

a paper:

ON THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE CANON

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PREFACE

Many Christians today accept the Holy Bible without considering the Divinely directed flow of historical events that resulted in fixing of the New Testament canon. This paper will attempt to offer a brief overview of that process in a humble effort to better appreciate the inestimable worth of The Holy Bible and in particular The New Testament.

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ABSTRACT

No single earthly force, individual or historical event seems capable alone to have determined the resulting form that The New Testament canon has taken. However, in combination and in the sequences that they were brought together - via the men, events and institutions that applied them - the early Church eventually fixed The New Testament canon in the form we have today. This process can only be adequately explained as a result of the active guidance of the hand of Divine Providence acting through The faithful Church.

DEDICATION

To the faithful Christian men and women who, acting under The Almighty's guiding hand through The faithful early Church, and filled with The very Spirit of GOD, set down The New Testament canon, that we might be guided into The Way of peace, righteousness and salvation in our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

EPIGRAPH

PSALMS 119:105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." [KJV]

I. INTRODUCTION -WHAT IS THE BIBLE CANON?

PSALMS 119:105 declares of Holy Writ, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”¹ No single earthly force, individual or historical event seems capable alone to have determined the resulting form that The New Testament canon has taken. However, in combination and in the sequences that they were brought together - via the men, events and institutions that applied them - the early Church eventually fixed The New Testament canon in the form we have today. This process can only be adequately explained as a result of the active guidance of the hand of Divine Providence acting through The faithful Church. So we shall see.

But what is meant by The Bible “canon?” Noah Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of The English Language defines the Canon as being derived from ancient words meaning “a measuring rod” and “to form a rule.” Relating to The Bible, the definition is “The genuine Books of The Holy Scriptures, called the sacred Canon, or general rule of moral and religious duty, given by inspiration.” It further defines the adjective canonical under Canonical Scriptures as: “those Books of The Scriptures which are admitted by the canons of The Church, to be of Divine origin. The Roman Catholic Church admits The Apocryphal Books to be canonical; the Protestants reject Them.”² The question is how did our New Testament Canon come to be established?

II. OVERVIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON FORMATION PROCESS

Formation of New Testament Christian Bible Canon was a gradual process over several centuries. In The early Church, readings at services ranged from Old Testament Scriptures to Christian writings of the Apostles or people close to them, the Epistles of Saint Paul and other Christian documents. There was a convergence of multiple forces in and on the early Church to develop an authorized New Testament Canon; to correct the early Church’s compromised witness of the Faith to nonbelievers due to competing irreconcilable pseudo-Christian doctrines; to communicate Christian doctrine as the eye witness Apostles and their associates did; to carry out The Great Commission to the known world; to establish and record Church doctrine, canon and history as the return of

¹ 1, KJV, PSALMS 119:105.

² 2, Webster, “Webster’s 1828 Dictionary,” entry for “CANON, n., 1, 3; CANONICAL, a., pages CAN-CAN to CAN-CAN.

CHRIST became a less prominent focus; to standardize teaching materials for new Christians; to aid early Church Apologists in answering criticisms of The Faith by non-Christians; to provide standardized Christian liturgy materials to read in worship services.

3 4

But perhaps the strongest force acting in and on The early Church to determine orthodox doctrine and Canon were the Christian heresies within the early Church itself. The early Church was confronted with heretical documents that purported to be Christian Canon, which forced the question. Thus, to understand what was eventually accepted as orthodox New Testament Canon by The Church, we must examine what was rejected as heretical.⁵ A brief review here of major Christian heresies that influenced New Testament Canon formation is thus in order.

III. MAJOR HERETICAL CANONS FACED BY THE EARLY CHURCH

Here we will briefly consider the following major heretical pseudo-Christian canons faced by The early Church: First, the Docetic Gnostics, who denied the real incarnation, death and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST in the early 100's AD. Second, the Ebionites, a Gnostic Jewish Christian sect in the early 100's AD. Third, Marcion and his Gnostic new testament circa 140 AD. Fourth, Tatian and his four-in-one new testament gospel circa 170 AD. Fifth, Montanu and his never ending new testament bible circa 190 AD.

