⁵ insinuating that other gospels were known to them and deemed reliable by others.⁸⁶ He went on to assert that exactly four gospels were authentic:⁸⁷ Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

⁸¹ Bruce, New Testament Documents, 48.

⁸² Early Christian Writings, *The Diatessaron*, Translated by Roberts-Donaldson, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diatessaron.html.

⁸³ Robert M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 49.

⁸⁴ Geisler and Nix, 292.

Some examples of quotations are as follows:

Quotation from John 1:3 – "Also, 'all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.' For this reason, too, is that Gospel full of all confidence, for such is His person." *Against Heresies 3:11:8* (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Quotation from Acts 20:29,30 – "Then, referring to the evil teachers who should arise, he said: 'I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves come to you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." *Against Heresies 3:14:2* (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Quotation from I Corinthians 2:6 – "... wherefore also Paul declared, 'But we speak wisdom among those that are perfect, but not the wisdom of this world.' "Against Heresies 3:2:1 (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Quotation from I John 2:22 – "Know ye therefore, that every lie is from without, and is not of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is Antichrist." *Against Heresies 3:16:5* (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁸⁵ "For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord." *Against Heresies 3:11:7* (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁸⁶ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 250.

⁸⁷ "It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the pillar and ground of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh." *Against Heresies 3:11:8* (from

Copies of the apostle's writings made their way to Egypt in the early second century.

John Ryland's P⁵² fragment establishes the fact that the Gospel of John was in use in Egypt by 130 AD.⁸⁸ This places the writing of the gospel at the end of the first century, with widespread circulation within 30 to 40 years. Clement of Alexandria, a noted scholar of the late second and early third centuries, quoted from John and about twenty other New Testament books.⁸⁹

Tertullian, a contemporary of Clement,⁹⁰ spoke of an Old and New Instrument as people speak of Old and New Testament today.⁹¹ He wrote against heresies, and was instrumental in defining Christian theology through using most of the books of the present canon.

There is a general consensus among many modern scholars that the New Testament books were not all written until the mid second century. ⁹² The evidence, however, seems more supportive of von Tischendorf's assessment. Based on his work with early manuscripts he

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Some examples of quotations are as follows:

Quotation of John 5:24 – "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My words, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into condemnation, but hath passed from death to life."

The Instructor (Paidogogos) Chapter 6 - The Name Children Does Not Imply Instruction in Elementary Principles (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Quotation from Matthew 3:9 – "The silly are stocks and stones, and still more senseless than stones is a man who is steeped in ignorance. As our witness, let us adduce the voice of prophecy accordant with truth, and bewailing those who are crushed in ignorance and folly: 'For God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham;'" *Exhortation to the Heathen (Protreptikos)* Chapter 1 - Exhortation to Abandon the Impious Mysteries of Idolatry for the Adoration of the Divine Word and God The Father (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Quotation from Galatians 4:9 – "but reverencing 'these weak and beggarly elements,' as the apostle says, which were made for the service of man." *Exhortation to the Heathen (Protreptikos)* Chapter 5 - The Opinions of the Philosophers Respecting God (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

⁸⁸ Bruce, New Testament Documents, 12.

⁸⁹ Geisler and Nix, 292.

⁹⁰ Farnell, 76.

⁹¹ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 415.

⁹² David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

concluded that not only were the books written, but the canon may have been fully developed by the early second century. 93

Early Use of Scripture in Worship

Use of the Scripture was an instrumental part of the community of believers in Christ from the very beginning. Based on the authority of the Old Testament, Peter and the others chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot among the twelve prior to Pentecost (Acts 1:16ff). Immediately after Pentecost the teaching of the apostles was a major focal point of church life (Acts 2:42). Leaders of the church were soon admonished to devote themselves to the public reading of the Word of God (I Tim 4:13). As letters were sent to churches, sharing the letters with congregations in other cities was encouraged (Colossians 4:16). Local congregations independently began to collect the gospels and letters from the apostles. Within a few decades, reading the Old Testament along with the written records from the apostles was a regular part of corporate worship. At first, an official list of approved letters did not exist.⁹⁴

Justin Martyr wrote that worship services in the second century included readings from "the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets." Tertullian records that a normal worship service would consist of a meal, or the agape love feast, singing, the reading of Scripture, and prayer. In some congregations a book like *The Shepherd of Hermas* was considered to be acceptable and authoritative enough to be used in worship. However, in time some standards developed to distinguish between those books which were truly authoritative and those which were not. This led to the exclusion of books like *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

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⁹³ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 20.

⁹⁴ Geisler and Nix, 287.

⁹⁵ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 6.

⁹⁶ Smith, 103.

Early Development of a Universal Canon

The Need

Wherever there is truth, there will be error. Jesus warned of false teachers among the people during his ministry (Matt 7:15). John warned that false teachers were among the believers before the end of the first century (I John 4:1). Paul needed to combat false rumors and counterfeit letters that were circulating among the churches in his name (II Thessalonians 2:2). It should come as no surprise that false teachings and letters would continue to surface during the early years of the church and beyond.

"Heretical concerns led the church to canon recognition." Interestingly, the first known list was compiled by a heretic. Marcion was a wealthy ship owner who joined the congregation in Rome in the late 130's. He took a view that the Jewish God was concerned with judgment while the Father of Jesus focused on love. Therefore, he concluded that the Creator God of the Old Testament could not possibly be the Father of Jesus. He also concluded that the gospels and letters of the apostles that were in circulation had to have been corrupted by those who worshipped the Creator God. His purpose was to purify the church of what he considered incorrect teaching.⁹⁹ He compiled a list of the books he thought were acceptable, and then proceeded to edit them, removing anything that put the Creator God or Judaism in a favorable light. 100 Nothing of the Old Testament was thought to have value for the church. Only Luke's gospel and ten of Paul's epistles were included in his canon. 101 Tertullian and Epiphanius were

⁹⁷ Early Christian Writings, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd-lightfoot.html.

⁹⁸ Lee Martin McDonald, "The Integrity of the Biblical Canon in Light of its Historical Development," Bulletin for Biblical Research 6 (1996): 118.

⁹⁹ Martin M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London: London Hodder and

Stoughton, 1903), 220.

100 David Salter Williams, "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol 108, no. 3 (1989): 477.

¹⁰¹ Ewert, 133.

openly critical of these editions. 102 Thus, Marcion stimulated the process of defining a proper canon. 103

Gnosticism was on the rise and infiltrating Christian circles by the mid second century. With it came literature which blended Gnosticism and Christianity. Gnosticism itself was out of line with both mainstream Christianity and Judaism. The Nag Hammadi documents reflect the combination of these various elements. The mainline church viewed Gnosticism as an aberration, with "doctrines based on an ill-digested syncretism between Christianity and Greek philosophy. Traditional Christianity looked back to the writings of the apostles, while Gnostics claimed access to special knowledge. Gnostics produced forgeries of gospels attributed to apostles such as Thomas, and letters attributed to Paul in support of their doctrines. Books of this nature were never given serious consideration for inclusion in the canon throughout the early centuries of the church's existence.

Montanus also caused controversy in the late second century. He presented himself as the promised Paraclete and prophesied the soon return of Christ. Two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, promoted his teachings. This movement was condemned in mainline Christianity from the outset, for the prophecies did not conform to the already recognized doctrines of the church. Those who refuted these new teachings turned to the accepted writings of the apostles to expose the heresy.

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¹⁰² Harrop, 117.

¹⁰³ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ Frend, 210.

¹⁰⁷ Bock, 73.

¹⁰⁸ J. Williams, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ewert, 133.

¹¹⁰ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "The Original Condemnation of Asian Montanism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 50, Issue 1 (January 1999): 1.

