

“During a time when there are so many astonishing and confusing things being claimed about the Bible, this volume brings exceptional clarity and careful scholarship to the task of introducing the New Testament. The authors not only provide the reader with a solid orientation to every NT book, but they also directly address a broad range of issues that scholars have raised. The end result is a richly informative text that is very readable and abundantly helpful. I enthusiastically recommend this volume to all who want to better understand their New Testament.”

—**Clinton E. Arnold**, dean and professor of New Testament language and literature, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* is a comprehensive and informative introduction to the New Testament. Written from a convictional evangelical perspective, this marvelous volume carefully interacts with the most up-to-date issues in modern scholarship. This well-written textbook invites students to grasp the meaning of the various books of the New Testament in their historical, religious, political, cultural, and geographical setting while offering applicable theological insights into the New Testament’s message for today. I have no doubt that this splendid work will become a standard resource for New Testament studies for years to come. I offer my heartiest congratulations to the authors for this fine publication.”

—**David S. Dockery**, president, Trinity International University/Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Of making of New Testament introductions there seems to be no end, and the use of them is often a weariness of the flesh for the student. Yet from time to time, fresh breezes blow life into the genre, and such is the case with *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*. Here we have a substantive, up-to-date introduction to the New Testament, for those preparing for ministry in the church. While broadly conversant with New Testament studies in general, the authors keep their target audience squarely in view, using information boxes, review questions, and even devotionals to good effect. Graded blocks of information for beginners, intermediate students, and those more advanced demonstrate an awareness of the range of competencies found in almost any classroom. This introduction should prove helpful to professors and edifying to students for many years to come.”

—**George H. Guthrie**, Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible, School of Theology and Missions and senior fellow, R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, Union University

“This volume ranks among the finest such studies of recent decades in classic matters of New Testament introduction. What sets it apart includes: (1) attention to theology and the history of interpretation; (2) extended presentation of the history of New Testament times and the rise of the canon; (3) appropriate rigor; (4) frequently creative layout features; and (5) conceptual clarity. It is also written with Christian conviction. Beyond an impressive digest of scholarship, it is an appeal to faithful appropriation of the New Testament’s message. It will and should see widespread graduate classroom use.”

—**Robert W. Yarbrough**, professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

SECOND EDITION

THE CRADLE,  
THE CROSS,  
AND THE CROWN

An Introduction to the New Testament

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER  
L. SCOTT KELLUM  
CHARLES L. QUARLES



Nashville, Tennessee

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AnBib</i>	<i>Analecta biblica</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ASNU	Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis
AUSSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Studies Doctoral Dissertation Series
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago, 1961)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries

<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
EB	Echter Bibel
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
EBS	Encountering Biblical Studies
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>EDRL</i>	<i>Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EMS	Evangelical Missiological Society
EROER	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios biblicos</i>
ET	English translation
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FFRS	Foundations and Facets Reference Series
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies

<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KD</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
MBPS	Mellen Biblical Press Series
MNTC	Moffat New Testament Commentary
<i>MSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NABPR	The National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentaries
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> , Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary



NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NS	New Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886
PL	Patrologia latina [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentaries
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
<i>QD</i>	<i>Quaestiones Disputatae</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevBib</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SacPag	Sacra Pagina
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBEV	Service Biblique Evangile et Vie
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Studies
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943–
<i>Scr</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
<i>SE IV, TU</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica IV, Texte und Untersuchungen</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>

<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>Theol</i>	<i>Theologica</i>
THNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZCS	Zondervan Church Source
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZRGG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>ZST</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie</i>

## ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>1 Apologia</i> , Justin
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , Josephus
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticus</i> , Tertullian
<i>Apion</i>	<i>Against Apion</i> , Josephus
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas</i>
<i>Chron.</i>	<i>Chronicle</i> , Eusebius
<i>Comment. Matt.</i>	<i>Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei</i> , Origen
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogus cum Tryphone</i> , Justin Martyr
<i>Eccl. Hist.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i> , Eusebius
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i> , Ignatius
<i>Hom. Luke</i>	<i>Homilies on Luke</i> , Origen
<i>Hom. Matt.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Matthaeum</i> , John Chrysostom
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish Wars</i> , Josephus

<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> , Philo
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i> , Tertullian
<i>Magn.</i>	<i>To the Magnesians</i> , Ignatius
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Ad nationes</i> , Tertullian
<i>Or.</i>	<i>De oratione</i> , Tertullian
<i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i> , Clement of Alexandria
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>To Polycarp</i> , Ignatius
<i>Praef. in Ioann.</i>	<i>Preface to John</i> , Theophylact
<i>Praescr.</i>	<i>De praescriptione hareticorum</i> , Tertullian
<i>Quis div.</i>	<i>Quis dives salvetur</i> , Clement of Alexandria
<i>Scorp.</i>	<i>Scorpiace</i> , Tertullian
<i>Trall.</i>	<i>To the Trallians</i> , Ignatius
<i>Vir. ill.</i>	<i>De viris illustribus</i> , Jerome

Abbreviations of other works (e.g., apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, Mishnaic, Talmudic, classical Greek and Roman writings, etc.) conform to *The SBL Handbook of Style*.

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

FOR BELIEVERS WHO look to Scripture as the authority for their faith and practice, the NT, with its twenty-seven books, presents both a wonderful, God-given treasure trove of spiritual insights and a formidable challenge for faithful, accurate interpretation. To be sure, “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). To be so equipped, however, the student of Scripture must follow Paul’s exhortation to “[b]e diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

The diligence required for a correct understanding of God’s “word of truth” involves a thorough acquaintance with the historical, literary, and theological aspects of the various NT writings. Ironically, the methodical study of these factors traces its modern origins back to the Enlightenment. We say “ironically” because the Enlightenment was also characterized by an ant-supernatural bias and a critical—if not skeptical—spirit that emphasized studying the Bible just as one would approach any other book.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, for anyone who believes Scripture is *more* than just a piece of human literature, such an approach is unacceptable because it denies that Scripture is the product of divine inspiration.<sup>2</sup> But while Scripture ought not be reduced to a *mere* piece of human writing, we can gain much by paying careful attention to the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of the biblical writings and, in our case, particularly the NT.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially W. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992, 2003, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See the reference to the Scriptures as “inspired by God” in 2 Tim 3:16.

## TITLE AND CONTENT OVERVIEW

### Title

For this reason we present you, the serious student of the NT, with *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*. The title attempts to capture the essence of NT theology: (1) *the cradle*, that is, Jesus's virgin birth and incarnation, which are narrated at the outset of the NT canon (Matt 1:18–25); (2) *the cross*, narrated in the Gospel Passion Narratives and explained in the NT epistolary literature; and (3) *the crown*, that is, the triumphant return of Christ and our eternal reign with him. Within this framework we advocate a holistic reading of the NT, and of the entire body of Scripture, along the lines of a salvation-historical framework that traces the story of God's progressive revelation and provision of redemption in the promised Messiah and Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### The Nature of Scripture

The first part of this book attempts to set the stage for the ensuing study by presenting a discussion of the most critical foundational issues for NT interpretation: (1) the nature and scope of Scripture (chap. 1); and (2) the political and religious background of the NT (chap. 2). It is vital for all students of Scripture to have a proper understanding of the *doctrine* of Scripture, so chapter 1 discusses the formation of the NT canon, its inspiration and inerrancy, the preservation and transmission of the Bible over the centuries, and issues pertaining to the translation of Scripture.

Unfortunately, this kind of doctrinal instruction is increasingly neglected in many current publications on the topic.<sup>3</sup> But we judge it absolutely vital because only by understanding Scripture as divine revelation, in keeping with its own claims, will we be able to pursue our study all the way to its intended goal: the application of the “word of truth” to our personal lives and our relationships with others.<sup>4</sup> God has revealed himself in his inspired, inerrant Word; and because the Bible is the Word of God in written form, it is therefore without error, trustworthy, authoritative, and requires obedience and personal application.<sup>5</sup> James says it well:

. . . humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately

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<sup>3</sup> The reason for this, at least in part, may be the continued hegemony of an approach to Scripture that holds doctrine—including the doctrine of Scripture—in abeyance and favors a primarily historical or literary mode of investigation. But this unduly neglects the third vital component of biblical interpretation, that is, theology. See A. J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, EBS, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 14–15.

<sup>4</sup> See the classic article by W. A. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 19–59.

<sup>5</sup> See the doctrinal base of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), reproduced at [www.etsjets.org/about](http://www.etsjets.org/about) (accessed April 11, 2016).

forgets what kind of man he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does (1:21–25).

Indeed, the purpose of Scripture is “training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

In this regard, it is our desire that this present volume be more than a dry, academic compilation of various dates and facts. To be sure, the study of Scripture requires diligence—in other words, work!—but what ought to motivate our efforts is the payoff at the end of our research: a better understanding of the history, literature, and theology of the NT writings for the purpose of cultivating, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a deeper spiritual life within ourselves, our families, and our churches. This, in turn, will result in a more authentic and authoritative proclamation of the biblical message so that God’s kingdom may be advanced in this world and so others may be subjected to his reign in their lives.

### **The Background of the New Testament**

As we approach our study of the NT, we need to acquaint ourselves with the political and religious background of the NT (the contents of chap. 2). This ingredient is sometimes missing in standard NT introductions, an omission that when teaching NT survey courses in the past has sent us scrambling for other resources to prepare our students adequately for entering the world of the NT. In this chapter we cover the end of OT history (the exiles of Israel and Judah, the last prophets); the period between the Testaments (the Greeks, the Maccabees, and the Romans); and the political environment of Jesus’s ministry (the Jewish sects, the Herodian dynasty, etc.). We also provide a survey of Second Temple literature and discuss relevant theological and philosophical issues.