A. DOCETIC Gnostics DENY THE INCARNATION, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST - EARLY 100'S AD

: First, the Docetic Gnostics, who denied the real incarnation, death and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST in the early 100's AD. There were apparently many forms and degrees of Gnosticism within the early Church that presumed to be Christian. Docetism - like most Gnosticisms - held that JESUS CHRIST did not come to earth in a material human body, but rather only appeared in the form of the material as a Divine mirage. Thus, the Docetists denied The Incarnation of GOD The Son in JESUS CHRIST as a real Man with a true human body. They therefore denied the death of CHRIST on The Cross, His resurrection, His ascension and His substitutionary atonement to redeem the saints from

³ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

⁴ 4, Guthrie, "New Testament Introduction," pages 21-27.

the earthly and eternal effects of sin – separation from GOD both now and forever. The Docetists held rather that JESUS had given special spiritual revelation that only a select advanced spiritual subpopulation could understand and use, but that the common revelation by JESUS CHRIST for the rest of mankind was sufficient for within the Church at large. Salvation of the elite was by this secret knowledge of CHRIST.^{6 7}

B. THE EBIONITES - A Gnostic JEWISH CHRISTIAN SECT - EARLY 100'S AD

Second, the Ebionites, a Gnostic Jewish Christian sect in the early 100's AD. The Ebionites were a poor and humble Jewish-Christian sect in the early Church age that denied the Divinity of CHRIST. They held distinctly Jewish Old Testament practices such as circumcision, keeping the Jewish Sabbath and Jewish dietary laws. They accepted JESUS as The Messiah, and that He truly died on The Cross and rose again. They accepted The Gospel of Saint Matthew. They held that JESUS possessed a true mortal body and was thus not a mere Divine mirage. However, they held that JESUS earned by works the status of Messiah by virtue of a super-righteous life of keeping The Old Testament Law and submission to the will of GOD. They denied the incarnation of JESUS CHRIST as GOD Incarnate on earth. They had their own distinct gospel.⁸

C. MARCION'S Gnostic NEW TESTAMENT - CIRCA 140 AD

Third, Marcion and his Gnostic new testament circa 140 AD. Gnostic doctrine and worship involved supposedly secret spiritual knowledge of salvation and were apparently very common in and during the period of the early Church. Indeed, at a time when there was not yet a universal Christian New Testament, people outside of and within The Church were susceptible to the doctrines of Gnosticism. Although 'Gnostic Christianity' did include a focus on major Christian themes - salvation through JESUS CHRIST, ascetic piety and the call to receive eternal spiritual life in Heaven with GOD - many central themes of Christianity were fatally warped by the Gnostic view. The result was

⁵ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History...", pages 80-97.

⁶ 6, Keifer, "Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr."

<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/270.html>

⁷ 7, Keifer, "Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons." <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/194.html>

⁸ 8, Thompson, "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia," entry for Ebionism; Ebionites.

that The Church eventually rejected Gnosticism as non-Christian and heretical.^{9 10 11}

Representative of various Gnostic sects was Marcion - a 'Gnostic Christian' theologian - who was the first such scholar to codify what he felt should be the Christian New Testament in about 140 AD. The man Marcion, the founder of what may be called "Marcionism," was excommunicated in about 144 AD for heresy as a result.¹²

Marcion's New Testament completely rejected and eliminated the entire Old Testament, since gnostics held the lesser deity JEHOVAH portrayed therein to be evil. It rejected The Books of MATTHEW, MARK and JOHN while including only a heavily edited gnostic-friendly pseudo-gospel of "Luke."¹³ It further included ten of Saint Paul's letters, which were also heavily edited to agree with gnostic doctrine. Since gnostic doctrine held that JESUS CHRIST was not human but rather a Divine mirage in human form sent by the true good GOD from Heaven to rescue a portion of mankind, all Scripture references to the birth, family, lineage and Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by JESUS CHRIST The Man were completely eliminated.¹⁴

