

Appendix B: How The Canon Was Formed

First Written Canon (64-70 A.D.)

The first written Christian canon was proposed by the Ebionites. They said it was only the book of Matthew in Hebrew. As explained in the main text, the Ebionites knew of Paul, but excluded Paul as a false apostle because he rejected the Law of Moses.¹ There is no indication that they knew of Luke's or Mark's gospels. Nor is there any evidence they heard of John's Gospel or Revelation. Therefore, we can deduce this simple canon list of the Ebionites was developed around 64 A.D. At that point, Paul's writings were in circulation, but neither Mark, Luke, John nor Revelation had yet been written. Since the original Ebionites apparently disappear upon the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it is safe to say their canon list was no later than 70 A.D.

This is often overlooked because mention is made of another group of Ebionites. However, they existed in the second century and are not necessarily to be linked *organically* to the first Ebionites. According to Origen writing in about 200 A.D., another group calling themselves Ebionites came along after the earlier Ebionites disappeared.² Some historians lack this perspective, and thus do not date the Ebionite canon to the 64-70 A.D. period. However, it is more reasonable to infer that the original Ebionites existed as of 64 A.D. and then disappeared because of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This would explain why they mention only Paul and the Hebrew Matthew, and fail to mention any other NT writing. Thus, the original Ebionites must date to about 64 A.D. when Paul's writings & the Hebrew Matthew existed but nothing else was yet written for our NT.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, it is likely the earliest Ebionites are the Jerusalem Church under James which we see operating in Acts chapter 15. After James died, it dispersed by 70 A.D. when the Romans razed Jerusalem.³

Marcion's Canon (144 A.D.)

In about 144 A.D., Marcion (85-160 A.D.) publicly declared the only apostle who had the true message of Jesus was Paul. Marcion said the twelve apostles were misled to mix Judaism (the Law) with the gospel of Jesus. Marcion's canon primarily consisted of Paul's epistles.⁴ Marcion also added his own Gospel narrative

1. See page 306 *et seq.*

2. "Origen is the first (C. Cels., V, lxi) to mark a distinction between two classes of Ebionites, a distinction which Eusebius also gives (*Hist. Eccl.*, III, xxvii)." ("Ebionites," *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05242c.htm>) (last accessed 2005).

3. For an explanation, see Chapter Twelve.

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of Jesus' life. In it, the narrative of Jesus' life appears almost identical to Luke's gospel. Marcion, however, omitted portions that detract from Pauline theology such as Jesus' emphasis on Law-keeping.⁵

Marcion also rejected the continuing validity of the Hebrew Scriptures, *i.e.*, 'the Old Testament.' Marcion did so claiming reliance upon Paul's chapter 4 of Galatians. Marcion claimed the God who delivered the Hebrew Scriptures was a different God than God, the Father of Jesus. Paul said in Galatians ch. 4 that if we submit to the Law of Moses, we are submitting to those who "are no gods." The Law rather was given by angels. This created a lesser-greater revelation distinction. This fed Marcion's lesser-greater God theory. Marcion also believed the gospel of Grace was so much about love and mercy that it excluded the God of Hebrew Scriptures. Yahweh of the 'Old Testament' was at odds with Grace. He clearly wanted obedience to the Law. Marcion in his work *Antitheses* tried demonstrating from the Bible how the God of the New (relying on Paul) was different from the God of the Old. The Old would only save the obedient, while the God of the New would save all who believed even if they became disobedient. (Marcion, *Antitheses* # 19 (quoted at 49 *supra*.)

John Knox (not the reformer) summarizes Marcion:

(1) The Creator of the world, although a real God, must be distinguished from the **higher god**, unknown except as he was revealed in Christ; (2) The Creator of the world is a just God, but sever[e] and harsh; the God whom Christ revealed is a Father, **a God of love**; (3) judgment is the prerogative of the Creator; redemption is the **free gift** of the God of love; (4) the Jewish Scriptures represent a true revelation of the Creator, but they do not speak of or for the God whom alone Christians ought to worship and **from whom alone salvation from the present wicked world is to be received**; (5) the revelation in Christ was intended not merely to supplement or 'fulfil' Judaism but **entirely to displace it**—the **one had no connection with the other**; (6) the Son of the Father did **not**