### **History, Literature, and Theology**

With this foundation laid, we analyze each NT book using the same pattern, which is called a “hermeneutical triad” in Köstenberger and Patterson’s *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*: (1) *history* (including a book’s authorship, date, provenance, destination); (2) *literature* (genre, literary plan, outline, unit-by-unit discussion); and (3) *theology* (theological themes, contribution to the canon).<sup>6</sup> In keeping with the three major divisions of the NT canon, the material in the body of this book is then organized into the following three parts:

- *Part Two: Jesus and the Gospels*, which features a chapter on Jesus and the relationship among the four Gospels as well as introductions to each of the four Gospels.

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<sup>6</sup> See A. J. Köstenberger and R. D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011); idem, *For the Love of God’s Word: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2015); cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

- *Part Three: The Early Church and Paul*, which includes chapters on the book of Acts; the ministry and message of the apostle Paul; and the thirteen canonical Letters of Paul in likely chronological order of writing: Galatians; 1–2 Thessalonians; 1–2 Corinthians; Romans; the Prison Epistles; and the Letters to Timothy and Titus.
- *Part Four: The General Epistles and Revelation*, which are discussed in canonical order (except that Jude is kept with the Petrine Letters because of the missive’s close relationship with 2 Peter): Hebrews; James; 1–2 Peter; Jude; 1–3 John; and Revelation.

The book closes with a chapter on unity and diversity in the NT and an epilogue tracing the biblical story line, concluding the volume as it began: with an emphasis on a holistic reading of Scripture.

## RATIONALE AND DISTINCTIVES

### Rationale

It is our belief, borne out of years of teaching on both undergraduate and graduate levels, that the pattern of organizing the material described above best reflects the organic growth of the NT material. It allows the classroom teacher (1) to cover the foundational material, that is, the doctrine of Scripture, the NT background, and Jesus and the Gospels; and (2) to use the template provided by the book of Acts as the basis for a study of the ministry and writings of the apostle Paul and the other NT witnesses.

While the NT is a collection of writings—a body of literature—to be appreciated in the sequence in which it is given, it also reflects a historical plan. It moves from God’s promise of a Messiah, as described in the OT, to the coming of that Messiah, as depicted in the Gospels, to the growth of the early church as narrated in the book of Acts and the NT letters, and to the consummation of human history at the return of Christ as anticipated in Revelation.<sup>7</sup>

To give but one example, it will be helpful for the student to understand that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians several years prior to his letter to the Romans so that the “Judaizing controversy” surrounding circumcision (discussed in Galatians) can be seen to provide the backdrop to the later, more general formulation of the gospel in the book of Romans. It will also be helpful to relate both Galatians and Romans to events in the book of Acts and to other events in early Christian history and in the ministry of Paul.

### Distinctives

With this in mind, we aimed to produce a volume with the following distinctives.

1. *User-friendly*. We have written with the teacher and the student in mind. This book is scholarly, yet accessible; it is useful as a text for one- or two-semester

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<sup>7</sup> See the chapter “Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse: The Fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New,” in Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*.

NT survey classes. One could cover all the material in one semester or go over the introduction and Jesus and the Gospels in semester 1 and the early church, covering Paul and the rest of the NT, in semester 2. User-friendly features include listings of Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Knowledge at the beginning<sup>8</sup> and Study Questions and Resources for Further Study at the end of every chapter. An extensive glossary is found in the back of the volume.

2. *Comprehensive.* This book covers the entire NT canon, background, Jesus, the Gospels, the early church, and Paul's writings in order of composition, the General Epistles and Revelation, and the unity and diversity of the NT. Studying Paul's Letters in the order in which they were written helps integrate them with the historical framework of Acts. The second edition also includes discussions of how to interpret the various genres of Scripture (Gospels-Acts, parables, etc.) and an epilogue on the story line of Scripture, both OT and NT.
3. *Conservative.* All three writers of this book affirm that all twenty-seven books in the NT were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed (the four Gospels, the Letters). We have included a strong defense of the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John and a rebuttal of the alleged pseudonymity of the letters written by Paul and Peter, especially those to Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter.
4. *Balanced.* We have attempted to follow sound hermeneutical procedure, modeling the study of each NT book in its historical, literary, and theological context. Hence, this volume is more (though not less) than just a NT introduction dealing with the introductory issues of authorship, date, provenance, destination, and so on. As mentioned under point 2 above, the second edition includes special discussions on how to interpret various NT genres.
5. *Up to date.* This volume includes comprehensive scholarly interaction with both older and more recent scholarship, with a primary focus on English-language sources. Where appropriate we draw on recent advances in the literary study of Scripture, following a narrative or discourse analysis approach in tracing the contents of various NT books. The second edition brings scholarly interaction up-to-date with regard to all matters of NT introduction.
6. *Spiritually nurturing and application oriented.* The style of writing consistently seeks to nurture the student's spirituality and encourages application of what is learned rather than giving an arid presentation of facts to be mastered merely on a cognitive level. This is reflected especially in the unit-by-unit discussions, in the

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<sup>8</sup> We recommend that for one-semester courses and in Bible college settings, teachers aim for imparting (at least) what is identified as Basic Knowledge. If the NT survey sequence spans two semesters, especially in seminary settings, our recommendation is to make the Intermediate Knowledge listed at the beginning of each chapter the standard for learning and testing. The Advanced Knowledge is provided for particularly motivated students who, in some cases, may be called to pursue further study or even an academic career.



theological themes sections, and in the Something to Think About sidebars (a unique ingredient for NT introductions).

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW TESTAMENT INTRODUCTION

### The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Before commencing our study, we need to take a moment to set the larger context of the science of NT introduction. In fact, students of the NT may not always realize this field of research has a pedigree spanning centuries. Perhaps the first modern NT introduction was produced by the French Roman Catholic scholar Richard Simon, who in 1689 wrote *A Critical History of the Text of the New Testament*.<sup>9</sup>

Several decades later one of the most prolific Pietist scholars, Johann Bengel, wrote his massive *Gnomon of the New Testament*, though his work is written in commentary style rather than conforming to the conventional format of a NT introduction.<sup>10</sup> Shortly thereafter, J. D. Michaelis (1717–1791), professor at the University of Göttingen, produced his *New Testament Introduction*, in which he questioned the inspiration of non-apostolic NT literature.<sup>11</sup>

### The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

One of the most influential NT introductions in the nineteenth century was the massive two-volume *Introduction to the New Testament* by Heinrich Holtzmann. In it the author articulated the emerging critical consensus: the two-document hypothesis; the theological rather than historical character of John; the questionable reliability of Acts; the pseudonymity of Ephesians and the letters to Timothy and Titus; the problematic authorship of the General Epistles; and the importance of Hellenistic backgrounds for Paul and John.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. Simon, *Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Reinier Leers, 1689). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:17–25, who calls Simon “the founder of modern biblical criticism” (p. 17).

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, 3rd ed., M. E. Bengel and J. Steudel, eds., 2 vols. (Tübingen, Germany: L. F. Fues, 1850); English translation *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. J. Bandinel and A. R. Fausset, ed. A. R. Fausset, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1866); reissued as *New Testament Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:69–80.

<sup>11</sup> J. D. Michaelis, *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, 4th rev. ed., 2 vols. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1788); English translation *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. Marsh, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London, England: F. and C. Rivington, 1802). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:127–38, who called Michaelis “[a]nother wunderkind [*sic*; German for “child prodigy”] of the Aufklärung” (German for “Enlightenment”).

<sup>12</sup> H. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr Siebeck, 1886; this work has not been translated into English). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:111–22, who considered him to be an important figure moving NT research “toward critical consensus” (heading on p. 111).

The early twentieth century saw the publication of Theodor Zahn's 1,100-page *Introduction to the New Testament*.<sup>13</sup> Zahn affirmed the traditional authorship of all four Gospels. He reconstructed the order of writing of the NT letters as James, Galatians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Corinthians, Romans, the Prison Epistles, and the Letters to Timothy and Titus. Zahn argued for the authenticity of both 1 and 2 Peter and believed the apostle John wrote not only the Gospel and the three Letters bearing his name but also the Apocalypse. Thus, Zahn provided a conservative counterpoint to Holtzmann and others representing the critical consensus, and his work became an important point of reference for subsequent conservative scholarship on matters of NT introduction.