D. TATIAN'S FOUR-IN-ONE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL - CIRCA 170 AD

. Fourth, Tatian and his four-in-one new testament gospel. In about 170 AD, the gnostic Syrian Christian scholar Tatian wrote a blended work of the four Gospels, which he called The Diatessaron, meaning the harmony of the four [Gospels – MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE and JOHN]. The Diatessaron apparently enjoyed widespread use in many Churches until it was displaced by the four individual Gospels of New Testament Canon. In the early 400's AD, Tatian was excommunicated as a heretic as a result of his work.^{15 16}

E. MONTANU'S NEVER-ENDING NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE - CIRCA 190 AD

Fifth, Montanu and his never ending new testament bible. In about 190 AD Montanu, a

⁹ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

¹⁰ 9, Ferguson, "Backgrounds of Early Christianity," pages 307-313.

¹¹ 10, Bromily, "Historical Theology – An Introduction," pages 18,19,38.

¹² 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

¹³ 4, Guthrie, "New Testament Introduction," pages 21-27.

¹⁴ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

¹⁵ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

¹⁶ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

pagan priest from a heathen ecstasy cult in what is now Turkey, became a Christian. Montanu was focused on continuing prophecy that he believed he and his followers were receiving directly from GOD, which were recorded and claimed as Scripture. Montanu preached that The Last Days were imminent and that JESUS CHRIST would return to earth soon. He also preached that The New Jerusalem from Heaven would descend to earth near his home. What may thus be called Montanism emphasized that Divine revelation of Scripture through The HOLY SPIRIT was continuous. Thus, he advocated that New Testament Canon should be kept open indefinitely and that, as long as he lived, he should personally be the moderator of it.^{17 18}

IV. MAJOR EVENTS IN THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

We will now consider briefly a number of major events involving key leaders of The early Church in the formation of The New Testament Canon: First, Bishop Clement of Rome's letter to The Corinthians circa 96 AD. Second, Justin Martyr's record of accounts of Christian writings in use in early Church services circa 155 AD. Third, Bishop Irenaeus wrote of The New Testament Books as being on the same level as those of The Old Testament Books circa late 100's AD. Fourth, Origen's consensus lists of Christian Books in the early 200's AD. Fifth, Eusebius is commissioned by Emperor Constantine to write 50 Bibles in 313 AD. Sixth, Athanasius upholds the doctrine of GOD The Son as being of the same substance as GOD The Father at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Seventh, Athanasius' Easter letter clarifies The Books of The New Testament Canon in 367 AD. Eighth, Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible sets down The New Testament Canon. Ninth, Church Councils that officially acknowledged Athanasius' New Testament Canon list.

A. BISHOP CLEMENT OF ROME'S LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - CIRCA 96 AD

First, we have Bishop Clement of Rome's letter to The Corinthians circa 96 AD. The Church leader Clement of the Churches in Rome is credited with writing The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, also known as I CLEMENT. In this letter, Clement writes to a troubled and divided Church congregation in Corinth where discord was reigning over who should lead the congregation there. Clement refers to Scripture paraphrased from The Old Testament. He then refers to The Words of JESUS CHRIST paraphrased from

¹⁷ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

¹⁸ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

what many recognize as from The Beatitudes and related Words of our Lord from The Book of MATTHEW. Clement attached the same weight to The Words of JESUS CHRIST as he does to Words of The Old Testament, showing that The Words of our Lord were at that time widely recognized as Scripture in The Church at this early date.¹⁹

B. JUSTIN MARTYR RECORDS ACCOUNTS OF CHRISTIAN WRITINGS IN USE IN EARLY CHURCH SERVICES - CIRCA 155 AD

Second, we have Justin Martyr's record of accounts of Christian writings in use in early Church services circa 155 AD. Justin Martyr was of pagan Greek parents and grew up in Roman occupied Israel. While seeking the truths of life through Greek philosophies, he eventually converted to Christianity. He opened several schools of Christian philosophy. He engaged in and won a debate against a pagan philosopher who it is believed to have then denounced Justin Martyr to the Roman authorities for practicing an 'unauthorized religion.'²⁰ Refusing to renounce his Christian faith for which he eventually gave his life, he used his imprisonment and impending execution to write several letters in support of Christianity to the Roman Emperor, the Roman Senate and to a Jewish friend who was interested in JESUS The Messiah.