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4. Of note, Marcion's version of Romans is missing chapters 9 through 11 and 15 & 16. (Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, xvi: 25.) One explanation is that Marcion rejected the grafting in concept in chapters 9-11. Others suggest these four chapters were a later addition fifty years after Paul was dead. I believe the former is true; these ideas are all true to Paul. Marcion is also missing 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon3.html>.)
 5. Charles B. Waite, "The Gospel of Marcion and the Gospel of Luke Compared," *The History of the Christian Religion to the Year Two-Hundred* (Chicago, C.V. Waite & Co., 1900) at 287-303, reprinted at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3827/wait2.htm>. The early heretic hunters of the church accused Marcion of mutilating Luke. However, conservative Christian scholars today generally agree Marcion did not know of Luke's gospel. He simply had received or developed himself what was a source for Luke. Marcion gave no name to the writer of the gospel he put forth. In fact, Tertullian excoriated Marcion for not identifying the human author. (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.2) Merely because the early heretic hunters such as Irenaeus saw the evident similarities to Luke does not mean Marcion mutilated Luke. He may or may not have done so. If he did not, then Marcion relied upon what is called the proto-Luke gospel. There is no trouble for the validity of Luke's gospel if Luke relied on the same text. Luke after all does not claim inspiration; he claims perspiration of research. (Luke 1:1-4.) It appears possible then Marcion either had Luke as his source or Luke added to an old source which scholars call the *proto-Luke*.

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actually take sinful flesh but only appeared to do so; (7) there is no resurrection of the flesh [i.e., only of the spirit]; and (8) **Paul was the only true apostle, to whom Christ committed his gospel** [of salvation by faith alone]—**the other ‘apostles’ were false and had misled the church** [i.e., by teaching works were also necessary].⁶

Thus, the second canon proposed about 144 A.D. was exclusively Paul and a truncated Gospel narrative that suited Marcion. This narrative is similar to Luke’s gospel. The major difference is that the first three chapters of Luke are absent.⁷

Marcion’s proposition was at odds with the Ebionite view. The Ebionites had insisted the canon was only about Jesus, based exclusively upon the Hebrew version of Matthew. Marcion implicitly rejected this. Accordingly, it was predictable that the next canon lists were compromises between these two diametrically opposed views.

The Muratorian Fragment (170 A.D.? 350 A.D.?)

The Muratorian fragment was discovered in the 1700s in a Catholic monastery. The actual document is from the seventh or eighth century. The source from which it comes from has no easy means of identifying its date.

Initially, the Muratorian fragment was estimated to be from 170 A.D. For tradition-sake, it is placed at this juncture in the canon story. However, in 1992, an Oxford scholar put forth what appears to be a better reasoned case which dates it to the Fourth Century. It matches several canons in the East from that period. Geoffrey Hahneman thus says the early dating would represent “an extraordinary anomaly on numerous counts.”⁸ I concur. If you simply read it without knowing the date ascribed, it has the clear scent of later Roman Catholic terminology.

Regardless of its dating, the *Muratorian Fragment* starts mid-sentence. It starts with an apparent list of approved reading materials. It starts saying Luke is the “third” gospel. It is fair to assume Matthew and Mark were first mentioned. Then it continues its list:

John, Acts, the Epistles of Paul (Corinthians (2), Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians (2), Philemon, Titus, Timothy (2)), John’s Apocalypse, Jude,

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6. John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942) at 7.
 7. See *Marcion: Gospel of the Lord and Other Writings* at <http://www.gnosis.org/library/marcionsection.htm> (2005). For more original material on Marcion, see *Fragments of Marcion* at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/marcion.html>.
 8. Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of Canon* (Oxford Theological Monographs)(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) at 131. This is critiqued in C.E. Hill, “The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of Canon,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57:2 (Fall 1995) at 437 ff. The only support for an early date is the Muratorian Fragment refers to the Shepherd as writing in “our time.” This amorphous language is hardly compelling given the many valid problems that Hahneman raises with the early dating hypothesis.

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John's epistles (2) [N.B. not 3], the Apocalypse of Peter [although] some of us are not willing [it] be read in church.⁹

This omits all of the epistles of Peter and James. It drops Third John. Hebrews is not mentioned.