Persecutions also forced the church to determine which writings were authoritative. The persecution under Diocletian, which began in 303 AD, was pivotal. A systematic destruction of church buildings and manuscripts swept over large portions of the Roman Empire. The intensity of the persecution grew over a two year span as a result of four separate edicts. Church leaders began to hide their copies of what they considered to be the Scriptures, and were ordered in the later stages of the persecution to turn them over to be burned. Since concealing the letters might mean death, Christians were forced to determine which of them were worth dying for. This did not result in a published list of canonical books, but it did help set the precedent for which books were already considered the most valuable, authentic, and sacred.

By the time Constantine commissioned Eusebius in 331 AD to produce fifty copies of the Bible for the churches being built in Constantinople, 115 a canon was basically already agreed upon. Differences of opinion still existed over a handful of books. This would be sorted out over the next few decades. The majority of the canon was settled before any church councils intervened. All twenty-seven books of the present canon were accepted almost universally as at least authoritative by the end of the third century. 116

The Criteria

Specific criteria for determining the authoritative books emerged as the church began to identify a canon. Apostolic origin was at the forefront. Writings attached to the apostles

¹¹¹ Aland, 65.

Donald L. Jones, "Christianity and Emperor Worship from Hadrian to Constantine," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* Vol VI, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 42-43.

¹¹³ McDonald, 119.

¹¹⁴ Cairns, 94.

¹¹⁵ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

¹¹⁶ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 75.

separated themselves from the others, and soon were revered the same as the Old Testament books. 117

One criterion was that of authorship. Trusted testimony of the life of Christ had to be grounded in eyewitness accounts. Irenaeus revealed that only the apostles, or a very close associate of an apostle, were satisfactory authors. The gospels of Matthew and John were written by apostles. Mark reportedly wrote on behalf of Peter. Luke admittedly consulted with eyewitnesses, and was a very close associate of Paul. The *Diatessaron* (meaning "through the four") was eventually rejected as canonical because it was a blending of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The use of the *Diatessaron* could indicate that only four gospels were recognized as authentic by the end of the second century. The ultimate decision, however, was to adhere to the originals.

The importance of apostolic origin is evident. Gnostic forgeries had apostolic names attached to them, presumably to gain acceptance. Some of the apocryphal books enjoyed initial acceptance, such as *The Apocalypse of Peter*, ¹²⁰ because of Peter's name. ¹²¹ Hebrews was accepted at an earlier date in the east only because it was attributed to Paul. ¹²² Later, Jerome and Augustine were instrumental in encouraging the west to canonize Hebrews based on Pauline authorship, though there is reason to believe neither was fully persuaded Paul was the author. ¹²³

This criterion necessitates an early date for the writing of the book. Because the acceptable works had to be of apostolic origin, the book also had to be of an early date. The later

¹¹⁷ A.H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament.* second edition revised by C.S.C. Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 314.

^{1ì8} Harrop, 126.

Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels, 403.

¹²⁰ The Gnostic Society Library, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, Translated by James Brashler and Roger A. Bullard, http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/naghamm/apopet.html.

¹²¹ Ewert, 130.

¹²² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. revised (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 14.

the date, the less likely an apostle was directly involved in the writing of the book. No book was seriously considered that was written after 120 AD. 124

An "essential content of the Christian faith" or "Canon of Truth" existed from the beginning of the New Testament era. This kerygma was in agreement with known teachings of the apostles. "Since the canon did not yet exist but was emerging, grounds of authority were sought within the writings." Therefore, another criterion for an authentic writing was that it must uphold this body of truth, especially pertaining to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Divergent teachings appeared soon after truth was established. The Apostle Paul confronted false doctrine in Galatia (Gal 1:6-9), Corinth (II Corinthians 11:3-5, 13-15), and Philippi (Philippians 3:2). He warned the leaders of the church in Ephesus of imminent opposition to sound doctrine (Acts 20:29-31). It is important to realize that truth comes before error. Tertullian, in *Prescription Against Heretics*, ¹²⁷ avidly establishes the fact that "in everything truth precedes its counterfeit." ¹²⁸

Various strains of legitimate, contradictory truth did not initially spring up at the same time. Books were not recognized as canonical because the stronger party endorsed them. For example, the Gospel of Peter¹²⁹ enjoyed some acceptance at first because Peter's name was attached to it. It was eventually rejected due to the Gnostic teaching of Docetism that Jesus' physical body was an illusion. 130 Thus, it is not surprising that the canon does not include

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¹²³ Ibid, 17.

¹²⁴ Witherington, 126.

¹²⁵ Von Campenhausen, 288.

¹²⁶ John Piper, "The Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon: A Response to Gerald Sheppard on Canon Criticism," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 19, no.2 (Spring 1976): 89.

¹²⁷ Early Christian Writings, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, Translated by Peter Holmes, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian11.html.

¹²⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1985), 81.

¹²⁹ Early Christian Writings, *The Gospel of Peter*, Translated by Raymond Brown,

http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter-brown.html ¹³⁰ Ewert, 130.

writings that were primarily popular among the followers of heretics like Montanus. Such books promote a departure from the *kerygma* already established through the apostle's teaching.

Another essential criterion in establishing the canon was that each book needed to have universal acceptance. While some books were popular among certain churches, local popularity was not sufficient endorsement for the whole church. Writings containing sound doctrine and solid encouragement were produced by godly believers. This occurs even to do this day. That does not mean, however, that the author was inspired by God. Universal recognition among believers is an indicator that the Spirit was guiding the process (I Corinthians 2:11-14). "The providence that guides this process should not be overlooked."

The Shepherd of Hermas is a good example of one such book that was eventually excluded from the canon based on the criteria above. Irenaeus¹³³ apparently quoted from the *Shepherd* and called it Scripture. The *Shepherd* was also included in Codex Sinaiticus, a significant uncial manuscript from the fourth century. However, the author of the Muratorian Canon commented that the *Shepherd* "ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publically to the people in the church." He reasoned that it was not written early enough to be considered Scripture. The church universally agreed over time that this book did not meet the criteria to be included with the canonical books.

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¹³¹ Ibid., 131.

¹³² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1998), 245.

¹³³ Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 153. Quotation from *Shepherd of Hermas 2:1* by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies 4:20:2* – "Truly, then, the Scripture declared, which says, 'First of all believe that there is one God, who has established all things, and completed them, and having caused that from what had no being, all things should come into existence: He who contains all things, and is Himself contained by no one." (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

[&]quot;First of all, believe that there is one God who created and finished all things, and made all things out of nothing. He alone is able to contain the whole, but Himself cannot be contained." *Shepherd of Hermas 2:1* (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

The Process of Selection

All twenty-seven of the canonical books were written by the close of the first century or very shortly thereafter. 135 There was immediate recognition by at least some of the authors that they were producing Scripture (II Peter 3:15-16). At least some of the letters circulated among various churches from the very beginning (Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27). These letters carried the same weight as the spoken words of the apostles (II Thessalonians 2:15), and were always in full agreement with their verbal instruction (II Thessalonians 2:5).

Counterfeit letters were in circulation even before all the canonical books were written (II Thessalonians 2:2). The apostles cautioned the churches to use discretion concerning their sources of spiritual instruction. Heretical doctrine was most notably identified by a departure from the apostles' teaching on the person and work of Christ (I John 4:1-3).

Contemporaries of the apostle John made references to the spoken and/or written words of the apostles. Although it is impossible to derive a conclusive list of canonical books from these references, the authority of the apostles' words cannot be ignored. Ignatius seemed to be familiar with the gospels of Matthew and John, and possibly Luke. 136 Many of his phrases are strikingly similar to those found in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians and Philippians. There may also be allusions to Hebrews, I Peter, ¹³⁷ and Paul's letters to the Galatians, Colossians and Thessalonians. ¹³⁸ The letters of Polycarp display familiarity with a similar list of gospels and epistles. 139

¹³⁴ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 305-307 (Metzger's English translation of the Muratorian Fragment).