One such letter was his "First Apology" to the then Roman Emperor Pius and his imperial sons.^{21 22} In his "First Apology," Justin Martyr provides a detailed account of common Christian worship services and ceremonies such as baptism and communion. He records that in Christian services "the memoirs of the apostles or the prophets are read."²³ Thus we have at this early time in Church history a historical record of the use of the established Old Testament and materials from what we now know as the New Testament being given equal honor, priority and position in common Christian worship.

24 25

¹⁹ 12, Kiefer, "Clement of Rome, Bishop." <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/290.html>

²⁰ 13, Kiefer, "Justin Martyr, Philosopher, Apologist, and Martyr." <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/175.html>

²¹ 13, Ibid.

²² 14, Ferguson, "How We Christians Worship," Christian History, issue 37, volume 12, number 1, pages 10-15.

²³ 14, Ibid., page 12.

²⁴ 12, Kiefer, "Clement of Rome, Bishop." <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/290.html>

²⁵ 14, Ferguson, "How We Christians Worship," Christian History, issue 37, volume 12, number

The Scripture reading was from either the writings that became the New Testament, or the Old Testament, or both. The “memoirs of the apostles” would be particularly The Gospels – MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE and JOHN. The “prophets” was a standing designation among Christians for the entirety of The Old Testament. But the prophetic Books in the narrower sense had a special meaning for the early Christians – as they do today and always will - since they point to The Messiahship of JESUS CHRIST. As now, so also in The early Church, the understanding of JESUS as The Saviour rests heavily on the multitude of Old Testament messianic prophecies fulfilled only by Him. ²⁶

C. BISHOP IRENAEUS WROTE OF NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS ON SAME LEVEL AS THOSE OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS - CIRCA LATE 100'S AD

Third, Bishop Irenaeus wrote of The New Testament Books as being on the same level as those of The Old Testament Books circa late 100's AD. Irenaeus was a Bishop of Lyons. He had as a youth heard Polycarp preach, who had been in turn exposed to the preaching of Saint John the Apostle. Irenaeus wrote several books, including “The Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So-called [Against The Heresies]” and “Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching.” In his writings, he uses as Scripture most of The Books that are in today's New Testament canon, giving them equal weight to those of The Old Testament. ²⁷

In his writings, Irenaeus actually goes far deeper and links the preaching of the Apostles as the fulfillment of The Law, The Prophets and The Psalms of the Old Testament. He shows how The Old Testament predicts what the Apostles preached and wrote about JESUS CHRIST as the Divinely directed completion of GOD's plan of salvation for mankind. Irenaeus points out how the Apostle's Books of The New Testament use Old Testament Scripture to show again and again how JESUS fulfilled the messianic prophecies contained therein. In treating The New Testament Books as the fulfillment of Old Testament Books - and referring to them all as Scripture - Irenaeus shows that the Apostolic writings were clearly being widely considered as Bible Canon

1, pages 10-15.

²⁶ 14, Ferguson, “How We Christians Worship,” Christian History, issue 37, volume 12, number 1, page 12.

²⁷ 15, Behr, “Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament,” Christian History, issue 80, volume 22, number 4, pages 16-17.

by this time.²⁸

D. ORIGEN'S CONSENSUS LISTS OF CHRISTIAN BOOKS - EARLY 200'S AD

Fourth, we have Origen's consensus lists of Christian Books in wide use in the early 200's AD. The Christian scholar Origen polled divergent Churches to determine what Christian Books were most accepted and widely used. Origen divided his poll into three categories of books: accepted books, which were those universally used in the early Church; questionable books, which were those whose Apostolic nature were questioned; unreliable books, which were those deemed 'apocryphal' works. Origen's first two lists - accepted books and questionable books - constitute what is today Christianity's New Testament canon.^{29 30}

"On his first list, of widely acceptable Christian writings, were The four Gospels we now have [MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE and JOHN], the 13 Epistles of Saint Paul we now have [(ROMANS, I and II CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, I and II THESSALONIANS, I and II TIMOTHY, TITUS and PHILEMON], and ACTS, I PETER, I JOHN and REVELATION. On his second list, of questionable writings, were the six other books that complete our New Testament: HEBREW, JAMES II PETER, II and II JOHN and JUDE. His third list, of books widely considered unreliable, includes writings that never made it into the New Testament: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Egyptians and Gospel of Matthias."³¹