If this the Muratorian Fragment (MF) identifies canon as of 170 A.D., please note how early that John's *Apocalypse* (today known as *Revelation*) was accepted. Its subject matter alone is what created controversy one-hundred and fifty years later.

The MF lacks any clear mention that inspiration is the criteria for each book listed as canon. It speaks of 'receiving' works. It does not ever suggest *inspiration* is the sole criteria for *receiving*.

In fact, in reference to Paul, the Muratorian Fragment describes Paul's works in a flat manner. It reads: "As to the epistles of Paul, again, to those who will understand the matter, they indicate of themselves what they are, and from what place or with what object they were directed."¹⁰ There is no excitement that we have here *inspired* works. It is described in utter blandness. Then, slightly with more excitement, the MF refers to Paul's epistles to Timothy as follows: "[There are] two [epistles] to Timothy, in simple personal affection and love indeed; but yet these are ***hallowed in the esteem*** of the Catholic Church, and in the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline." This says clearly these two Pauline epistles were held as esteemed guides on how to institute discipline in the church. Otherwise, there is nothing more to imply about inspiration.

The MF also speaks of canon as including the Gospel of Luke but yet holding it in less than 100% certainty of its inspiration. As to Luke's Gospel, the MF says Luke is one who was "studious" and who "himself [never] saw the Lord in the flesh." Then it says Luke "according as he was able to accomplish it" wrote the nativity of John the Baptist. There *human historical* research, not inspiration, is ascribed to Luke. (This was precisely Tertullian's assessment of Luke's gospel as well in *Against Marcion*.) Since the MF regarded Luke as canon, but MF had an understanding it was included because it was *reliable* rather than *inspired*, one can recognize a test is at work other than *inspiration*. Canon was formed due to *esteem* or *high regard* or *trust*, not because each and every work was deemed *inspired*.

Origen's List (240 A.D.)

Origen said there were four Gospels. He mentions that Matthew was "composed as it was in the Hebrew language..." just as the Ebionites had claimed.

9. The source of this list, and all the subsequent lists, you will find at *New Testament Canon and Ancient Canon Texts* quoted in full at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon8.html> (last visited 8/26/05).

10. The entire MF text is at <http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Muratorian-Canon.html> (last accessed 1/7/07).

A Word About the Hebrew Matthew

Origen is the first mention of the Hebrew Matthew in the early lists outside the list of the Ebionites. Some people are surprised to learn Matthew was written originally in Hebrew, as the Ebionites earlier claimed. However, Eusebius in 325 A.D. agreed, and said the version we have today is a Greek *translation* of the Hebrew Matthew.¹¹ Irenaeus too in 125 A.D. knew of the Hebrew Matthew which later became the Greek Matthew. As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* relates, “Irenæus...wrote about A.D. 125 [and] he speaks of Hebrew... Sayings of Christ, composed by St. Matthew, which there is reason to believe *formed the basis* of the canonical Gospel of that name.”¹² The Hebrew Matthew was also said to have been brought to India by the Apostle Bartholomew. Pantænus, visiting India late in the second century, reported that “he found on his own arrival anticipated by some... to whom Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached, and had left them the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew.” (Eusebius quoted by H.J. Schonfield. *The History of Jewish Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1936) at 66.)¹³

Incidentally, for some inexplicable reason, the early existence of the Hebrew Matthew is ignored in the scholarly analysis of the dating of the gospels as well as the order of their writing. This is apparently so because its very existence puts in doubt many pet theories to attack the gospels, such as the Marcan priority claim. Many scholars, typically liberal ones, argue that Matthew relied upon Mark. If true, this casts in doubt that Matthew, an apostle, wrote from an understanding he was *inspired* by the Holy Spirit. This Marcan priority claim, while not having a shred of evidence to support it,¹⁴ has become modern dogma. It runs against the grain of the history we do have. Irenaeus in 125 A.D. and Origen in 240 A.D. both say Matthew

11. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 39; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk III, ch. 1; Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, ch. III; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* [12:13]. The only significant difference mentioned in ancient works between the Hebrew Matthew and the Greek is that the Hebrew Matthew is missing chapter one that is present in the Greek. (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.1-30.22.4). This means the Hebrew is lacking some serious errors that appear in the Greek. This first chapter in Greek contains the genealogy and virgin birth account. The genealogy is clearly flawed. Honest evangelical Christian scholars admit the Greek Matthew’s genealogy has several errors. (Ben Witherington, *New Testament in History: A Narrative Account* (Baker 2001) at 70.) Also, other flaws in the Greek text disappear when we look at the Hebrew Matthew recovered recently from a medieval text. A modern translation of it can be found in the work of George Howard (Professor of Religion, University of Georgia) entitled *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Mercer University Press, 1995). The original Hebrew Matthew that Howard recovered shows Jesus correctly saying the prophecy of the 30 pieces of silver is in *Zechariah* (11:10-13), but our Greek version from which our English translations derive has Jesus Himself incorrectly saying it was in *Jeremiah*. (Matt. 27:9.) Thus, the Hebrew Matthew is indeed the more authentic version. Whether by fortuity or God’s design, it was preserved and we can all enjoy it now in Mr. Howard’s scholarly book.

12. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03274a.htm> (accessed 8/27/05).

13. Thomas is typically regarded as the main apostle to the people of India. The traditional date of Thomas’ martyrdom is 72 A.D. in Mylapore, India. See “History of Christian Missions,” *Wikipedia*.

14. The Marcan priority claim rests on an unproven assumption: if Mark wrote after Matthew, he would have relied upon Matthew. Based on that assumption, then it is allegedly hard to explain why Mark omits the Sermon on the Mount. However, if Mark was relying primarily upon Peter’s recollections, as was Origen’s claim, then Mark has no need to read Matthew. The assumption at stake that Mark would rely upon Matthew is an unfounded supposition.

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came first. (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1. and Origen in Eusebius' *Eccl. Hist.* 6.25.3-6.) Likewise, Augustine, writing in the 300s, said the evangelists "have written in this order: first Matthew, then Mark, third Luke, and last John." (*De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.3.)

The Marcan priority claim crumbles if the Hebrew Matthew is acknowledged to exist and pre-exist the Greek version. For if Matthew came first in Hebrew, this explains perfectly why Mark—who as a Gentile at Rome evidently did not understand Hebrew—would not have included the Sermon on the Mount which is present in Matthew. Mark could not read Hebrew! Mark did not omit the Sermon on the Mount because of the frequently heard argument that the Gospel of Matthew *did not exist yet*. This omission of the Sermon by Mark—the main support for the Marcan priority claim—therefore vanishes as relevant evidence. No wonder no scholar wants to discuss the existence of the Hebrew Matthew. They fear their pet theory will evaporate. Conventional thinking has taken over.

Furthermore, the Hebrew Matthew affects dating issues as well. The Ebionites' reference to it appears to predate 70 A.D. The first Ebionites disappear at about that time, which supports their canon list predates 70 A.D., as explained above. Also, their canon list does not mention Mark, Luke, John or any other NT writing except Paul, whom they reject. Their canon list thus spans as early as 45 A.D. to 65 A.D., but not beyond. (See page ix *supra*.) Thus, the Hebrew Matthew must have been written in that approximate time frame.

This matches the textual clues in the Gospel of Matthew itself. John A. T. Robinson in his book *Redating the New Testament* (SCM Press: 1976) rejects the modern dogma that Matthew was written in 85 A.D. He redates Matthew to 40-50 A.D. Robinson argues that because Matthew does not mention the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D., and Matthew includes Jesus' prophecy of its fall, then likely the fall had not yet happened when Matthew wrote his gospel. Thus, it was written pre-70 A.D. This is a reasonable position because Matthew had a penchant for citing all the fulfilled prophecies he could find. Matthew would not omit mention of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem had he been writing post-70 A.D.

However, most skeptical modern scholars merely assume true prophecy is impossible, and put Matthew necessarily after the events of 70 A.D. Based on that logic, they date him to 85 A.D.