135 Bruce, New Testament Documents, 6-7.

¹³⁶ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 49.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹³⁸ Harrop, 113.

¹³⁹ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 61.

Later second century authors, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, endorse no fewer than twenty-two canonical books by 200 AD. 140 It is observed that non-canonical books were also used by some of these authors. The Shepherd of Hermes was used favorably by Irenaeus, 141 and by Tertullian in his earlier writings. 142 Clement of Alexandria favorably referenced at least 9 non-canonical works while acknowledging that many of these writings were not recognized elsewhere. 143

Some of the books were gathered together in collections by this time period. At least ten of Paul's epistles had been circulating as a group. The four gospels seem to have been gathered together as well. Irenaeus speaks of these four as if it was an established fact that they were the only universally accepted gospels by 180 AD. AD.

Origen's writings are perhaps the best gauge of the recognition of authoritative books in the third century. While he affirmed that only the four gospels were recognized in the church, he occasionally referenced others, such as *The Gospel of Peter* and *The Gospel to the Hebrews*. Acts was received as the work of Luke. All of Paul's letters were received, including Philemon and II Timothy. In regards to II Timothy he commented, "Some have dared to reject this Epistle, but they were not able." He accepted the epistle to the Hebrews as authentic, although he was uncertain of its authorship. He once commented, "But who wrote the epistle, in

¹⁴⁰ Ewert, 126.

¹⁴¹ Grant, 153.

¹⁴² Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 159-160

¹⁴³ Harrop, 125.

¹⁴⁴ Carsten Peter Thiede, "A Testament in Born," *Christian History* 43 (1994): 27.

¹⁴⁵ Bruce, New Testament Documents, 19.

¹⁴⁶ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 137.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

truth God knows."¹⁵⁰ Origen quotes from most of the general epistles, but says Peter "has left one acknowledged Epistle; possibly also a second, but this is disputed."¹⁵¹

Christian writings under consideration for apostolic authority fell into one of three categories at this time: books that were accepted by all (Homologoumena), those that were disputed by all (Antilegomena), and those that were rejected by all (Pseudepigrapha). Those accepted by all were originally limited to twenty of the twenty-seven canonical books. The other seven were among the Antilegomena.

These seven questionable books were eventually accepted as canonical when the objections were resolved to the satisfaction of nearly everyone. Even if Paul did not write Hebrews, it was understood that it at least bore his mark of influence (as Mark bears the influence of Peter). Works in James were no longer seen as a means of salvation, but an outgrowth of genuine faith. If Peter was included after the differences in style between I and II Peter were not attributed to different authors. Peter enlisted the help of a scribe in writing I Peter (5:12), but penned II Peter himself. If and III John gained acceptance as letters of the apostle John, even though he identifies himself as the elder in the letters. If Peter could call himself an elder in I Peter 5:12, why not John in two of his letters? Jude's references to non-canonical Old Testament writings were deemed permissible in light of Paul's references to pagan poets (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Neither quoted these sources as inspired by God. Revelation was included after the references to a millennial kingdom were no longer seen as an endorsement of fringe, cultic groups such as the Montanists. 154

¹⁵⁰ As quoted by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.13 Donald A. Hagner, *New International Biblical Commentary: Hebrews* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 11.

¹⁵¹ As quoted by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.8 Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 138. ¹⁵² Geisler and Nix, 298.

¹⁵³ Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1996), 153.

¹⁵⁴ Geisler and Nix, 298-301.

Objections to the other disputed books were never resolved. Those books went on to be considered useful, but not canonical. Tatian's *Diatessaron* was excluded in lieu of the four gospels used to produce it. Though *The Shepherd of Hermas* was popular among many, it was written too late to be apostolic. ¹⁵⁵ I Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas and the *Didache* simply did not gain wide acceptance as canonical. They were considered authoritative early, but were on the fringe by the time of Eusebius and Athanasius. ¹⁵⁶

Many Christian writings, especially canonical books, were destroyed during the Diocletian Persecution in 303 AD. Perhaps in sympathy to the depletion of sacred Christian literature, Constantine, upon his conversion to Christianity in 313 AD, commissioned Eusebius to produce 50 copies of the Scriptures. No one knows for certain which writings Eusebius introduced into this project. It is likely that some of the Antilegomena, such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the Epistle of Barnabas, were incorporated, being that significant manuscripts like the Codex Sinaiticus include such books.

Several councils convened over the next century that greatly helped to define the established canon. Contrary to the thoughts of some, ¹⁵⁷ the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD did not focus on the New Testament canon. Rather, the main topics centered on the heretical teachings of Arianism. ¹⁵⁸ A tone was set, however, for future councils that would consider the canon. The outcome was not based upon winning debates, but on affirming the dominant views. ¹⁵⁹

The Council of Laodicea in 363 AD did address matters concerning the canon. All extant records of the proceedings include a statement that only canonical books should be read in the

¹⁵⁵ Ewert, 131.

¹⁵⁶ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 49.

¹⁵⁷ This fallacy is promoted in *The Da Vinci Code*. "'Who chose which gospels to include?' Sophie asked. "Aha!' Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. 'The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.'... In 325 A.D., he decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity." Brown, 251.

¹⁵⁸ Kuiper, 30-31.

churches.¹⁶⁰ Latter versions of the decree add a list of the canonical books, but the validity of this list is questionable.¹⁶¹ It is omitted in early copies, and in most Latin and Syriac versions.¹⁶² At the very least it is known that a canon was basically established, and that all in attendance were knowledgeable of what that entailed.¹⁶³

Four years later, Athanasius sent a canonical list of Old Testament and New Testament books to the eastern churches. He specifically lists our present twenty-seven New Testament books in his Easter letter of 367 AD. This is the first time it is known for certain that these books and only these books were presented as those that are inspired. No one should assume, however, that the whole church had reached an agreement. Gregory of Nazianzus, a contemporary of Athanasius, omitted Revelation from his list. 166

Amphilochius the bishop of Iconium, was another contemporary of Athanasius. His poem, *Iambics for Seleucus*, ¹⁶⁷ was written to encourage Seleucus to study the Scriptures. He

¹⁵⁹ Bock, 102.

¹⁶⁰ "No psalms composed by private individuals nor any uncanonical books may be read in the church, but only the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments." *Synod of Laodicea Canon 59* (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 14, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

¹⁶¹ Editorial comment "This Canon is of most questionable genuineness." *Synod of Laodicea Canon 60*, (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 14, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

¹⁶² Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 210.

¹⁶³ Ewert, 129.

¹⁶⁴ Festal Letter 39:5 – "Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John." (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 4, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

¹⁶⁵ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 212.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

Orthodoxy Through Patristic, Monastic and Liturgical Study, *The Canon of Scripture (Iambics for Seleucus)*, http://www.monachos.net/library/Amphilocius_of_Iconium%2C_The_Canon_of_Scripture

expressed some doubt over the inclusion of a few of the twenty-seven New Testament books, but then exclaimed, "This is perhaps the most reliable canon of the divinely inspired Scriptures." 168

Several African councils convened from the late fourth into the early fifth century. The exact number of these local councils or synods is difficult to establish. ¹⁶⁹ What is known is that the twenty-seven canonical books were verified as the established canon during these years.

The canon was clearly confirmed at the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD. Although the original records of this synod have been lost, abridgements of the canons (ecclesiastical codes or laws that were established) were read at a later council in Carthage in 397 AD. ¹⁷⁰ The canon begins, "Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in the church under the title of 'divine writings.'" The twenty-seven canonical books are listed as the New Testament. The bishops in attendance, which included Augustine, ¹⁷² did not choose which books were authentic, "but simply recorded their previously established canonicity." ¹⁷³

Canon 24 of the 419 AD Council of Carthage is the abridgement of Canon 36 from Hippo that was read at the 397 AD Council of Carthage. The list of the canonical books of the New Testament was not altered. This consistency demonstrates that the church leaders in Africa did not waiver in their resolve that the twenty-seven books were firmly established.