E. EUSEBIUS COMMISSIONED BY EMPEROR CONSTANTINE FOR 50 BIBLES - 313 AD

Fifth, Eusebius is commissioned by Emperor Constantine to write 50 Bibles in 313 AD. The Roman Emperor Constantine wrested control over the Empire under the banner of The Cross in a vision circa 313 AD. Constantine then sought out a Christian theologian to produce 50 Bibles for 50 Churches in his new capitol of Constantinople. Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, was given the task. Eusebius had studied under Pamphilus, who was in turn a one time student of Origen.³² Although none of the

²⁸ 15, Ibid.

²⁹ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

³⁰ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

³¹ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," page 94.

³² 5, Ibid., pages 80-97.

original 50 Constantine Bibles survive, it is known that Eusebius utilized Origen's lists of acceptable and questionable Books for his New Testament - thus producing a New Testament with the same books as that of Origen - but with one addition, The Book of HEBREWS. Eusebius however had doubts about The Book of REVELATION.^{33 34}

F. ATHANASIUS "THE HERO OF THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA" UPHOLDS THE DOCTRINE OF GOD THE SON THE SAME SUBSTANCE AS GOD THE FATHER - 325 AD

Sixth, we have Athanasius upholding the doctrine of GOD The Son as being of the same substance as GOD The Father at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Arius of Alexandria said that only GOD The Father is eternal and preexistent. He proposed that JESUS CHRIST was a created out of nothing by GOD The Father, and that there was a time when JESUS CHRIST did not in fact exist. Arius' view of a lesser nature of CHRIST were in fact widely held in the Christian world at this time, as evidenced by the very fact that the Emperor Constantine himself was obliged to call upon the Bishop's Council gathered at Nicea to decide upon the nature of The Person of CHRIST. Is JESUS CHRIST fully GOD Incarnate and fully Man but without sin? Was He – as Arius held - in fact the highest created Being of similar substance to GOD The Father, but not quite fully GOD? Or did JESUS begin as fully human only, and because of complete obedience to the will of GOD The Father and to The Law, become also Divine at the time of His baptism by the descent of The HOLY SPIRIT upon Him?³⁵

Thus, in 325 AD, the Christianized Emperor Constantine gave a mandate to this council of Church Bishops meeting in Nicea to clarify The Person and natures of JESUS CHRIST. At issue was whether JESUS was of the same substance as GOD The Father [homo-ousios] and thus equal to The Father, or if JESUS was of a similar substance as GOD The Father [homoi-ousios]. As history records in the Nicene Creed, the overwhelming vote of the Bishops was that JESUS was of the same substance as GOD the Father and thus equal. Athanasius emerged from this confrontation as the hero of the Council of Nicea, having successfully led the early Church to reject Arianism.³⁶

³³ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," page 94.

³⁴ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

³⁵ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

³⁶ 3, Ibid, page 71.

This development is most significant in the development of New Testament canon. First, there is the intermingling of Church and State in that the Christianized Roman Emperor Constantine establishes secular authority in relation to the early Church. This is vital in the chain link of development of New Testament Canon in, as has been noted already, the impetus provided to the early Church to produce 50 Bibles for 50 Empire Churches at the request of Constantine. Had the head of the Roman Empire not been Christianized, there would have been no such imperial request to Bishop Eusebius, and thus the early Church would not have been blessed with Eusebius' New Testament Canon found in his Bibles.

Secondly, the process of establishing early Church decisions based on the majority votes of councils of Church Bishops had begun - with official backing by the state - with the Council of Nicea. This new mechanism of standardizing of Christian doctrine begun at Nicea plays, as will be seen, a vital role in giving official sanction to Bishop Athanasius' list of New Testament Canon Books. Without Empire-wide Church authorities like the Council of Nicea - which enjoyed the backing of The state - no Church entity capable of making such pronouncements would have been in place when Providence apparently required it to be.