### Recent Contributions

More recently the British scholar Donald Guthrie (1990) and North Americans D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo (with Leon Morris, 1992; 2nd ed. Carson and Moo, 2005) have produced major evangelical NT introductions that set a high standard of scholarship while affirming conservative conclusions with regard to authorship, date, and other aspects of the NT literature.<sup>14</sup> Less conservative is the NT introduction by the Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown (1997).<sup>15</sup> Also noteworthy is the work of Donald Hagner, who does, however, frequently affirm critical positions regarding the authorship of NT books.<sup>16</sup> Several other NT introductions written from a more critical perspective in the last decade or two are available as well.<sup>17</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As this brief survey of the history of NT introductions shows, the present volume stands in a long line of efforts by scholars with a variety of perspectives that range from conservative to critical. As mentioned at the outset, to a large degree this is a function of scholars' larger presuppositions with regard to the nature of Scripture. Nevertheless, we believe it is possible to meet on the common ground of the biblical text and of the available sources

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<sup>13</sup> T. Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, Germany: A. Deichert, 1897, 1899; repr. Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1994); English translation *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Fellows and Scholars of Hartford Theological Seminary, ed. M. W. Jacobus, 2nd ed., three vols. in one (New York, NY: Scribner's Sons, 1917; repr. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1971). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:367–73; see the discussion of Zahn's contemporary (and relative) A. Schlatter in *ibid.*, 373–83. While Schlatter did not write a NT introduction as such, his two-volume *New Testament Theology* makes an important contribution to the understanding of the theological message of the New Testament. See A. Schlatter, *New Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. A. J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997, 1999); and A. J. Köstenberger, "T. Zahn, A. von Harnack, and A. Schlatter," in *Pillars in the History of New Testament Interpretation: Old and New*, ed. S. E. Porter and S. A. Adams (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990); D. A. Carson, L. Morris, and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); 2nd ed., D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., D. Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a recent survey of NT introduction from a German perspective, see F. W. Horn, "Einleitung in das Neue Testament 2001–2011," *TRu* 79 (2014): 294–327.

and evidence and to engage in scholarly work and dialogue. It will become apparent that the present work operates more closely in the conservative Zahn–Guthrie–Carson/Moo tradition than in the more critical vein of the Simon–Michaelis–Holtzmann–Brown trajectory.

As we release this second edition, we are well aware of the limitations associated with producing such a work. In this age of unprecedented proliferation of scholarly literature, who is adequate to such a task? Nevertheless, we believe it is a risk worth taking since the task of helping to equip another generation of Bible students with a portion of the knowledge of “the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15) must not be left undone. On this side of heaven, our knowledge will of necessity be preliminary and incomplete: “For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror,” and long for the day when we will see Jesus “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). In the meantime we invite you to join us to press on to full Christian maturity (Phil 3:12–14) as we grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). May God be pleased to use this volume as a small tool toward that worthy and glorious end.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**T**HIS BOOK REPRESENTS the product of collaboration among three authors. Each chapter was assigned to one of us, although all of us contributed our input throughout. Andreas served as general editor and wrote all the “Something to Think About” sections, and together we stand behind the final product. For this reason it would be counterproductive to identify the authors of individual chapters (though readers are, of course, welcome to venture educated guesses!).

We would like to express our appreciation to Jason Meyer for writing a first serious draft of the original chapter on the Prison Epistles and to Alan Bandy for doing so for the book of Revelation. Thanks are also due to Keith Campbell, Matt Lytle, Liz Mburu, and Nate Ridelhoever for their assistance in preparing the first edition, and gratitude extends to Chuck Bumgardner for his competent help in updating chapters 2, 5, 7, 15, 18, 20, and 21 for this second edition.

We also acknowledge our heartfelt thanks to our wives and families; our academic institution, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; and our students past, present, and future. It is a great privilege and solemn responsibility to be involved in the serious study and teaching of Scripture, and we count ourselves blessed to serve our Lord Jesus Christ in this way and to partner in sharpening others as “iron sharpens iron” (Prov 27:17).

It is humbling to release our work to you, mindful that many have undertaken to write introductions to the NT before us. Inevitably, some of our scholarly colleagues who are less conservatively minded will beg to differ with regard to certain positions taken in the volume. Yet our reward is in serious students of Scripture finding in this book a measure of the spiritual wealth that Jesus alluded to when he said that “every student of Scripture instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who brings out of his storeroom what is new and what is old” (Matt 13:52).

*Soli Deo gloria*—to God alone be the glory!

Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles  
Wake Forest, North Carolina, May 1, 2015

## Part One

# INTRODUCTION

**B**EFORE INVESTIGATING THE Gospels and the rest of the NT in Parts Two through Four of this volume, it is appropriate to lay the groundwork for the study of the writings included in the canon of the NT by considering the nature and scope of Scripture (chap. 1) and by surveying the landscape of the political and religious background of the NT (chap. 2). This is appropriate because questions such as the extent of the NT canon, the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, the translation of Scripture, and its textual transmission (textual criticism) constitute preliminary issues that have an important bearing on the interpretation of the books included in the NT.

Unless these questions are adequately addressed, there is no proper foundation for NT introduction. When there is no proper foundation, the result is a doctrinal vacuum that leaves the student in a precarious and vulnerable position when confronted with challenges to the canonicity of certain NT books or to a high view of Scripture and its authority. Moreover, the Gospels, Acts, the NT letters, and the book of Revelation did not appear in a vacuum. For this reason it is vital to discuss the political and religious backgrounds that form the backdrop to the study of the various NT writings. Hence, NT introduction properly commences with treatments of the nature of NT Scripture and of the relevant NT background.

## CHAPTER I

# THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF SCRIPTURE

### CORE KNOWLEDGE

**Basic Knowledge:** Students should know the major issues involved in the formation of the canon, the doctrines of inerrancy and inspiration, the textual transmission of the NT, and translations of the Bible. They should have a basic grasp of the major figures and documents involved and issues addressed, including key dates.

**Intermediate Knowledge:** Students should be able to discuss more thoroughly the canonization process and the criteria of canonicity. They should be able to identify developments in the collection of the Gospels and the Pauline Letters. They should also be able to defend the reliability of the Bible on the basis of their knowledge of the relevant issues regarding the transmission and translation of Scripture.

**Advanced Knowledge:** Students should be able to provide definitions of *inerrancy* and *inspiration* on the basis of the major NT passages on the subject. They should be able to provide an overview of the history of the English Bible. They should also be prepared to discuss formal and functional equivalence in Bible translation.

## INTRODUCTION

**B**. F. WESTCOTT noted long ago that a “general survey of the History of the Canon forms a necessary part of an Introduction to the writings of the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup> For many students the discussion of the canon—the question of which books should be included in the Bible—seems moot: the canon is closed and limited to the books found in the Bible. But a study of the canon does more than merely determine the books of the OT and NT or furnish material for scholarly debate. It provides a basic orientation to how the Bible came into existence and therefore connects students more firmly to the foundations of their faith. In the context of the present volume, this opening chapter also serves the purpose of laying a basic framework for dealing with each NT book in more detail later on in this work.

This chapter begins a journey through the NT. The idea of a NT is traced along the lines of the historical development of this body of literature. As in the case of each individual NT book in the remainder of this volume, the discussion of the canon of the NT in the present chapter proceeds under the rubrics of history, literature, and theology.<sup>2</sup> First, the discussion of *history* scrutinizes the process of canonization in order to answer the question, Why these twenty-seven books? Second, the treatment of *literature* deals with the reliability of the Bible and seeks to adjudicate the question, Is the Bible today what was originally written? Finally, the canon is also significantly a function of the church’s *theology*. Hence the chapter closes with an inquiry into the question, What is the nature of the canon?

## THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON: WHY THESE TWENTY-SEVEN BOOKS?

The present investigation regarding the scope and extent of the NT—the NT canon—is concerned not so much with the production of these writings but with their recognition as Christian Scripture to the exclusion of all other possible candidates. What is a “canon”? Put succinctly, the word comes from the Greek word *kanōn*, which in turn derives from its Hebrew equivalent *kaneh* and means “rule” or “standard.”<sup>3</sup> The term eventually came to refer to the collection of the Christian Scriptures. This modern concept of canon is clearly

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<sup>1</sup> B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (London, England: Macmillan & Co., 1896), 1. Westcott defines *canon* as “the collection of books which constitute the original written Rule of the Christian Faith” (ibid., n. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the rubrics of history, literature, and theology, see A. J. Köstenberger and R. D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011); idem, *For the Love of God’s Word: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See L. M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 38–39; and B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1987), 289–93.

attested in the fourth century. How far the notion extends back beyond this to even earlier centuries is the subject of vigorous scholarly debate.<sup>4</sup>

The composition of the various NT writings took place starting in the late 40s and proceeded through the latter half of the first century. Subsequently, these books were copied and disseminated among the growing number of Christian congregations all over the Roman Empire, as is attested by the available manuscript evidence. The papyrus fragment P<sup>52</sup> contains John 18:31–33, 37–38 and most likely dates to the first half of the second century.<sup>5</sup> Its discovery in Egypt, many miles from the Gospel’s origin in Asia Minor and only a few short decades after the Gospel was written, bears telling testimony to the speed with which the early Christian writings spread to various locales across a network of churches that one writer has called a “holy internet.”<sup>6</sup>

Generally, the main subject of debate today is not whether the NT canon is closed (i.e., fixed and therefore unchangeable).<sup>7</sup> The discussion centers rather on the questions of how and when the closing of the canon occurred. The broad time frame during which this process of canonization took place spans from the period of the early church to the ecclesiastical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries that declared the canon closed.<sup>8</sup> Whether the canon was set earlier or later in this period is disputed. The limited evidence from second-century patristic literature and differing assumptions regarding the nature of Christianity and the Christian canon make the investigation into the process of canonization “a narrow path, roughly paved and poorly lit.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For helpful surveys see D. G. Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 297–360, 424–46; and “The New Testament Canon,” in D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 726–43. See further the discussion below.

<sup>5</sup> K. and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, rev. and enl. ed., trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 85; B. M. Metzger and B. D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55–56.

<sup>6</sup> M. B. Thompson, “The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. R. Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 49–70.