¹⁶⁹ "The numbering of the African councils differs very widely between the different writers." Historical Introduction (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 14, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents*, Vol II, Translated by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 395.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 400.

¹⁷² Ibid, 395.

¹⁷³Encyclopedia Coptica: The Christian Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, *The Book We Call the Bible: The New Testament Canon*, http://www.coptic.net/articles/TheStoryOfTheBible.txt

The New Testament Canon, http://www.coptic.net/articles/TheStoryOfTheBible.txt

174 The canon is entitled "That nothing be read in church besides the Canonical Scripture." (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 14, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

A synod in Rome convened in 382 AD to discuss the Biblical canon. The church in the west recognized the same twenty-seven book New Testament canon as in the east.

Some opposition to this list has surfaced over the years. The issue was especially revisited during the Reformation. Reformers questioned many beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church, so it is not surprising that the canon would be questioned as well.

Martin Luther specifically expressed doubts concerning Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. He grouped these four together in his 1522 German translation of the New Testament. Hebrews was the first in the series. In his preface to Hebrews he wrote, "Up to this point we have had to do with the true and certain chief books of the New Testament. The four which follow have from ancient times had a different reputation." He expressed his opinion that James, although a good book, could not have been written by an apostle. Likewise, he did not think that Jude shared authority with the "chief books." Luther suggested that Revelation was not of apostolic origin, and not prophetic. 179

Even though he harbored doubts about some of the books, Luther was not willing to remove them from his German translation of the Bible. He even quoted from these books in his writings, making no distinction between them and other Scriptures. All twenty-seven

176 Bible Research: Internet Resources for Students of Scripture, *Luther's Treatment of the 'Disputed Books' of the New Testament*, http://www.bible-researcher.com/antilegomena.html.

¹⁷⁵ New Advent, *Catholic Encyclopedia: Canon of the New Testament*, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03274a.htm

[&]quot;However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle;" Ibid, *Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*.

¹⁷⁸ "Therefore, although I value this book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are supposed to lay the foundations of falth." Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ "I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic." Ibid, *Preface to the Revelation of St. John*.

¹⁸⁰ Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, 242.

¹⁸¹ For instance, in Luther's commentary on Galatians he references Hebrews 11:6 (on Galatians 3:10), James 2:10 (on Galatians 5:9), and Jude 4 (on Galatians 5:13). *Luther's Commentary on Galatians*, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 1999, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

books continued to be recognized as those that originated with the apostles and were in agreement with the *kerygma* of the apostles' teaching.

CHAPTER 3

PRESERVATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

How is it known the books that are in existence today have not been significantly changed since they were penned in the first century? There are two key factors that cannot be denied: all the original autographs are gone, and differences exist in the remaining copies. 182

Doubt in the trustworthiness of the current New Testament is cultivated even by those who produce printed copies of the Bible. The following is quoted from the preface of the 1952 edition of the RSV published by the American Bible Society: "The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying." Christian scholars add that some papyri manuscripts of the New Testament show evidence that they were not copied with the greatest of care, 184 and important changes to the text likely were made within the first one hundred years of the original autographs. 185

It is very likely that the very first copies were made privately,¹⁸⁶ and not by trained scribes.¹⁸⁷ The original autographs and earliest copies were probably written on papyrus. Many, such as Paul's letters, were likely delivered in codex (book) form as opposed to on a scroll.¹⁸⁸ Churches would make copies of the books and letters they received. Copies were passed along to other local churches. There may not have always been very close supervision or intense

¹⁸² David Alan Black, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament" in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 396.

¹⁸³ Preface to *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (New York: American Bible Society, 1952), iii.

¹⁸⁴ Greenlee, 36.

¹⁸⁵ Harrop, 41.

¹⁸⁶ Aland, 70.

¹⁸⁷ Harrop, 14.

Greenlee, 34.

proofreading.¹⁸⁹ Even if these assumptions are true, it is also reasonable to assume that the copies were relatively accurate. The circulating manuscripts were cherished by those who received and copied them. It is also possible that the scribes who penned letters for the apostles (Rom 16:22; I Peter 5:12) produced multiple copies themselves.

There is strong evidence that by the early third century "readers" in Egypt were responsible for making their own copies of the Scriptures they read in worship. ¹⁹⁰ The earliest Alexandrian scriptoriums were established around this time as well. ¹⁹¹ Trained scribes were careful to preserve the integrity of the text, ¹⁹² especially since their remuneration depended on the number of accurate lines produced. ¹⁹³

The Process of Copying Manuscripts

The original New Testament manuscripts and the earliest copies were likely written on papyrus. This was the most common writing material until the third century. ¹⁹⁴ It was made by pressing and gluing together two layers of split papyrus reeds. ¹⁹⁵ This material was not easily preserved outside the dry climate of Egypt. ¹⁹⁶ This explains why most of the ancient papyri manuscripts are from Egypt.

Papyrus sheets usually ranged in size from six by nine inches to twelve by fifteen inches. Twenty sheets were glued together to make a scroll, ¹⁹⁷ or a small number of sheets were folded and fastened together to form a codex. ¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ Ewert, 152.

¹⁹⁰ Comfort, 15.

¹⁹¹ Aland, 70.

¹⁹² Comfort, 22.

¹⁹³ Ewert, 137.

¹⁹⁴ Greenlee, 20.

¹⁹⁵ Geisler and Nix, 337.

¹⁹⁶ Ewert, 62.

¹⁹⁷ Greenlee, 20.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 25.

New Testament manuscripts were mostly written on parchment from the fourth century forward. Parchment was made from animal skins, and was much more durable than papyrus. Parchment could be made into scrolls or codices. Most of the extant New Testament manuscripts are parchment codices. Parchment codices.

Earlier Greek New Testament manuscripts were written in uncial form. This form is sometimes called majuscule. Uncials were written as all capital letters with no punctuation or spacing between the words. Manuscripts written prior to the tenth century were usually written as uncials. ²⁰¹

The minuscule, or small letter writing, became prominent by the tenth century.

Minuscules were faster to write, and took up less space on the page. Nearly nine-tenths of the extant New Testament manuscripts are minuscules. 203

Some manuscripts were undoubtedly copied by individual scribes working independently, especially during the early days of the church.²⁰⁴ The scribe may or may not have been a professional. Later, manuscripts were produced in scriptoriums.²⁰⁵ A lector, or reader, would dictate aloud from an exemplar (the document that was to be copied). As many as fifty scribes would sit or stand at benches in the room.²⁰⁶ The scribes wrote what they heard as the lector slowly read the text aloud.²⁰⁷ Sometimes a corrector would check over the manuscripts produced in a scriptorium and note the inaccuracies in the margin.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ Ewert, 63.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰¹ Greenlee, 27.

²⁰² Ewert, 137.

²⁰³ Greenlee, 29.

²⁰⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, 24.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁶ Harrop, 55.

²⁰⁷ Metzger and Ehrman, 25.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Nature of the Errors

Even paid scribes made mistakes. It is difficult to copy large texts without making at least one or two errors. Considering that thousands of New Testament copies were produced, it is amazing that more errors do not exist.²⁰⁹

The majority of errors were minor, unintentional mistakes.²¹⁰ For example, there is a difference among manuscripts in Romans 5:1. Some contain the Greek word *echomen*, while others have *echōmen*. The difference it makes in the English translation is that it reads "we have peace with God" or "let us have peace with God." It is a difference, but it is minor.

Another common error was confusing letters that look alike. This resulted in I Timothy 3:15 reading "God was manifested in the flesh" or "who was manifested in the flesh." Again, this is a very minor error that does not change or confuse the teaching within the passage.