The Nicene Creed - a fundamental confession of orthodox Christianity that clearly rejected Arianism and Gnosticism as heresy - was the end result of this Council. The Council further attached a statement to their Creed that condemned any Christian who denied that GOD The Son was equal to GOD The Father: "We believe in one GOD, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, JESUS CHRIST, the Son of GOD, begotten of the Father, the only begotten of the essence of the Father, GOD of GOD, and Light of Light, true GOD of true GOD, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made in heaven and on earth, Who for us men and our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven. From thence He comes to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost... And those who say there was a time when He was not, or He was not before He was made, and He was made out of nothing, and out of another substance or thing, or the Son of GOD is created or

changeable, or alterable, they are condemned by the Catholic Church.”³⁷

G. ATHANASIUS’ EASTER LETTER CLARIFIES NEW TESTAMENT CANON - 367 AD

Seventh, we have Athanasius’ Easter letter clarifies The Books of The New Testament Canon. In 367 AD, Bishop Athanasius in Egypt sent out an Easter letter of encouragement to the Churches under his authority. His letter spells out a clear New Testament canon identical to that of Eusebius’ New Testament list, which were the prevailing accepted Christian Scriptures at the time in most Christian Churches. This is the final form of the New Testament canon that the Christian Bible uses to this day.^{38 39}

Athanasius wrote, “As the heretics are quoting apocryphal writings, an evil that was widespread even as early as when St. Luke wrote his Gospel, therefore I have thought it good to clearly identify what books have been received by us through tradition as belonging to The Canon, and which we believe to be Divine. These are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no one add to or take anything from them.”⁴⁰

H. JEROME’S LATIN VULGATE BIBLE SETS DOWN THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Eighth, we have Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Bible setting down The New Testament Canon. In 382 AD the priestly scholar Jerome became secretary to Pope Damasus I in Rome. Jerome was assigned by Pope Damasus to translate of the Bible into Latin. Jerome translated the Old Testament from mostly Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament into the common language of the West at the time, which was Vulgate Latin.^{41 42} Jerome’s translation of the Bible into the “Vulgate Latin Bible” The Canon used for Jerome’s Bible was known as the Damasus Canon, which marked the official closing by The Roman Church of the New Testament. The New Testament Canon in Jerome’s

³⁷ 3, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” pages 17-133.

³⁸ 5, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History.” pages 80-97.

³⁹ 10, Bromily, “Historical Theology – An Introduction,” pages 18,19,38.

⁴⁰ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for “Canon of the New Testament.”

⁴¹ 10, Bromily, “Historical Theology – An Introduction,” pages 18,19,38.

⁴² 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for “Canon of the New Testament.”

Vulgate Bible is the form that has defined the New Testament Canon since.⁴³

I. CHURCH COUNCILS ACKNOWLEDGE ATHANASIUS' NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Ninth, we have official Church Councils that officially acknowledged Athanasius' New Testament Canon list. The widespread view of the New Testament Canon as clearly identified by Athanasius was accepted by most - but not all - Christians. The "Codex Alexandrius" Bible from Egypt from this time period include the letters from Clement. Some Churches, such as in Syria, persisted in using the Diatessaron - the blended four-in-one document written by Tatian.⁴⁴

Shortly after Athanasius' Easter letter was written, some other Christian Churches felt that The Books of HEBREWS, JAMES and JUDE should be excluded from a New Testament Canon. Thus, Church councils were called and the majorities voted to define New Testament Canon as identified by Athanasius at the Council of Hippo in 393 AD, the Council of Carthage in 397 AD and the 2nd Council of Carthage in 419 AD.^{45 46} Interestingly even today, some Christian Churches hold to a slightly different New Testament Canon. Some Syrian Churches exclude II PETER, II and III JOHN and REVELATION. The Ethiopian Church has an additional 11 books more than the standard 27 Books in its New Testament canon.⁴⁷

V. MECHANISMS AND CRITERIA FOR NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The early Church was eventually obliged to set up barriers to exclude a large volume of popular Christian writings in order to separate those books that were deemed inspired Canon from a sea of uninspired books.⁴⁸ There was thus a clear need to counter the heresies - such as "Marcionism" and "Montanism" - which were establishing themselves within and around the early Church. These heresies were undermining mainstream orthodox Christian doctrine and faith, which called for standard Canon requirements. "There is no formal list of criteria the early church used to determine

⁴³ 11, Ibid.