<sup>7</sup> Some have sought to reopen this issue; see R. W. Funk, “The Once and Future New Testament,” in *The Canon Debate*, 2nd ed., ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 541–57; and the discussion of reformist feminist proposals by E. S. Fiorenza, R. R. Ruether, and others in M. E. Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). McDonald (*Biblical Canon*, 427) has questioned the contours of the NT canon, particularly with regard to 2 Peter, the Pastorals, and other “nonapostolic” books. Certain Christian groups have historically had a different NT. The Nestorian churches in Eastern Syria still hold to a 22-book NT (B. M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 25–29; Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 735). Evangelicals and Roman Catholics continue to differ regarding the contents of the OT canon (see the discussion of the OT Apocrypha in chap. 2 below).

<sup>8</sup> J. Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1.

<sup>9</sup> W. R. Farmer, D. M. Farkasfalvy, and H. W. Attridge. *The Formation of the New Testament Canon: An Ecumenical Approach*, Theological Inquiries (New York, NY: Paulist, 1983), 125.



### The Witness of the New Testament

The NT canon can be viewed from both a human and a divine perspective. The traditional evangelical view affirms God's activity in the formation of the canon. From this vantage point, it can be said that in one sense at least, the NT canon was closed the moment the last NT book was written. According to this view, God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the NT writers, generated holy Scripture (a phenomenon called "inspiration"; see further below); and the church's task was not the *creation* of the canon but merely the *recognition* of the Scriptures God had previously chosen to inspire. This, in turn, has important ramifications with regard to authority: if the church's role is primarily passive in determining the Christian canon, then it is inspired Scripture, not the church, which is in the final position of authority.

Traditionally, the second century has been viewed as the pivotal period for the canonization process of the NT writings. By the end of that century, the books of the NT were largely recognized throughout the churches. In the two subsequent centuries, all that remained was a final resolution regarding the canonicity of smaller or disputed books such as James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation. What is more, the fact that traces of the church's canonical consciousness appear even in the NT itself suggests that the NT writers were aware that God was inspiring new documents in their day. In two important NT passages, the term "Scripture" (*graphē*), used about fifty times in the NT to refer to the OT,<sup>10</sup> may refer to the emerging NT writings.

The first such passage is 1 Timothy 5:18: "For the Scripture says: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and, 'The worker is worthy of his wages.'" The text uses the word "Scripture" with reference to two quotations. The first, the prohibition against muzzling an ox, is taken from Deuteronomy 25:4. The second, "the worker is worthy of his wages," is in fact an exact verbal parallel of Luke 10:7.<sup>11</sup> While it is debated whether Luke's Gospel was the source for this quotation, it is clear that (1) the author used a written source (demanded by the word "Scripture," *graphē*); and (2) the source was considered to be authoritative on par with Deuteronomy. Whatever one's view is regarding the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy, this furnishes a significant piece of evidence regarding the emerging canonical consciousness in NT times.

The same is true of 2 Peter 3:15–16. With reference to the apostle Paul, Peter writes that "[h]e speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some matters that are hard to understand. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with *the rest of the Scriptures*" (emphasis added). By implication, it follows that Peter

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Luke 4:21; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20.

<sup>11</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The International Critical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1999), 615. He notes that some scholars try to lessen the implication of the statement by (1) making the reference to *graphē* apply only to the first quote; (2) a loose understanding of the word; or (3) the contention that the term is an inexact expression. However, as Marshall rightly says, "In any case, for the author the second citation had equal authority with the OT" (*ibid.*).

viewed Paul's Letters as "Scripture" on par with the writings of the OT. Strikingly, while NT writings were still being produced, 2 Peter indicates the acceptance of the Pauline Letters as Scripture and hence equally as authoritative as the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>12</sup>

Given this kind of NT evidence, it is safe to conclude that, almost before the ink was dry, the earliest Christians, including leading figures in the church such as the apostles Paul and Peter, considered contemporaneous Christian documents such as Luke's Gospel and Paul's Letters as Scripture on the same level as the OT. From this it is not too difficult to trace the emerging canonical consciousness with regard to the formation of the NT through the writings of the early church fathers in the late first century and early second century. In fact, prior to the year 150, the only NT book not named as authentic or not unequivocally cited as authoritative in the extant patristic writings is 3 John.<sup>13</sup>

### The Witness of the Early Church Fathers

A survey of the early patristic literature reveals that the early church fathers had no hesitancy whatsoever in quoting the various NT books as Scripture. Four examples must suffice. The author of *1 Clement*, the first extant non-biblical Christian document (ca. AD 96), tended to quote Scripture organically (i.e., without introductory formulas).<sup>14</sup> Clement cited the OT and the NT equally in this manner. He referred to the canonical Gospels, the book of Acts, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and perhaps James much as he did to the OT. Most likely, the earliest citation of a NT passage using the term "Scripture" in the subapostolic period (the period following the apostolic era) is *2 Clement* 2.4: "And another scripture says, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"<sup>15</sup> This reference includes a clear citation of a passage in one of the canonical Gospels, most likely Mark 2:17, as early as the end of the first century.

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<sup>12</sup>While the authors of this present book affirm the Pauline authorship of the letters to Timothy and Titus and the Petrine authorship of 1 and 2 Peter, respectively, the significance of the citations for the present debate is not diminished greatly if one assumes they are pseudepigraphical. Both books are normally considered first-century works.

<sup>13</sup>This silence can be explained by (1) the lack of complete records (3 John may have been cited in now-lost early patristic writings); (2) the brevity of the letter (only 14 verses); and (3) the fact that reference to 3 John may not have been as essential in the early church's proclamation, defense of the faith, or theological controversies, as those of other more weighty NT writings. But see C. E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 99, 369. Hill notes that the author of the *Epistula Apostolorum* used the phrase "to walk in truth," a possible echo of 3 John 3–4, and that Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.26.3) may allude to 3 John 9 when referring to elders who "conduct themselves with contempt towards others, and are puffed up with pride of holding the chief seat." Hill also theorizes that the fifth- or sixth-century Codex Bezae may have originally included John, Revelation, and 1, 2 and 3 John in successive order, which would suggest a considerable prehistory as well as a "Johannine corpus" (*ibid.*, 455). Given the size and content of 3 John, the question arises how such a manuscript could have survived unless it was attached to one or several larger works (at least 1 and 2 John).

<sup>14</sup>Generally, Clement uses *graphē* to refer to the OT, except for *2 Clem.* 23.3 where he cites an unknown writing (see also *2 Clem.* 11.2–4 for the same citation). There is some connection of this unknown writing to James.

<sup>15</sup>M. W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 141: "This appears to be the earliest instance of a NT passage being quoted as *scripture*" (emphasis original). Holmes suggested the passage quoted is either Matt 9:13 or Mark 2:17.

Polycarp (ca. AD 69–155), whom Irenaeus called a disciple of the apostle John, also frequently referred to various NT writings in his letter to the Philippians. P. Hartog categorized Polycarp's use of NT documents according to three levels of certainty: (1) Polycarp *certainly* quoted Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, and 1 Peter; (2) he *probably* quoted Matthew, 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, and 1 John; and (3) he *possibly* quoted Luke, Acts, and 2 Thessalonians.<sup>16</sup> B. Metzger added an allusion to Hebrews to the list.<sup>17</sup> Thus Polycarp may have cited as many as fifteen NT books. By far Polycarp's most intriguing comment comes at *Phil.* 12.1: "For I am convinced that you are all well trained in the sacred scriptures. . . . Only as it is said in these scriptures, 'be angry but do not sin,' and 'do not let the sun set on your anger.'"<sup>18</sup> The clear implication is that there was a body of literature called "the Scriptures" of which the book of Ephesians was a part. Beyond this, it is more than likely that Polycarp viewed Paul's Letters in their entirety as Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

Papias (ca. AD 60–130), a contemporary of Polycarp and fellow disciple of John, wrote five books entitled *Expositions of the Lord's Sayings* that are no longer extant. From quotations in other books ("fragments") and reports from ancient writers, it is possible to ascertain that the books were a commentary on the words and deeds of Jesus from the canonical Gospels.<sup>20</sup> From these fragments it can be gleaned that Papias approved of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and Revelation. Reportedly, he also made use of 1 Peter and 1 John.<sup>21</sup> Since the word "sayings" or "oracles" (*logia*) is Paul's euphemism for the OT Scriptures (see Rom 3:2), it is likely that Papias considered his work an exposition of Scripture.

It follows from these observations that most NT documents were recognized as authoritative, even Scripture, as early as the end of the first or at least by the end of the second century of the Christian era. The four Gospels, the book of Acts, the letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John were universally recognized. With the exception of 3 John, the early church fathers cited all NT books as Scripture. Toward the end of the second century, the major contours of the NT had clearly emerged, setting the framework for the subsequent final resolution of the canonical status of several remaining smaller or disputed books.

<sup>16</sup> P. Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament*, WUNT 2/134 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 195.

<sup>17</sup> Metzger (*Canon*, 61) states, "Polycarp almost certainly knows the Epistle to the Hebrews; he calls Christ 'the eternal high priest' (xii.2; see Heb. vi.20; vii.3) and seems to echo Heb. xii.8 ('let us serve him with fear and all reverence,' vi.3)."

<sup>18</sup> The citation is from Eph 4:26, quoting Ps 4:5. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 295.

<sup>19</sup> Polycarp further seems rather enamored with *1 Clement*, which regularly uses the word translated "pore over" (*egklyptō*) to refer to studying the OT Scriptures. Yet Polycarp, for his part, uses Clement's favorite term, not with reference to the OT but to the Pauline Letters (*Phil.* 3.2). Clearly Polycarp understands the Pauline Letter collection to be Scripture. He certainly has access to Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 and 2 Timothy, and possibly 2 Thessalonians (Hartog, *Polycarp and the NT*, 195–97). Given this list, it is improbable that Polycarp's collection of Paul's Letters did not contain the rest of his letters (see below on the nature of ancient letter collections).