Uncial manuscripts, written roughly between the third and eighth centuries, did not have separations between the words. The writing was done predominantly with all capital letters. Errors could be made by incorrectly dividing the words²¹² when the minuscule style (dividing the words and using both capital and lower case letters) became popular. This is demonstrated in English with the following phrase: HEISNOWHERE. The statement could be read "He is now here" or "He is nowhere."

Scribes who were familiar with certain phrases elsewhere in the Bible were susceptible to adding words to a similar phrase. This may have happened when a scribe was copying

²⁰⁹ Bruce, New Testament Documents, 14.

²¹⁰ Greenlee, 57.

²¹¹ Ewert, 152.

²¹² Greenlee, 55.

²¹³ Geisler and Nix, 469.

Colossians 1:14. Instead of stopping with "in whom we have redemption", the scribe probably added "through the blood" based on recollection of Ephesians 1:7.²¹⁴

Errors of hearing happened when one person would read the text as one or more scribes wrote the new manuscript(s). This could explain why Matt 19:24 in some manuscripts from the fifth century onward read that it is easier for a rope (*kamelos*) to pass through the eye of a needle instead of a camel (*kamēlos*). ²¹⁵ This may be the reason why Rev 1:5 sometimes reads that Jesus washed (*lousanti*) us from our sins while others say he freed (*lusanti*) us from our sin. ²¹⁶

Sometimes a whole phrase was mistakenly omitted when a following line or phrase ends with the same or similar word. This is seen in Codex Vaticanus in John 17:15. The following portion in brackets was inadvertently skipped: "I do not pray that thou shouldst take **them from the** [world, but that thou shouldst keep **them from the**] evil one." The scribe's eyes apparently skipped from the first occurrence of "them from the" to the second. In this case the error does make a difference, but is easily detected. Such mistakes could be caught and corrected in future copies.

This leads to the reasoning behind some intentional changes. A scribe might have legitimately noticed an error such as the one above and changed it to agree with other manuscripts. However, a scribe could also be mistaken and, with good intension, actually make an error instead of a correction. This may explain a discrepancy among some manuscripts in Romans 8:2. "Your" (se) has been changed to "my" (me) to agree with the sense of the previous verses.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Ewert, 153.

²¹⁵ Geisler and Nix, 469.

²¹⁶ Ewert, 153.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

²¹⁸ Greenlee, 67.

Scribes have intentionally made linguistic and grammatical changes, such as correcting a first aorist ending on a second aorist verb. This appears to be the case in Mark 6:29 (*eélthon* / *eélthan*). Harmonization between two similar passages has occurred. The phrase "this people" has been added to Matthew 15:8 to agree with Isaiah 29:13. A doctrinal statement on the Trinity has been added to I John 5:7-8, and a doxology has been added to the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:13. Loose quotations of Old Testament verses have been corrected, as in changing the tense of a verb in John 2:17 to agree with Psalm 69:9.

Attempts were made to clarify or improve a passage. Comments were added in the margin, information was given about the other, and difficult words were defined (glosses).²²⁴ In some instances these comments were later copied into the text itself. The comment in John 5:4 that an angel came and stirred the waters is one instance. It does not exist in older manuscripts, and about twenty later manuscripts that include it have the phrase marked to indicate it is doubtful or spurious.²²⁵

Intentional errors were far less numerous than the unintentional.²²⁶ Scribes were aware that changes were taking place. There is good evidence that many were devoted to protecting the integrity of the texts. A note is found in the margin of Codex Vaticanus next to Hebrews 1:3 which reads, "Fool and knave, can't you leave the old reading alone and not alter it." An "old reading" was valued and recognized. Alterations did not always go unnoticed. Conscientious

²¹⁹ Ibid., 66.

²²⁰ Geisler and Nix, 472.

²²¹ Greenlee, 68.

²²² Ibid., 66.

²²³ Ewert, 154.

²²⁴ Ibid., 138.

²²⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 98.

²²⁶Greenlee, 58

²²⁷ Ewert, 153.

scribes endeavored to reconstruct changed texts back to the original form. Textual Criticism, then, was in vogue well before the modern era.

Evidences of Authenticity

One important matter to consider was the cost involved in producing a complete New Testament manuscript. A sizeable investment usually constrains those involved with a project to exercise a good amount of caution. Although the first copies were written on papyrus, parchment was the material used for the majority of the extant manuscripts. Parchment was made from hides of sheep and goats. It took at least fifty to sixty sheep or goats to produce the parchment needed for one complete New Testament. ²²⁸ This in itself is a sizeable investment.

Scribes were then paid to write on the parchment. The established rate of pay was twenty-five denarii for every 100 lines of text. One denari was the customary daily wage for a common laborer. The lines of text in Codex Sinaiticus would have exacted a wage of approximately thirty-thousand denarii. 229 This is more than the average wage earner would make in a lifetime.

More convincing arguments for authenticity are made from three lines of evidence²³⁰ which prove that, in spite of changes made to New Testament manuscripts, the modern day copies are very reasonably accurate to the originals. One test is to compare early quotations of the church fathers to the extant texts. Another is to compare the copies of early translations into other languages to the extant Greek texts. Finally, the Greek manuscripts are examined in light of the number of years that elapsed between the original autographs and the oldest extant copies, the number of extant copies, and the magnitude of the variations among the extant copies.

<sup>Aland and Aland, 77.
Metzger and Ehrman, 26.
Ewert, 155.</sup>

Quotations by Church Fathers

Early Christian authors cited the New Testament thousands of times. The citations and allusions are so numerous and extensive that the basic content of the New Testament could practically be reconstructed without the use of actual manuscripts.²³¹ According to Burgon's index, the combined references of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origin, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Eusebius total over thirty-six thousand.²³²

These citations, however, are not of a caliber to determine the exact wording and order of the original texts. Eusebius, for example, cites the New Testament over five-thousand times, yet he rarely quotes a large passage. Furthermore, it seems that he often quoted loosely or from memory.²³³

Other early writers followed this same pattern. Origen used obvious paraphrases. ²³⁴ One such case is his citation of John 1:18 in *Against Celsus*. ²³⁵ Irenaeus cited John 1:18 in at least three different forms in *Against Heresies*. ²³⁶ A comparison of the citations to the Greek texts found in extant manuscripts verifies that these men knew and referenced John's gospel. The

²³¹ Greenlee, 54.

²³² Geisler and Nix, 431.

²³³ Ibid., 428.

²³⁴ Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts: A Working Introduction to Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 169.

²³⁵ "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." *Against Celsus* 2:71 (from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

²³⁶ Finegan, 167.

[&]quot;For 'no man,' he says, 'hath seen God at any time, unless the only-begotten Son of God, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared [Him]." *Against Heresies 3:11:6*

[&]quot;... as is written in the Gospel: 'No man hath seen God at any time, except the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; He has declared [Him.]'" *Against Heresies 4:20:6*

[&]quot;... of whom also the Lord said, 'No man hath seen God at any time." *Against Heresies 4:20:11* (all quotations from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

citations also demonstrate that the meaning of the verse is consistent. A precise reconstruction of the original Greek text, though, must be dependent on other sources.

Early Translations

A second line of evidence is a consideration of the early translations made from the Greek manuscripts. Greek was the common language among the civilized nations, yet people still preferred to read, write and speak in their native tongue. Christians have been mission minded from the first days of the church and took their message to many different people groups. By the end of the second century, most of the New Testament books were already translated into several other languages.