⁴⁴ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

⁴⁵ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

⁴⁶ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

⁴⁷ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

⁴⁸ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

which books to put in the New Testament. But scholars suggest there were three major requirements. First, the book had to be written by an apostle or an apostle's close associate; secondly, it had to be in line with traditional Christian teachings; and thirdly, it had to be widely used in the Church and recognized as authoritative."⁴⁹ In response, these and other forces developed as gate keepers for Canon requirements of Christian writings, of which we will consider five: Apostolic Tradition, Evangelical Character, Rule of Faith, the Bishops and the Baptismal Creed.

A. APOSTOLIC TRADITION

Apostolic Tradition [traditio apostolica] says that New Testament Scripture may include only Books written in the time of the Apostles and by the Apostles or their close associates. This was a required fingerprint which was required for a Book to be considered for inclusion into The New Testament Canon by The early Church. Thus, any books written in time later than The Apostles, or contrary or outside the doctrine of The Apostles, or by persons who were not themselves Apostles or their close associates can not possibly be canonical.^{50 51}

It is because of 'Apostolic Tradition' that many Christian books from the early Church era fell into Origen's "unreliable books" category and were eventually rejected as non-canonical by the early Church. Only Those Books which met this test could be considered for entry into Origen's "accepted" or "questionable" categories.⁵² Apostolic Tradition therefore means that The Church faithfully hands down intact – from generation to generation - the teachings of our Lord and His Apostles, preserved as GOD ordained Them to be revealed as His Holy Word.^{53 54}

B. EVANGELICAL CHARACTER

Evangelical Character may be best understood as an extension of the doctrine of

⁴⁹ 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," list of "Good Books," page 94.

⁵⁰ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

⁵¹ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

⁵² 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," pages 80-97.

⁵³ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for "Canon of the New Testament."

⁵⁴ 15, Behr, "Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament," Christian History, issue 80, volume 22, number 4, pages 16-17.

Apostolic Tradition. Evangelical Character was understood in the early Church as criteria for evaluating a Christian book as to if it was Divinely inspired or not. The Words and teachings of JESUS CHRIST were understood to have been sacred because they are from and of JESUS CHRIST Himself, Who is GOD Incarnate. This concept requires first that the person who wrote the Book was himself an inspired witness – directly or indirectly -to the ministry of JESUS CHRIST. Evangelical Character demands that only Those Books which show clearly that they are inspired by The HOLY SPIRIT internally may be included in New Testament Canon. ⁵⁵

C. THE RULE OF FAITH

The Rule of Faith [regula fidei] limits how Scripture can be interpreted as within the bounds of orthodox and official Church doctrine. ⁵⁶ For example, the gnostic ‘Marcion Bible’ employed a number of New Testament Christian Books, but Marcion and his followers interpreted Those Books outside The Rule of Faith of The Church. Therefore, by this test, the ‘Marcion Bible’ was heretical and rejected by The Church. ⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ ⁵⁹ For a book to pass this third test as a possible place in Bible Canon, its teachings must be consistent with traditional Christian faith based on The Rule of Faith. ⁶⁰

D. THE BISHOPS

The Bishops, as successors of the CHRIST’s Apostles and having the Divinely inspired gift of truth, served as the guardians, interpreters and mediators of the first three tests employed by The early Church – Apostolic Tradition, Evangelical Character and The Rule of Faith - to determine a book’s canonicity. And Biblical Canon having been long since discerned by The Church, the Bishops of the faithful Church continue an unbroken direct line of successors from JESUS CHRIST and His Apostles - down through the ages - as The Lord’s faithful caretakers of The Holy Scriptures. ⁶¹

⁵⁵ 11, Reid, New Advent Encyclopedia, entry for “Canon of the New Testament.”

⁵⁶ 3, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” pages 17-133.

⁵⁷ 5, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” pages 80-97.