<sup>20</sup> C. E. Hill, "Papias of Hierapolis," *ExpTim* 117 (2006): 312.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### **The Witness of the Muratorian Fragment**

Most likely, in the late second century, an unknown writer composed a defense of the NT books that seems to corroborate the conclusion that most NT writings were recognized as Scripture by that time.<sup>22</sup> The writer referred to these writings as “held sacred,” and he stated that pseudonymous works could not be “received” in the church because “gall should not be mixed with honey.”<sup>23</sup> At the very least, the writer saw the books listed as a firm canon. The Muratorian Fragment, which was named for the eighteenth-century Italian historian and theologian who discovered it, lists at least twenty-two of the twenty-seven books in the NT canon.<sup>24</sup>

These works included the four Gospels, at least two of John’s letters (and possibly the third), the Acts of the Apostles, Paul’s thirteen letters, Jude, and Revelation. The books are not in a particular order, and the manuscript is fragmentary at the beginning and, most likely, at the end. Other books may well have been included in the church’s canon at the time the Muratorian Fragment was written, such as Hebrews, the Petrine Letters, or the letter of James. From the third century to the fifth, questions regarding the rest of the General Epistles and the book of Revelation were resolved in the minds of most Christians.

We have considered the witness of the NT and of the early church fathers as well as the testimony of the Muratorian Fragment, which is likely the earliest extant canonical list that in all probability documents the existence of the concept of canon by the end of the second century.

### **Stimuli for Canonization and Criteria of Canonicity**

***Stimuli for Canonization*** There was likely a series of contributing factors for NT canonization. The treatment by N. Geisler and W. Nix is representative in suggesting the following five major stimuli for the church’s determination of the NT canon.<sup>25</sup>

1. *The prophetic nature of the NT books.* The NT books themselves were prophetic, intrinsically valuable, and worthy of preservation.
2. *The church’s need for authoritative Scriptures.* The demand for books that conformed to apostolic teaching to be read in the churches (see 1 Thess 5:27; 1 Tim 4:13) required a selection process.
3. *Heretical challenges.* Around 140, the heretic Marcion in Rome declared an edited Gospel of Luke and only ten letters of Paul as useful while rejecting all the other apostolic works, which necessitated a response by those in the apostolic mainstream of Christianity.

<sup>22</sup> See esp. E. J. Schnabel, “The Muratorian Fragment: The State of Research,” *JETS* 57 (2014): 231–64.

<sup>23</sup> See Metzger, *Canon*, 305–7, citing Muratorian Fragment 60 and 66–67.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion in *ibid.*, 191–201.

<sup>25</sup> N. L. Geisler and W. E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), 277–78.

4. *Missionary outreach.* Since the Bible began to be translated into Syriac and Latin as early as the first half of the second century, determining the NT canon was important for deciding which books should be translated.
5. *Persecution.* When the edict of Diocletian in AD 303 ordered all the sacred books of the Christians burned (a fact that may, at least in part, account for the relative scarcity of pre-AD 300 NT manuscripts), this required believers to choose which books were part of Scripture and thus most worthy of preservation.

**Criteria of Canonicity** When the early church addressed the topic of the canon, it recognized which writings bore the stamp of divine inspiration. Four major criteria were used in this process.<sup>26</sup> The first was *apostolicity*, that is, direct or indirect association of a given work with an apostle. This criterion was met by Matthew, John, and Peter, all of whom were

### SIDEBAR 1.1: PSEUDEPIGRAPHA IN THE EARLY CHURCH

There is no known example of a book falsely claiming to be written by an apostle (a “pseudepigraphical” work), orthodox or not, that was accepted by the early church as canonical. Serapion, bishop of Antioch (died AD 211), stated concerning the spurious *Gospel of Peter*: “For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject, as men of experience, knowing that such were not handed down to us.”<sup>1</sup>

Tertullian (ca. AD 160–225) recorded the defrocking of an Asian elder, noting that, “in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing [i.e. *Acts of Paul* and *3 Corinthians*], as if he were augmenting Paul’s fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, when a book in the canon claims to have been written by a certain author, it may be assumed that the early church believed it was authentic.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Ecl. Hist.* 5.22.1.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. III: Tertullian, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. C. Coxe, and A. Menzies (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 677. See also Eusebius’s statement regarding apocryphal works: “in order that we might know them and the writings that are put forward by heretics under the name of the apostles containing gospels such as those of Peter, and Thomas, and Matthias, and some others besides, or Acts such as those of Andrew and John and the other apostles. To none of these has any who belonged to the succession of the orthodox ever thought it right to refer in his writings. Moreover, the type of phraseology differs from apostolic style, and the opinion and tendency of their contents are widely dissonant from true orthodoxy and clearly show that they are the forgeries of heretics” (*Ecl. Hist.* 3.25).

<sup>26</sup> For helpful treatments on the formation of the Christian canon, including criteria for canonicity, see Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 726–43 (esp. pp. 736–37); M. J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); idem, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013); and L. M. McDonald, “Canon,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. R. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 134–44 (for ancient references regarding criteria for canonicity, see p. 135).

members of the Twelve (Matt 10:2–3 pars.), as well as Paul, an apostle commissioned by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9). It was also met by James and Jude, half brothers of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; see Jas 1:1; Jude 1). Indirectly, the criterion was also satisfied by Mark, a close associate of Peter (1 Pet 5:13) and Paul (2 Tim 4:11), and Luke, a travel companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys (see especially the “we” passages in the book of Acts).

The second criterion of canonicity was a book’s *orthodoxy*, that is, whether a given writing conformed to the church’s “rule of faith” (Lat. *regula fidei*). This allowed books such as Hebrews to be considered, though it appears that attribution to Paul or a member of the “Pauline circle” also played a major role in the acceptance of Hebrews into the canon. The question addressed under this rubric is whether the teaching of a given book conformed to apostolic teaching (see Acts 2:42).

#### SIDEBAR 1.2: ATHANASIUS’S EASTER LETTER OF AD 367

Athanasius, in his festal letter dated 367, lists the exact same canon as today. “There must be no hesitation to state again the [books] of the New Testament; for they are these: Four Gospels: according to **Matthew**, according to **Mark**, according to **Luke**, and according to **John**. Further, after these, also [The] **Acts** of [the] Apostles, and the seven so-called Catholic Epistles of the Apostles, as follows: One of **James**, but **two of Peter**, then, **three of John**, and after these, one of **Jude**. In addition to these there are fourteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul put down in the following order: The first to the **Romans**, then **two to the Corinthians**, and after these, [the Letter] to the **Galatians**, and then to the **Ephesians**; further, [the Letters] to the **Philippians** and to the **Colossians** and two to the **Thessalonians**, and the [Letter] to the **Hebrews**. And next two [Letters] to **Timothy**, but one to **Titus**, and the last [being] the one to **Philemon**. Moreover, also the **Apocalypse** of John.”

The third criterion was a book’s *antiquity*, that is, whether a given piece of writing was produced during the apostolic era. This served to corroborate the previous two criteria and excluded second-century and third-century apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature (such as the Gospel of Thomas) that mimicked the authentic apostolic documents. It also ruled out documents such as the *Didache* or the *Shepherd of Hermas* that were produced subsequent to the apostolic era. Some of these latter writings reflected early church practice and were read with profit by the early Christians. In the end, however, they were not included in the canon because they failed to meet the criteria of apostolicity and antiquity.

The fourth and final major criterion of canonicity was that of *ecclesiastical usage*, that is, whether a given document was already widely used in the early church. As in the previous criterion, this benchmark was used in conjunction with the other standards stated above, and only documents that met all four criteria were included. The above list should

not be taken to suggest that the early church used this exact list of criteria to arrive at the NT canon. Rather, these four criteria, used in conjunction with one another, adequately summarize the types of considerations that went into the early church's adjudication of individual books for possible inclusion in the canon. In fact, C. E. Hill notes that these types of criteria are digested from the churches' rejection of late contenders to be added to the Scripture.<sup>27</sup> It implies that these criteria were what is expressed in the existing canon and expected for any additions (if any).

### **Ecclesiastical Debates Regarding the Canonicity of Individual Books**

*Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History and Varying Opinions in the East and the West* On the whole these were the major criteria used by the early church to determine the canonicity of a given piece of writing. But not everyone agreed in every specific instance. The historian and church father Eusebius (ca. AD 260–340), bishop of Caesarea, provided a valuable reflection of then current discussion in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius grouped the books of the NT into three categories. First were the commonly recognized books, that is, those writings widely acknowledged as canonical. These documents included the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's Letters, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation. Second were the disputed books questioned by some, "but," as Eusebius noted, "nevertheless known [i.e., recognized as authentic and thus canonical] by most." These writings included James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2–3 John. The third group encompassed the spurious books, which designated those works that at one time had been received by some but that had now been rejected. These writings included the *Acts of Paul*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Revelation of Peter*, and the (*Pseudo-*) *Epistle of Barnabas*.<sup>28</sup>

As the Roman Empire was divided into East and West, so also, to a certain extent, opinions were divided concerning certain NT books. In the West (Italy/Rome, North Africa, Gaul, etc.), doubts seemed to persist regarding Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John, and Jude. But these views were not universal since each of these books had its supporters.<sup>29</sup> In the East (Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt), the status of James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation continued to be debated.<sup>30</sup> But again this was not a universal opinion. For example, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (ca. AD 296–373), published

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<sup>27</sup> Hill, "New Testament Canon," 119. Hill states, "They are internal qualities by which the authentic makes itself known and recognized. Also, they only seem to function negatively, when a given book is challenged, not positively, applied a priori before anything is to be considered as Scripture. Most of the books of the NT in fact never seem to have been significantly questioned within the church."