Latin versions were used in the West. Numerous and varied copies existed by the late fourth century. 237 Jerome, who was perhaps the greatest biblical scholar of the early church next to Origen, ²³⁸ was commissioned by Pope Damasus in 382 AD to produce a universal Latin translation. Jerome's work faced intense opposition at first. It took until after his death for the Latin Vulgate to gain universal acceptance. 239 There are approximately 8,000 extant copies. 240

Coptic versions were translated in Egypt. Extant manuscripts exist primarily in two dialects: Sahidic from Upper (southern) Egypt and Bohairic from Lower (northern) Egypt in the Delta region.²⁴¹ The Sahidic translation was completed as early as 200 AD.²⁴² The Bohairic

²³⁷ Harrop, 32.

²³⁸ The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome, Edited by P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 510.

²³⁹ Victor Walter, "Versions of the Bible," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Comfort, Philip Wesley (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 323. ²⁴⁰ Harrop, 32

²⁴¹ Geisler and Nix, 516-517.

²⁴² Walter, 324.

eventually became the most dominant of the Coptic dialect versions. There are over 100 extant Bohairic manuscripts.²⁴³

Several versions of Syriac translations were produced. Tatian's Diatessaron, written about 160 AD, was in Syriac. The Peshitta, dating from at least the early fifth century, eventually became the standard text.²⁴⁴ There are at least 350 known Peshita manuscripts.²⁴⁵

Translations were written over the next few centuries in Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Slavic and Arabic.²⁴⁶ There are approximately nine-thousand extant translated manuscripts in addition to the approximately five-thousand in Greek, all dated prior to the printing press.²⁴⁷

The versions cannot, however, validate specific details of the original Greek text. Latin does not have a definite article. No distinction can be made between the Greek aorist and perfect tenses in Syriac. Copic lacks a passive voice. ²⁴⁸ They do validate the essence of the Greek text. The vast number of these copies coupled with the striking agreement in text among them provides a strong defense for the integrity of the New Testament.

Historical Validation

Historians determine the accuracy of extant manuscripts to the original based on at least two critical points: the amount of lapsed time between the original writing and the oldest copy, and the total number of existing copies.²⁴⁹ If the oldest extant copy is within one-thousand to one-thousand five-hundred years of the original, and if the copies are reasonably similar to one

²⁴³ Greenlee, 50.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁴⁵ Ibid 19

²⁴⁶ Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 5.

²⁴⁷ Greenlee, 16.

²⁴⁸ Metzger and Ehrman, 95.

²⁴⁹ Greenlee, 13.

another, the extant copies are deemed reliable. The information gathered on the ancient writings of several authors provides adequate proof that the writings in existence today are authentic to the originals.²⁵⁰

It is generally agreed that the writings from Plato are authentic. Plato's writings date back to approximately 400BC. The oldest copy is dated at 900 AD. This provides an acceptable gap of one thousand one-hundred years between the original and the oldest copy. A total of seven copies exist. This is considered sufficient to guarantee the reliability of the known text.

Proof for the integrity of *History* by Herodotus and *History* by Thucydides is similarly as strong. Both were written in the mid to late fifth century BC. The oldest copy of each is dated to 900 AD, providing a gap of approximately one-thousand three-hundred years. Eight copies of each have been discovered.

The evidence for the authenticity of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* is even stronger. Caesar wrote around 100 BC. The oldest extant copy was written in 900 AD, leaving only a one-thousand year gap between the original and the oldest copy. Ten similar copies are in existence. This is accepted by historians as sufficient evidence that today's copies are reasonably close to the original.

Validation for *Annals*, written by Tacitus in 100 AD, is stronger yet. Twenty copies exist, of which the oldest dates to one-thousand years of the original. Although there is a one-thousand four-hundred year gap between the oldest known copy and the 300 BC writings of Demosthenes, the abundance of two-hundred known copies compensates sufficiently.

All of this acceptable evidence pales in comparison to the proof of authenticity of the New Testament. Although there are no manuscripts that contain large portions of the New

²⁵⁰ Geisler and Nix, 408.

Testament that date to within one-hundred years of the original, ²⁵¹ this is not the standard that is upheld for other ancient writings. One of the smallest gaps exists between Livy's *History of* Rome, written around the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. A partial copy dates to within fourhundred years of the original, and nineteen complete copies to within one-thousand years.

The oldest New Testament fragment is the John Ryland Papyrus. Although it only contains a few verses from the Gospel of John, it dates to within forty years of the original autograph. ²⁵² Copies of nearly complete individual books of the New Testament have a gap of only about one-hundred to one-hundred and fifty years back to the originals. P⁴⁶ of the Chester Beatty Collection contains major portions of seven letters of the Apostle Paul and Hebrews. ²⁵³ Eighty-six leaves of the original one-hundred-four are extant. It has been dated as early as 200 AD, ²⁵⁴ leaving an approximate gap of one-hundred years. P⁴⁵, also of the Chester Beatty Collection, is dated from 200 to 250 AD. 255 It contains portions all four gospels and Acts. 256

Papyri manuscripts from the Martin Bodmer Collection are just as impressive. P^{75} contains most of the gospels of Luke and John²⁵⁷, and is dated from 175 to 225 AD²⁵⁸. P⁶⁶, dated at about 200 AD, ²⁵⁹ contains major portions of John's gospel. ²⁶⁰

Complete copies of the New Testament exist that were written approximately twohundred fifty years of the originals. Both Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus contain nearly

²⁵¹ Harrop, 13.

²⁵² Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, 12.

²⁵³ Aland and Aland, 99. The contents are Romans 5:17-6:14; 8:15-15:9; 15:11-16:27; I Corinthians 1:1-16:22; II Corinthians 1:1-13:13; Galatians 1:1-6:18; Ephesians 1:1-6:24; Philippians 1:1-4:23; Colossians 1:1-4:18; I Thessalonians 1:1; 1:9-2:3; 5:5-9,23-28; Hebrews 1:1-13:25.

²⁵⁴ Harrop, 23. ²⁵⁵ Ewert, 145.

²⁵⁶ Aland and Aland, 98. The contents are Matthew 20:24-32; 21:13-19; 25:41-26:39; Mark 4:36-9:31; 11:27-12:28; Luke 6:31-7:7; 9:26-14:33; John 10:7-25; 10:30-11:10,18-36,42-57; Acts 4:27-17:17.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 101. The contents are Luke 3:18-4:2; 4:34-5:10; 5:37-18:18; 22:4-24:53; John 1:1-11:45,48-57; 12:3-13:1,8-9; 14:8-30; 15:7-8.

²⁵⁸ Ewert 145.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

complete New Testaments and date to the fourth century.²⁶¹ In all, there are over five-thousand extant Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.²⁶²

Development of the Greek Texts

Critics do not doubt the abundance of extant manuscripts; the evidence is irrefutable. What is questioned is the integrity of the text. The most respected supporters of the reliability of the New Testament admit that the text of the original autographs will not be recovered.²⁶³ The sheer number of extant manuscripts is reason enough to make it impossible to resolve every minor variation.

In order to help decipher the best text, an attempt is made to categorize the vast amount of manuscripts into three families. These are the Western Text, the Alexandrian Text and the Byzantine Text. An extant manuscript is not always easily placed within one of these families. For example, a church might have received manuscript "X" that originated in the Alexandrian family, and manuscript "W" from the Western family. A scribe, wanting to produce another copy, would compare the two and find some differences. He might prefer some variations found in "X", and others in "W". The resulting manuscript would have traits of two families.

Sometime later, the hybrid manuscript would become an exemplar for additional copies. Later it might be compared to another hybrid copy to produce yet another variant.

Tracing the development of extant manuscripts is exactly what is being done today within the discipline of Textual Criticism. Scholars make every effort to trace every last detail backwards to the original text. Realistically, it is acknowledged that it is impossible to perfectly

 $^{^{260}}$ Aland and Aland, 100. The contents are John 1:1-6:11; 6:35-14:26,29-30; 15:2-26;16:2-4,6-7; 16:10-20:20,22-23; 20:25-21:9.