⁵⁸ 3, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” pages 17-133.

⁵⁹ 4, Guthrie, “New Testament Introduction,” pages 21-27.

⁶⁰ 15, Behr, “Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament,” Christian History, issue 80, volume 22, number 4, pages 16-17.

⁶¹ 15, Ibid.

When Marcion's proposed New Testament forced the The early Church to begin addressing exactly what was and was not acceptable orthodox Christian Canon, the actual task of doing so fell to the Bishops assembled in official Councils. We see the emerging authority of The early Church's Bishops in for example the resolution of the nature of The Person of JESUS CHRIST at The Council of Nicea in 325 AD. There, as we have noted, the consensus vote of the early Church Bishops declared the nature of GOD The Son in relation to GOD The Father and produced a standard Christian Creed, the "Nicene Creed."⁶² The same Church authority and structure, directed by the hand of The Almighty, lead to the finalization of The Bible Canon.

E. BAPTISMAL CREED

Of all The Sacraments, Baptism and The Eucharist were the primary two Sacrament ordained by CHRIST in early Christianity, as they remain today. Those to be baptized into The Church were required to ascent to a public confession of The Faith. The Baptismal Creeds, like the Nicene Creed and others, were overseen and decreed by the Bishops. This produced a universal 'catholic' Church-wide standard of what was to be considered acceptable Christian doctrine to which men must submit to and confess for entry into The visible Church. This provided a 5th test to which all canonical Books were required to be consistent with by The early Church. Thus, Marcion's proposed New Testament and the strong presence of Gnosticism within and around the early Church were rejected as outside Canon and therefore heretical by The Bishops because they were outside of orthodox Creeds.^{63 64}

VI. DISCUSSION

Many Christians today take for granted the contents of the New Testament without realizing that the process of fixing Christian Canon was an intense affair that required about 400 years. Many forces acting upon the early Church from without and from within called for determining what exactly was New Testament canon and what was

⁶² 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

⁶³ 3, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," pages 17-133.

⁶⁴ 15, Behr, "Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament," Christian History, issue 80, volume 22, number 4, pages 16-17.

not. Perhaps the most motivating of all these forces were Christian heresies that proposed their own New Testament Canon, the most notable and bold being that of the gnostic Christian heretic Marcion.

Major early Church figures in this process progressed through what appears in retrospect to be a Divinely guided flow of Church Fathers from the 1st to the 4th Centuries: Clement; Justin Martyr; Irenaeus; Origen; Eusebius; Athanasius; Jerome. Included in this chain of key individuals must be Emperor Constantine. At any point along the flow of history in the canon process, there appears to be strategically placed by Providence specific Church Fathers who were to play a vital role. Had any one of these men been missing, looking back with the hindsight of history, one can see how the forming of the Christian canon could have been jeopardized.

These men and their contemporaries constantly evaluated Christian writings with these questions: Are the books of Apostolic origin? Are the books widely accepted by the Churches? Are the books commonly read publicly in worship? Are the books consistent in their message to that of JESUS CHRIST and the Apostles? Various formal and informal forces formed in response to these constant pressures as “gate keepers” in the New Testament Canon process: Apostolic Tradition; Evangelical Character; Rule of Faith; the Bishops; Baptismal Creed.

VII. IN CONCLUSION

No single force noted, nor any single historical individual noted, nor any single historical event noted seem capable alone to have determined the resulting form that our New Testament Canon has taken. However, in combination and in the sequences that they were brought together - via the men, events and institutions that applied them - The early Church eventually fixed the Christian Canon in the form we have today. After the birth, death and resurrection of our Lord JESUS CHRIST that offers eternal salvation to all men, the fixing of The New Testament Canon is perhaps the second greatest miracle of Christianity.

This process can only be adequately explained by Divine Providence: the result of the active guidance of the hand of GOD Almighty, acting through early Church leaders and Councils, in fulfilling by The HOLY SPIRIT The Words of PSALMS 119:105 - for

The New Testament Canon through The Church as was the case for The Old Testament Canon through Israel - "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path!"⁶⁵

⁶⁵ 1, KJV, PSALMS 119:105.

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