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 3.25. Eusebius adds the book of Revelation to this because he cannot reconcile the thousand years of Rev 20:2–7 with his own antichilist position, though this appears to be at least to some extent a function of his own personal bias rather than reflecting widespread rejection of Revelation by the church as a whole.

<sup>29</sup> Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–367/68) receives Hebrews and James; Philaster, bishop of Brescia (died ca. 397), receives the seven General Epistles and Hebrews; Rufinus (ca. 345–411) receives the entire 27-book NT, as did his friend and contemporary Jerome (ca. 345–420). Augustine (354–430) followed suit (see Metzger, *Canon*, 232–37).

<sup>30</sup> Revelation is the only book rejected by Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (ca. 315–387), and Gregory Nazianzen (ca. 329/30–389/90); Amphilocheus of Iconium (ca. 340–395) states that most reject Revelation.

his thirty-ninth festal letter in 367, in which he prescribed the same twenty-seven-book NT canon still affirmed by the vast majority of Christians.<sup>31</sup>

The Syrian church (Aramaic-speaking Christians in the East) hesitated to receive the General Epistles and Revelation. The Syrian translation of the NT (called “Peshitta”) supports a twenty-two-book canon. It was not until the Philoxenian revision (ca. AD 500) that the remaining NT books were added to the church’s canon.

Certain orthodox books for a time assumed canonical status in particular segments of the church or at least in the opinions of some of its representatives.<sup>32</sup> On the whole these writings were only rarely considered to be Scripture, but they were viewed as useful for the instruction of new Christians without being read during the church’s worship. When some were included in the later complete codices (such as the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus and the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus), they were always placed subsequent to the book of Revelation. This suggests that the church considered these writings to be useful for believers’ edification but not divinely inspired.<sup>33</sup> Thus, these codices, too large and bulky for personal use, among other things, served as “reference editions” of the Bible.<sup>34</sup>

**Early Church Councils** Only three known early church councils officially mention the canon of Scripture.<sup>35</sup> There may have been some earlier local councils, but we have only brief mentions of them.<sup>36</sup> The first, the Council of Laodicea, was a local meeting of bishops around AD 363. It only survives in an ancient summary of the individual canons. Canon LX contains a list of the Old and New Testaments. The list of specific books included in the extant documents was probably added at a later time and may not represent the council.<sup>37</sup> The description given of the canon shows the idea of “canon” is indeed present.

<sup>31</sup> As did Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315–403). See F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 210–14.

<sup>32</sup> These writings include the *Shepherd of Hermas* (received by Irenaeus, respected in Egypt, but not by Clement of Alexandria or Origen) as well as the Wisdom of Solomon and the *Apocalypse of Peter* (included in the Muratorian Fragment). *First Clement* is also received as Scripture by some (e.g., Clement of Alexandria). The *Epistle of Barnabas* is briefly believed to be canonical in Egypt. The *Didache* was at one time considered Scripture in Egypt according to Clement of Alexandria and Origen. See H. Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 48–49.

<sup>33</sup> Note that the Muratorian Fragment and Eusebius both discuss the books of the NT in these categories, as do many other patristic writers.

<sup>34</sup> Westcott (*Canon*, 439) notes regarding Codex Sinaiticus and the *Shepherd of Hermas* that “the arrangement of the quires shews [*sic*] that the *Shepherd*, like *4 Maccabees* in the Old Testament, was treated as a separate section of the volume, and therefore perhaps as an Appendix to the more generally received books.”

<sup>35</sup> D. Brown (*The Da Vinci Code* [New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003], 234), in a widely popular novel, suggests that the canon was determined—what is more, significantly revamped—at the Council of Nicea (325). In fact the Council never even discussed the matter. Instead, this first ecumenical council presupposed the NT Scriptures, including the four canonical Gospels, as the arbiter of all disputes (see Westcott, *Canon*, 438).

<sup>36</sup> Tertullian appeals to “every council of Churches” who rejected the canonicity of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (*De pudicitia* 10). These would have predated the earliest of the known councils (*De pudicitia* was written around AD 210). Hill suggests that the Muratorian Fragment may possibly have been the report of one of these councils. (Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 133–34).

<sup>37</sup> That list consists of the present NT, minus the book of Revelation. Westcott suggests the list is a copy from the list of Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. AD 315–387; Westcott, *Canon*, 505).



It states, “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.”<sup>38</sup> The second was the Council of Hippo Regius in North Africa (AD 393), which met and affirmed the present twenty-seven-book NT. The third was the Third Council of Carthage (AD 397), which read the previous affirmations and repeated them.<sup>39</sup> In no sense were these lists the result of great debate. The conciliar documents simply stated the books of the OT and NT and added the following note: “Let this be sent to our brother and fellow bishop, Boniface, and to the other bishops of those parts, that they may confirm this canon, for these are the things which we have received from our fathers to be read in church.”<sup>40</sup> Rather than engaging in a sustained debate or a process of sorting and sifting, “the church,” as P. Balla noted, “recognized as scripture in the fourth century those writings that had guided its life, at least in some regions, in the preceding centuries.”<sup>41</sup>

In the next century the East came to receive Revelation and the rest of the General Epistles. Thus, by the close of the fifth century, virtually all questions regarding the extent of the NT canon were closed in the minds of most.

To sum up, the salient facts regarding the recognition of the NT canon thus far are as follows. First, most books of the present NT canon are found in every witness to a canon in antiquity. Almost immediately, twenty out of twenty-seven books were universally received; most accepted at least a twenty-two-book canon. Second, no book in the present canon had previously been universally rejected by the early churches. There is no post-second-century epiphany concerning a book in the NT that lacked ancient support. Third, no book was ever received into the NT canon that was believed to be pseudonymous.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, no council subjectively selected or rejected the books of the canon. Instead, after a period of sifting and sorting, the church recognized the divine inspiration of the books included in the NT canon and declined to accept the claims of canonicity of any competing works on the basis that they failed to meet the above-stated criteria of canonicity: apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, and ecclesiastical usage.

### Recent Developments in Scholarship on the NT Canon

The above survey of the major works and figures forms the basic framework for the study of the NT canon. The basic facts and data pertaining to the canonization process of the NT are not widely disputed. What has been the subject of considerable recent debate,

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<sup>38</sup> P. Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, vol. 14 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, n.d.), 14:158. Note also that earlier Canon XVI states, “The Gospel, apostle, and the other Scriptures are to be read on the Sabbath.” The conjecture is that this is a reference to a Saturday worship and that the NT is to be read along with the OT (ibid., 133). For our purposes, note that “Gospel, apostle, and other Scriptures” sounds much like earlier descriptions of the books of the NT. See, e.g., Irenaeus who describes the four Gospels as “Gospel” and Paul as “the apostle.”

<sup>39</sup> See Metzger, *Canon*, 314–15; Westcott, *Canon*, 448–49.

<sup>40</sup> Schaff, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 454.

<sup>41</sup> P. Balla, “Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century),” in *Canon Debate*, 385.

<sup>42</sup> This is addressed in the discussion of pseudonymity later in this volume; see esp. the discussions in chap. 15 (Letters to Timothy and Titus) and chap. 18 (2 Peter).

however, is the interpretation of this data with regard to the question of the formation of the Christian canon. In fact, some, such as Sundberg, have called for a “revised history of the NT canon.”<sup>43</sup> The discussion took its point of departure from the definition of the NT canon as “a closed list of authoritative books.” Since this terminology is not found, at least explicitly, until the third or fourth centuries, these writers argued that characterizing the early church’s deliberations in the second century as determining the “canonical” status of a given book committed the fallacy of anachronism. According to these writers, at this early stage of the canonical process, a particular work could have been viewed as “Scripture” (i.e., a piece of sacred writing) but not as “canonical” because this kind of canonical consciousness and sense of a “closed collection” of NT books only emerged in the third and fourth centuries.

What can be said in response to these claims? First, as mentioned above, on the assumption that the Muratorian Fragment is to be dated in the late second century, it would contradict these objections, for it clearly evidences this kind of canonical consciousness and presents a list of canonical books. This possible damaging counterevidence has been recognized by the proponents of this view. Consequently, scholars such as Sundberg and Hahneman have challenged the dating of the Muratorian Fragment to the second century, proposing instead a date in the fourth century.<sup>44</sup> But many continue to believe that a second-century date for the Muratorian Fragment is more likely.<sup>45</sup>

Another problematic aspect of Sundberg’s thesis is that the early church in all probability did not only evidence a concept of canon but in fact possessed an already established canon: the OT. Again, Sundberg and others challenged the notion of a closed OT canon in the first two centuries, maintaining that the OT canon was not completed until at least the fourth century and that the early church received the OT canon before Judaism determined the canonical boundaries of the Hebrew Scriptures. According to these scholars, the collection of Scripture was a fluid process.<sup>46</sup>

In response, Sundberg and his followers focus unduly on *the church’s* closing of the canon while failing to give adequate attention to *God’s* activity of inspiring the NT writings in

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<sup>43</sup> See A. C. Sundberg Jr., “Toward a Revised History of the New Testament Canon,” *SE IV*, TU 102 (Berlin, Germany: Akademie, 1968), 452–61; idem, “Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List,” *HTR* 66 (1973): 1–41.