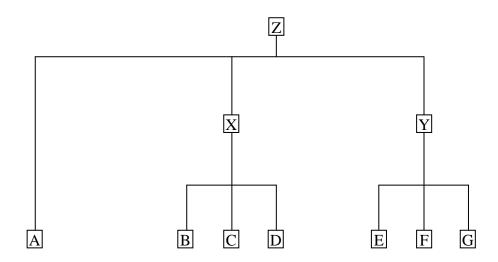
²⁶¹ Ewert, 141-142.

²⁶² Geisler and Nix. 408.

²⁶³ Epp and Fee, 3-4.

reconstruct the family tree, ²⁶⁴ but that the "earliest attainable text", will be very close to the original autographs.

The first step in the classical approach of Textual Criticism is recension. This is the process of gathering all available manuscripts, closely examining each one, and selecting the most trustworthy ones for further study and comparison. The next step is emendation: the attempted elimination of errors found in the best manuscripts. These errors could include the addition of detraction of words or phrases, the order of the words in a sentence, or corrected grammar. The process of the classical form of Textual Criticism is illustrated in the following diagram.



The letters A through G represent extant manuscripts. These have been selected through examination as the manuscripts most worthy of further study. Through further examination it is realized that variations occur in certain passages. Manuscripts B through D share a common

²⁶⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, 276.

²⁶⁵ Epp and Fee, 3-4.

²⁶⁶ Metzger and Ehrman, 205.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 166.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 207.

reading of these passages, so they are grouped together. Likewise, manuscripts E through G share a common reading and are grouped together. Manuscript A is different from either group.

It is determined that B through D share a common ancestor, or archetype. The archetype is labeled X, but no extant copy exists. The archetype of manuscripts E through G, though not extant, is labeled Y. Manuscripts A, X and Y are then compared. The effort is made to determine the reading that is most likely the same as the original autograph. The resulting manuscript, though not extant, is labeled Z. Manuscript Z is considered to be the closest we can come to the original autographs.

An alternative to the Critical Text, determined through Textual Criticism, is the Majority Text. The Majority Text gives greater weight to the extant manuscripts that are more plentiful. The assumption is made that the most authentic manuscripts were copied more frequently, resulting in a greater number of extant copies. ²⁷⁰ Textual critics argue that this view does not take into account the destruction of many manuscripts during the Diocletian persecutions or the seventh century Muslim invasions.²⁷¹

Dates of the Manuscripts

Establishing dates for the manuscripts is essential for determining which readings are the oldest. Papyrus was generally used for the oldest extant copies. These are mostly dated from the early second to the fourth century. There are notable exceptions. P⁷⁴ from the Bodmer collection is believed to be the latest extant Greek text on papyrus, dating between the sixth and seventh centuries.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 218-219. ²⁷¹ Ibid., 220.

²⁷² Greenlee, 36.

Parchment, made from animal skin, was used more extensively following the Diocletian persecutions and the official recognition of Christianity by Constantine in the early fourth century. Two different writing styles were used on the parchments. Uncial, a use of all capital letters with no spaces between the words, dates writings between the fourth and ninth centuries. Minuscule, more of a cursive style utilizing upper and lower case letters with spaces between the words, is mostly later. The uncial manuscripts, numbering over 250, are the most useful in determining the original Greek text. Even though these are not as early as papyri manuscripts, they are more numerous and often more complete. Minuscule manuscripts are by far the most numerous, but they are too far removed from the originals to have more value than the uncials.

Western Text Type

The name of this text type can be a little misleading, as it was not confined to the western world of the Roman Empire. Western style is found in the east, including Egypt. ²⁷⁵

Use of this text type began very early. Marcion, Justyn Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian all used it. Western type is the "result of the undisciplined and 'wild' growth of the manuscript tradition in the second century." It is characterized by a fondness for paraphrases. P²⁷ P²⁹, P³⁸ and P⁴⁸ are the most noteworthy of the papyri of this type. All three are fragments of the book of Acts²⁷⁸ discovered near Oxyrhynchus. P⁴⁸ dates to the end of the third century and provides evidence that this style was known in Egypt from an early date.

²⁷³ Harrop, 20-21.

Greenlee, 36.

²⁷⁵ Metzger and Ehrman, 277.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid

²⁷⁸ Aland and Aland, 97-99. The contents are: P²⁹ Acts 26:7-8,20; P³⁸ Acts 18:27-19:6,12-16; P⁴⁸ Acts 23:11, 17,23, 20

²⁷⁹ Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: History and Literature of Early Christianity* 2nd ed (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 2000), 23.

The uncials Codex Claromontanus and Codex Bezae are Western style documents of interest. Both are bilingual, containing the Greek and Latin texts. Codex Bezae is the oldest of all bilingual versions, dating between 450-550 AD. It also has more variations than most New Testament texts. Perhaps this should be expected of an earlier Western text, since this style is known for paraphrases. Codex Claromontanus, written in the sixth century, contains one of the earliest references to James in the Western church. 282

Alexandrian Text Type

The Diocletian persecutions proved to be devastating due to the systematic destruction of New Testament manuscripts. Some manuscripts were successfully hidden in rural Egypt and were not found until many centuries later. Many of those that have been found most recently are of the Alexandrian text type, dating prior to the Diocletian Persecutions.

These have proven to be some of the best manuscripts in determining the closest text possible to the original autographs.²⁸⁵ This is because there was "conscious and conscientious control exercised"²⁸⁶ from the very beginning among the Alexandrian scribes. Alexandria was well known in the ancient world as a center for scholarship. Great care was given to the copying of all manuscripts, whether biblical or secular. The Alexandrian text type was commonly used by church scholars such as Origen and Athanasius. Some of the Chester Beatty collection and most of Bodmer's papyri are Alexandrian.

²⁸⁰ Geisler and Nix, 395.

²⁸¹ Metzger and Ehrman, 73.

²⁸² Harrop, 131.

²⁸³ Aland, 65.

²⁸⁴ Comfort, 23.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Metzger and Ehrman, 277-278.

Two of the best uncials, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, belong to this text type. Both date to the fourth century. 287 There is speculation that they could be two of the fifty parchment manuscripts ordered by Constantine, as reported by Eusebius. 288 Codex Vaticanus, considered by many critics to be the best single manuscript of the New Testament, has only been available to scholars over the last century. 289 Codex Sinaiticus, however, shows strong Western influence in John 1:1-8:38.²⁹⁰

Several of the papyri are very early. Chester Beatty's P⁴⁶ is as early as 200 AD.²⁹¹ Martin Bodmer's P⁷⁵ could be even earlier from 175 AD.²⁹² The striking similarities between Alexandrian papyri and uncials provide remarkable proof that the Greek text, except for minor variations, had been preserved over the years. P⁷⁵ and P¹³ (Oxyrhynchus) both closely resemble Codex Vaticanus. 293 P47 agrees frequently with Codex Sinaiticus. 294 This demonstrates that the integrity of the text was upheld for well over a century, enduring the threat of extinction at the hands of persecutors.

Martin Bodmer's P⁶⁶ is another valuable manuscript from the Alexandrian family. Some claim that it does not clearly fit into any of the text types, determining that "scholars are hard pressed to give P⁶⁶ a fitting label."²⁹⁵ This manuscript, dating to about 200 AD, exhibits the work of a corrector in many places.²⁹⁶ Koester places this in the Alexandrian family, while

²⁸⁷ Ewert, 141-142.

²⁸⁸ Epp and Fee, 278.

²⁹⁰ Philip Wesley Comfort, Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 79.

²⁹¹ Harrop, 23. ²⁹² Ewert, 145.

²⁹³ Koester, Introduction to the New Testament, 23.

²⁹⁵ Philip Wesley Comfort, Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the New Testament (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990), 14.

²⁹⁶ Ewert, 145.

reveling that marginal notes give evidence that the Western Text and a mixed text were already in existence and known in Alexandria by the start of the third century.²⁹⁷

This text type continued to be copied over subsequent centuries. Manuscript 33, the "Queen of the Cursives," is perhaps the best example of a minuscule Alexandrian manuscript. It is dated to the ninth or tenth century.²⁹⁸

Byzantine Text Type

The Byzantine type is "characterized by lucidity and completeness." It came into existence a little later than the Western and Alexandrian. None of the papyri belong to this family. Scribes apparently refined harsh language and harmonized variant readings to smooth out a more fluent text. Because of the evidence of refinement, it tends to be the least trusted of the text types among many critical text scholars. On the other hand, other textual scholars have used the Codex Alexandrinus, a Byzantine text from the mid fifth century, longer than any other uncial manuscript. 303

This was the preferred text type by the early Middle Ages. It dominated from the seventh century onward. Many of the late uncial manuscripts and most of the minuscule manuscripts are Byzantine. This domination is due to several historical factors. The Byzantine text had become popular in Constantinople, and was therefore spread throughout the Byzantine Empire. The timing coincided with the growing popularity of various translations in other regions, most specifically the Latin Vulgate in the Roman Empire. The result is that the Greek language was

²⁹⁷ Koester, Introduction to the New Testament, 24.

²⁹⁸ Geisler and Nix, 402.

²⁹⁹ Metzger and Ehrman, 279.

³⁰⁰ Greenlee, 117-118.

³⁰¹ Metzger and Ehrman, 279.

³⁰² Comfort, Early Manuscripts, 15.

³⁰³ Greenlee, 39.

preserved within the Byzantine Empire. The popularity of the text, therefore, should not be misunderstood to mean that it is superior in establishing the original autographs.³⁰⁴

The Mixed Text Types

Manuscripts that do not fit into any of the previous three are likely the result of combining any two, or possibly all three. Scholars will attempt to identify some strains of these texts and designate them as belonging to another distinct text type such as Caesarean. It does seem clear that some manuscripts do not fit the style of any of the others.

P⁴⁵ from the Chester Beatty Collection is one such manuscript. It is dated to the first half of the third century. The gospels are arranged in the western order of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but the text itself appears to be a mixture of families. 308

Codex Washingtonianus from the late fourth to early fifth century is another example of a curiously mixed manuscript.³⁰⁹ No single style is clearly decipherable. It includes the long ending in Mark's gospel (16:9-20) along with an insertion after verse 14.³¹⁰

³⁰⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, 279.

³⁰⁵ Greenlee, 117.

³⁰⁶ Ewert, 144.

³⁰⁷ Harrop, 23.

³⁰⁸ Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 23.

³⁰⁹ Geisler and Nix, 400.

³¹⁰ Metzger and Ehrman, 81. And they excused themselves, saying, "This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now"--thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, "The term of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, that they may inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness that is in heaven.

Comparisons of the Texts

It is irrefutable: there are variations in the New Testament manuscripts. There is no single manuscript or group of manuscripts that can be treated as the original autographs.³¹¹

Perhaps surprisingly, approximately one percent of the New Testament is affected by variations that cannot be resolved.³¹² Whether the variations were intentional or unintentional, the startling fact is that the message of the Bible is not altered by them. Many scholars have come to this conclusion after meticulously comparing multitudes of extant manuscripts. Variant or uncertain readings do not affect historical facts or matters of faith and practice.³¹³ No Christian doctrine is contingent upon the meaning of a debatable text.³¹⁴ Variations among the texts do not alter any basic biblical teachings.³¹⁵

A typical example is found in studying the variations of John 1:3-4 in several manuscripts. The following are the variations found in six different manuscripts. The variation is in bold print for easy identification.

<u>Manuscript</u>	Greek Variation
P^{66}	choorís autoú egéneto oudén hó gégonen en autoó zooeé
Codex Sinaiticus	choorís autoú egéneto oudén hó gégonen. en autoó zooeé
Codex Bezae	choorís autoú egéneto oudén. hó gégonen en autoó zooeé
Codex Vaticanus	choorís autoú egéneto oudé hén hó gégonen en autoó zooeé
Codex 666	choorís autoú egéneto oudé hén hó gégonen. en autoó zooeé
P ^{75c}	choorís autoú egéneto oudé hén. hó gégonen en autoó zooeé

³¹¹ Metzger and Ehrman, 343.

³¹² Geisler and Nix, 408.

³¹³ Bruce, New Testament Documents, 15.

Greenlee, 61.

³¹⁵ Ewert, 145.

³¹⁶ Finegan, 170-171.

There are two items to consider. One is the punctuation. The other is whether there is one word, oudén (nothing), or two words, oudé hén (not one thing). The following are the variations translated into English.

<u>Manuscript</u>	<u>Translation</u>
P ⁶⁶	apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being in him was life
Codex Sinaiticus	apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being. In him was life
Codex Bezae	apart from him nothing came into being. What has come into being in him was life
Codex Vaticanus	apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being in him was life
Codex 666	apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being. In him was life
P ^{75c}	apart from him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life

Although there are unmistakable differences, any one of the variations would be true and in agreement with the *kerygma* of the apostles' teaching. Randolph Shaylor puts this in proper perspective when he wrote, "This identity between texts is too often overlooked and undue attention given to the variations." ³¹⁷

³¹⁷ Randolph Shaylor, "Our Final Authority" in *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Layman's Guide to How We Got Our Bible* Edited by James B. Williams (Greenville: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2002), 24.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

When it comes to matters of the New Testament canon, "unbelief is demanding equal rights within the Christian church." If it is assumed that Christianity was developed by man, theories expressed in *The Da Vinci Code* seem perfectly legitimate. But what if Christianity is based on absolute truth that was directly revealed to man by God? This would demand a closed canon; one that is closed by God. The text of the closed canon would have to be preserved; otherwise the revelation of God would be lost.

Examination of Christian literature cannot irrefutably prove that God inspired a limited number of books. But the examination has demonstrated that this is the most probable conclusion. The twenty-seven book New Testament canon "stands on an incomparably higher level than all other early Christian literature."

The process by which the canon was eventually defined can seem suspect from a purely human perspective. In retrospect one can see the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³²⁰ Writings originated with apostolic authority. The writings were proven to be consistent with the oral tradition of the apostles by those who both heard the apostles and read the writings. True believers connected on a spirit-to-spirit level with God's written revelation (I Corinthians 2:11-16). Counterfeit gospels and letters were recognized as fraudulent. Doctrinally sound writings by spiritual men continued to be highly respected and valued, but not at the same level as Scripture. No book that legitimately belongs in the New Testament canon has been left out. The

³¹⁸ Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is "Scientific Theology"?* Translated by Robert Yarbrough. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 31.

³¹⁹ Aland, 114.

³²⁰ Ewert, 125.

church councils did not choose a canon. Church leaders simply acknowledged what the church had already come to accept.

The twenty-seven original autographs were copied and spread among the local churches. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the originals (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21), but that inspiration did not extend to the scribes producing copies and translations. Mistakes were made by the copyists. Some were intentional, most were not. The concepts of textual criticism were practiced by early scribes who worked hard to preserve a text that is not exact to the originals, but extremely close. Variant texts emerged, but each text type maintained doctrinal integrity. Today's copies are not an exact match to the original autographs, but they are extremely close. Once again, the eye of faith clearly sees the hand of the Holy Spirit guiding and protecting God's revelation to man. Textual criticism proves the integrity of what now exists, even though the originals will never be precisely reproduced.

The present day canon of the New Testament is itself a testament to God's relationship with man. He invites men to be His fellow workers (I Corinthians 3:9; II Corinthians 6:1).

Unfortunately, man has a way of bringing imperfection into everything he touches. God allowed men to be involved in perpetuating the existence of His written Word. Man made it imperfect.

God preserved the integrity.

³²¹ Erickson, 265.

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