<sup>44</sup> See Sundberg, “Canon Muratori”; G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, NY: Clarendon, 1992); and McDonald, *Biblical Canon*, 369–79. On the Muratorian Fragment, see already the brief summary earlier in this chapter as well as the discussion in Metzger (*Canon*, 191–201); and Schnabel, “Muratorian Fragment.”

<sup>45</sup> E. Ferguson, “Canon Muratori: Provenance and Date,” *Studia Patristica* 18 (1982): 677–83. Hahneman’s arguments are solidly refuted by C. E. Hill, “The Debate over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” *WTJ* 57 (1995): 437–52 (see esp. p. 440); and Schnabel, “Muratorian Fragment.” See also E. Ferguson, “Review of G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*,” *JTS* 57 (1993): 696. For a helpful discussion of the date of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, see Holmes (*Apostolic Fathers*, 447), who suggests that the writing may be a composite document.

<sup>46</sup> See A. C. Sundberg, “The Bible Canon and the Christian Doctrine of Inspiration,” *Int* 29 (1975): 352–71.

the first place.<sup>47</sup> Thus, these writers base their assessment primarily on definitive ecclesiastical pronouncements on the NT canon. Since this kind of final resolution does not occur until the fourth century, this is taken as evidence that “canon” was not an operative concept during earlier stages of the canonization process. Such reasoning is hardly convincing because it puts an undue emphasis on the church’s role in the determination of canonicity. It also neglects to acknowledge that by the end of the second century, most NT books were recognized as part of the church’s canon of sacred Scripture.

Viewing the determination of the church’s canon of inspired, authoritative books primarily in terms of a “patristic accomplishment”<sup>48</sup> casts the debate along the lines of two possible options: wholesale acceptance or critical evaluation. Sundberg favors the first alternative. One of the entailments of such a full-scale acceptance of the fourth-century church’s determination of the canon is the inclusion of the OT Apocrypha in the canon of Scripture on the basis that the same councils that enumerated the twenty-seven-book NT canon also included the OT Apocrypha.<sup>49</sup> C. D. Allert, likewise, seems to suggest that the church’s proper response is to submit to this patristic decision. In doing so, he attempted to affirm inspiration and inerrancy but only through the lens of the church’s interpretation, not as a function of the Bible’s own testimony regarding itself.<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, while largely concurring with Sundberg, L. McDonald concluded his book with the following list of seven questions that suggests that he would prefer to evaluate, rather than merely accept, the “patristic accomplishment” in delineating the NT canon.<sup>51</sup> He asked,

1. Is the very notion of canon a Christian idea? In his view the earliest Christians had no concept of canon. So why should believers today entertain such a notion?
2. Should the contemporary church adhere to a canon that legitimizes abhorrent practices such as slavery or the subjugation of women?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See the discussion of inspiration later in this chapter.

<sup>48</sup> C. D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, Evangelical Resource: Ancient Sources for the Church’s Future (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 175.

<sup>49</sup> A. C. Sundberg, “Protestant Old Testament Canon: Should It Be Re-examined?” *CBQ* 28 (1966): 194–203; and idem, “The ‘Old Testament’: A Christian Canon,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 143–55.

<sup>50</sup> Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Canon*, 426–27.

<sup>52</sup> This question addresses at least two major issues. First, there is the matter of proper exegesis: the NT endorses neither slavery nor the subjugation of women, though it does restrict certain ecclesiastical roles to men (see R. W. Yarbrough, “Progressive and Historic: The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 2nd ed., ed. A. J. Köstenberger and T. R. Schreiner [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005], 121–48). Second, there is the issue of the relationship between biblical revelation and contemporary culture. Especially since culture is always in a state of flux, if not entropy (a case in point being the advocacy of some, even in the church, of the permissibility of homosexuality today, which stands in conflict with the Bible’s universal condemnation of this practice), culture must not be used to judge the appropriateness of biblical teaching. Instead, Scripture should constitute the standard by which the morality of the prevailing culture is assessed.

3. Does a move toward a closed canon limit the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the church?
4. Should the church be limited to an OT canon to which Jesus and his first disciples were clearly not confined?
5. Should the church continue to recognize nonapostolic literature? Here McDonald affirms the criterion of apostolicity but rejects the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, 2 Peter, and Jude.
6. Is it appropriate to tie the modern church to a canon that emerged out of the historical circumstances in the second to fifth centuries?
7. Does the same Spirit who inspired the written documents of Scripture not still speak today?

McDonald did not advocate replacing the Christian Bible, and he acknowledged that no other ancient document is, on the whole, more reliable than Scripture in its current configuration. But he did seek to listen to other voices to tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ. According to McDonald, the *agrapha* (supposedly true stories of Jesus that were not included in the canonical Gospels), the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and other early Christian literature are valuable in informing the church's faith. While the questions raised by McDonald are certainly worthy of further reflection and discussion, his blurring of the edges of the canon is of doubtful merit.

### Critique

How should one evaluate the various contributions by recent scholarship on the NT canon? To begin with, as noted above, the claim that the Muratorian Fragment was a fourth-century composition has been decisively refuted. Also, much of recent scholarship on the NT canon is beset by a series of methodological problems. One such difficulty is that the available relevant evidence is often judged as if "not extant" necessarily means "never existed." For example, Athanasius's list is sometimes declared to be the first time the present twenty-seven-book NT canon was listed as such.<sup>53</sup> But the truth is that we have precious little evidence from the previous centuries on any one subject. Is this the first complete list of NT canonical books ever compiled or the first such list extant today? The latter is more likely.

The same holds true with regard to terminological discussions. For example, concerning the term *canon*, Gamble stated, "It is important to notice that the word 'canon' did not begin to be applied to Christian writings until the mid-fourth century."<sup>54</sup> This is problematic for the following reasons. To argue that there was no concept of a canon in the previous centuries on the basis of the presence or absence of the word *canon* is an argument from silence that is notoriously difficult to substantiate. In fact, the argument constitutes

<sup>53</sup> E.g., Allert, *A High View of Scripture*, 141; Barton, *Holy Writing, Sacred Text*, 10; and Metzger, *Canon*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, 17.

an instance of a semantic fallacy that fails to consider the possibility that another expression or set of terms may have been used to communicate the concept that was later called “canon.”<sup>55</sup>

A third problem arises with regard to the significance placed on dissenting voices. How heavily does one weigh those who received a book versus those who rejected it or indeed the mere notation that some rejected or, more often, disputed the canonicity of a given book? Must one extrapolate from such discussions an unfinished collection of Scripture? If dissenting voices obviate the widespread mainstream consensus, there is still no canon today, nor was there ever a biblical canon, whether of the OT or the NT. Someone somewhere has always and will always object to a given book for often less than compelling reasons.<sup>56</sup> If unanimity, rather than consensus, is required, then there is no hope of ever having a canon of Scripture.

Thus, recent scholarship has been helpful in raising important questions regarding the NT canon but appears to be headed largely in the wrong direction by focusing on the final determination and closure of the NT canon by the church councils while unduly diminishing the significance of earlier developments in the canonization process. For this reason the conventional evangelical understanding continues to be preferred. In fact, closer scrutiny suggests that the traditional view may concede even more than is necessary by placing the closure of the canon at a date later than may be warranted by the available evidence. As seen below, there is good reason to believe that the core of the NT canon was established at least by the middle of the second century if not before.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Evidence for an Early Canon of Core New Testament Books**

***The Fourfold Gospel*** Even before the Gospels were written, there was an intense interest in the words and deeds of Jesus on the part of the church. J. D. G. Dunn argued that the oral pre-Gospel traditions were already functioning as canon in the first century.<sup>58</sup> He was undoubtedly correct when he stated, “It was the authority which it [the Gospel tradition] already possessed which ensured that it was written down.”<sup>59</sup> His conclusion was that “the canonical process began with the impact made by Jesus himself.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> E.g., M. G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997 [1987]), 75, who suggests that the covenantal nature of the canon may have led the early church writers to employ the term “covenantal” rather than “canon.” Eusebius uses the term “the Covenanted Scriptures.” The term is *endiathēkos*. Tertullian preferred the term “instruments” (Lat., *instrumentum*) that may mean “documents.”

<sup>56</sup> E.g., E. Evanson attempts to reduce the Christian canon for theological reasons (*Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists and the Evidence of Their Respective Authenticity, Examined with That of Some Other Scriptures Deemed Canonical* [Gloucester, England: Walker, 1805], 340–41).

<sup>57</sup> See C. E. Hill, “The New Testament Canon: *Deconstructio ad absurdum?*” *JETS* 52 (2009): 114–20.

<sup>58</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, “How the New Testament Began,” in *From Biblical Criticism to Biblical Faith: Essays in Honor of Lee Martin McDonald*, ed. W. Brackney and C. Evans (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 128. See also, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, “How the New Testament Began,” 127.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Not too long after Jesus's earthly ministry the Synoptic Gospels were written (most likely, all before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70). Originally, the four Gospels disseminated independently of one another. Their individual status as Scripture is usually not debated. Whether the collection of Gospels should be limited to these four is a different matter. There are about thirty known Gospels that appeared before the year 600,<sup>61</sup> but none were as popular as the canonical Gospels.<sup>62</sup> Only these four were recognized because, as Serapion—who died in 211—and others said, they were “handed down” to the church.<sup>63</sup> The other Gospels were rejected on the grounds that they did not agree with the commonly accepted four canonical Gospels. This implies not only antiquity of the collection but also the authority of the transmitters.<sup>64</sup>

The collection of the Gospels, and even the whole idea of a canon, is frequently attributed to a reaction to Marcion's rejection of all the NT Gospels but Luke.<sup>65</sup> Today most are less certain that Marcion is to be given as much credit, but many still see his canon as an important influence in the formation of the NT.<sup>66</sup> More importantly, Marcion's canon most likely presupposed a large portion of the present canon.<sup>67</sup> Ferguson noted that Marcion's contemporary, the gnostic teacher Basilides (ca. AD 117–138), “is our earliest full witness to the New Testament as scripture, but the offhand way he speaks shows that he was not the first to do this and was reflecting common usage.”<sup>68</sup> An orthodox

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<sup>61</sup> If limited to the first few centuries of the Christian era, the number is even smaller. B. D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), includes only seventeen non-canonical Gospels, including the disputed Secret Gospel of Mark (see chap. 3 below). J. K. Elliott (*The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford, NY: Clarendon, 1993]) provided a fuller listing, but a perusal of the Gospels featured in his book shows that many of these Gospels (1) are fragmentary, late, and dependent on the canonical Gospels; (2) include dubious content; or (3) are otherwise transparently inferior to the canonical Gospels.

<sup>62</sup> The manuscript evidence alone suggests that the four canonical Gospels were far more popular than the rest. *Gospel of Thomas* has one whole manuscript (and three small fragments); the *Gospel of Peter* survives in only three small fragments; the *Egerton Gospel* in two small fragments; the *Gospel of the Hebrews* only in quotations (G. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 2nd ed. [Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002], 122–35).

<sup>63</sup> See Eusebius, *Ecl. Hist.* 6.12.

<sup>64</sup> See especially R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). He stresses the eyewitness character of the Gospels and argues that the Twelve served as an “authoritative collegium” in the Gospels' preservation of eyewitness testimony regarding Jesus in the Gospels.

<sup>65</sup> See A. von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*, Bibliothek klassischer Texte (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996; repr. of 1924 ed.), 357; H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1972), 148; and J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University Press, 1942), 31, who wrote that “Marcion is primarily responsible for the idea of the New Testament.”

<sup>66</sup> See the discussion of stimuli for canonization above. See Metzger, *Canon*, 99; and T. von Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons I* (Erlangen/Leipzig, Germany: A. Deichert, 1888), 586.

<sup>67</sup> Tertullian's remark that Marcion “gnawed the Gospels to pieces” suggests that Marcion's separation of Luke from the rest of the Gospels was a disruption of an already existing collection (*Against Marcion*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III: *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986], 272). Tertullian further notes that Marcion's rejection of the other Gospels is purely an innovation, not a restoration movement, indicating that Marcion surely knew the other Gospels (*Against Marcion*, Book IV, chaps. III–IV, in *ibid.*, 348–49).

<sup>68</sup> E. Ferguson, “Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon,” in *Canon Debate*, 313.

contemporary of Marcion, Justin Martyr (ca. 100–165), wrote of the Gospels (“the memoirs of the apostles”) being read in the churches alongside the Prophets.<sup>69</sup> This reference has a bearing not only on worship in the early church, but it also indicates the status afforded the four Gospels.<sup>70</sup> They were Scripture on par with the OT.

In this context the question of format takes on special significance. When a given group of similar documents is gathered together, the writings that are included, by definition, constitute the limits of the collection. In terms of the Gospels, the creation of the fourfold Gospel codex says as much about the limits of the Gospel canon as it does about the Gospels chosen for inclusion. Rather than assigning the date of the Gospel collection to the *end* of the second century, it may well be that the canonical Gospels were circulating as a unit as early as the *beginning* of the second century.

It is not known whether Justin’s Gospels were bound in one codex, but these four apostolic Gospels were being read in the churches.<sup>71</sup> What is known is that by the end of the second century the fourfold Gospel codex was common.<sup>72</sup> Irenaeus (ca. 130–200) is perhaps our strongest patristic witness to the fourfold Gospel. For him, the Gospels formed a fourfold unity. In fact, Irenaeus preferred the singular “Gospel” to the plural “Gospels.”<sup>73</sup> While this is no doubt a theological conviction, it may well be reflected in the physical arrangement familiar to Irenaeus. In *Against Heresies* 3.11.8, he declared the Gospels to be precisely four in number, comparing them to the four winds, the four angelic creatures of Ezekiel, and the four covenants of God.

Irenaeus’s argument is often understood to be limiting the number of the Gospels to only “these four and no more.”<sup>74</sup> But this is only part of what Irenaeus sought to establish. His point was that there were four canonical Gospels—neither more *nor less*. He castigated the Ebionites for using only Matthew, the Docetists for only using Mark, the Marcionites for using only Luke, and the Valentinians for preferring John and audaciously creating a *Gospel of Truth*. In fact, Irenaeus wrote more about those who *reduced* the number of Gospels in the canon than about those who *added* to their number, which assumes a fixed Gospel collection in both directions.

T. C. Skeat has persuasively argued that Irenaeus’s comparison to the four creatures of Ezekiel is both a citation of a previous work and an argument about the *order* of the

<sup>69</sup> See Justin, *1 Apol.* 67: “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things” (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I: *The Apostolic Fathers—Justin Martyr—Irenaeus*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987], 186).

<sup>70</sup> Against von Campenhausen (*Formation of the Christian Bible*, 103), who maintained, “It is customary to talk of a ‘canon of the Four Gospels,’ a ‘canon’ of the Pauline Epistles, and an ‘apocalyptic’ canon even before the time of Marcion. Our sources certainly do nothing to justify such ideas.”

<sup>71</sup> Justin’s student Tatian created the *Diatessaron* (“through four”), a continuous Gospel harmony.

<sup>72</sup> G. N. Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 316–46.

<sup>73</sup> M. Hengel, *The Four Gospels and One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 2000), 10.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., McDonald (*Biblical Canon*, 290) argues that Irenaeus was an innovator here.

Gospels. If so, he rightly drew the following conclusion: “Any question of the order of the Gospels only makes sense when all four have been brought together in a single volume, which must be a codex, since no roll, however economically written, could contain all four Gospels.”<sup>75</sup> As mentioned, Irenaeus referred to a four-gospel codex. Thus, it is more than just an abstract point that he declared that the gospel was in its very essence “fourfold.”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, he concluded, “Now, these things being so, all these [men] are vain, unlearned, and moreover also audacious—these who destroy *the form of the gospel*,<sup>77</sup> and [by supposing] either more or less than what has been spoken, amend *the appearance of the gospels*.”<sup>78</sup> In saying this, he was referring not only to the apostolic Gospels but very likely to a fourfold codex that was known and well established at the time he wrote.<sup>79</sup> Thus, this Gospel collection likely had a very early archetype, possibly one appearing a half-century earlier than Irenaeus.<sup>80</sup>

Evidence from the early Gospel manuscripts also points to an early canonical collection. There is ample manuscript evidence of a fourfold Gospel collection from the third century onward.<sup>81</sup> All of these have a different ancestor, which seems to suggest at least a mid-second century origin.<sup>82</sup> In fact, there may be physical evidence to this effect from the late second century from two manuscripts. First,  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  contains a large portion of Luke and John, including the page where Luke ends and John begins. This sequence makes it likely that it originally included all four Gospels.<sup>83</sup> Second, T. C. Skeat argued that  $\mathfrak{P}^4$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{64}$ , and  $\mathfrak{P}^{67}$  (dated ca. 200) were all originally from the same codex and must have had an

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<sup>75</sup> T. C. Skeat, “Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon,” *NovT* 34 (1992): 198–99. The order suggested is the so-called western order found in many Latin and Greek manuscripts (i.e., Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke). While this may cause one to doubt Skeat’s thesis, J. Bingham and B. Todd Jr. have shown that text of the Gospels in Irenaeus show great affinity to the western text-type. They suggest it is possible that the Greek “Gospel text that Irenaeus used was closer to manuscripts from which the Latin manuscripts were derived.” (D. J. Bingham and B. R. Todd Jr., “Irenaeus’s Text of the Gospels in *Adversus haereses*,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, ed. by C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger [Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012], 392). Thus, it is no stretch of the imagination to suggest a western order of the Gospels in a Greek text that may have been related to the Old Latin’s Greek parent.

<sup>76</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8 (Migne, *PG* 7.1, 889). Irenaeus’s argument is that the *one* gospel is, literally, “four-formed” (*tetramorphè*).

<sup>77</sup> *Idean tou euangeliou* (emphasis added).

<sup>78</sup> Emphasis added; *prosōpon*, Lat. *personas*; lit. “face” or “mask.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.9 (Migne, *PG* 7.1, 890).

<sup>79</sup> Note also Irenaeus’s final words: “Since God made all things orderly and neatly, it was also fitting for the outward appearance of the Gospel to be well arranged [Lat. *bene compositam*] and well connected [Lat. *bene compaginatam*]. Therefore, having examined the opinion of those men *who handed the Gospel down to us*, from their very beginnings, let us go also to the remaining apostles” (*Against Heresies* 3.11.9 [*PG* 71, 894]).

<sup>80</sup> Given an AD 170 or 180 date for *Against Heresies*, this would produce a date of ca. AD 120–130.

<sup>81</sup> The other early mss. that indisputably show more than one Gospel in a codex are  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ , containing all four Gospels and Acts (third cent.); possibly  $\mathfrak{P}^{53}$  (including portions of Matthew and Acts, suggesting Mark–John lay between them; ca. 260); and Uncial 0171 (ca. 300). See Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 53–61.

<sup>82</sup> Ferguson, “Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon,” 303.

<sup>83</sup> Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*, 118.  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  is officially dated ca. 200.