There is no justification for such skepticism. The prophecy of the fall of the temple after the Prince Messiah was cut-off is clearly in Daniel 9:25-26. This writing is traditionally dated by Jews and Christians to 600 *B.C.*! Would these same scholars, who assume prophecy is impossible, redate Daniel 9:25-26 to 85 A.D. too? Of course not. There is no more reason to redate Matthew to post 70 A.D. than there is to redate the book of Daniel to post 70 A.D. As long as you put aside the supposition that the temple destruction prophecy could not possibly be uttered pre-70 A.D., all the evidence points to a pre-70 A.D. date for the original Hebrew Matthew. Of course, these same scholars are partially correct about the dating of the *Greek* Matthew. It would be true that the Greek translation of Matthew came later — possibly in 85 A.D. Then it is true the Greek Mark comes *before* the Greek Matthew. This would then explain perfectly why Mark does not have the Sermon on the Mount which is in the Greek Matthew. This also perfectly explains why Luke has parts of the Sermon on the Mount. His gospel account comes *after* the Greek Matthew.

Continuing With Origen's List

As to Mark's Gospel, Origen says Mark "composed it in accordance with the instructions of Peter." Then Origen mentions the gospels of Luke and John.

Origen continues his list by simply saying "Paul," without listing the individual epistles.

Origen next mentions Peter who "left one acknowledged epistle; possibly also a second, but this is disputed." Origen means Second Peter was disputed as not genuinely written by Peter.

Origen next mentions Revelation: "[John] wrote also the Apocalypse." Again please note that in the *Muratorian Fragment* of 170 A.D.(?) and now again in the Origen list of 240 A.D., John's Apocalypse (what we call Revelation) was clearly accepted.

Origen next adds 1 John and raises dispute with 2 John and 3 John. "[John] has left also an epistle of a very few lines; and, it may be, a second and a third; for not all say that these are genuine but the two of them are not a hundred lines long."

As to the Epistles of James and Jude, Origen is sometimes firm of their inclusion and other times waffling. *James* is an "epistle in circulation under the name of James...." This seems waffling. As to Jude, he likewise says: "And if indeed one were to accept the epistle of Jude...." However, in Origen's *Homilies on Joshua*, viii. 1, Origen is firm that they are both authentic canon:

So too our Lord, whose advent was typified by the son of Nun, when he came sent his apostles as priests bearing well-wrought trumpets. Matthew first sounded the priestly trumpet in his Gospel. Mark also, Luke and John, each gave forth a strain on their priestly trumpets. Peter moreover sounds loudly on the twofold trumpet of his epistles; and so also **James and Jude.**

As to *Hebrews*, Origen says its writing style is certainly not Paul's. Yet the thoughts are admirable and on par with Paul's thoughts. Thus, it is commendable to attribute it to Paul, although Origen 'concedes' the author's identity is unknown.

Eusebius' List (324 A.D.)

Eusebius acknowledges the four Gospels, Acts, and Paul. For Paul, he counts 14 epistles. This apparently means he was including Hebrews as a work of Paul's. Then Eusebius mentions Hebrews was disputed by the Roman Bishop. "[I]t is controverted by the church of Rome as not being Paul's."

Eusebius next acknowledges 1John and 1Peter.

Then as to John's Revelation, Eusebius is the first published source in church history to raise any doubt. He says:

After these must be put, if it really seems right, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time (Concerning the Apocalypse men's opinions even now are generally divided). These, then, are among the recognized books.

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Please note the test Eusebius utilized was recognition, with no mention of inspiration.

Eusebius then repeats about Revelation: “This last, as I said, is rejected by some, but others count it among the recognized books.” Eusebius then goes on, and becomes the loudest voice against the book of Revelation. He raised as many points as possible to undermine its validity. He did not appreciate its content, apparently because it contained anti-Roman millennialism. Because Roman rulers now embraced Christianity, the prophecies in Revelation were embarrassing to the church. Eusebius thus did everything he could to support doubts about the Book of Revelation.¹⁵

Then Eusebius discusses James and Jude and 2 Peter. He says:

Of the disputed books, which are nevertheless familiar to the majority, there are extant the epistle of James, as it is called; and that of Jude; and the second epistle of Peter (that which is circulated as his second epistle **we have received to be uncanonical**; still as it appeared useful to many it has been diligently read with the other scriptures).

Please note he affirms strongly here that Second Peter is non-canonical. What was the dispute over the Epistle of James? Eusebius writes that it was supposedly not frequently cited by the ‘ancients’:

These things are recorded in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called Catholic epistles. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, **not many of the ancients have mentioned it**, as is the case likewise with the epistle that bears the name of Jude, which is also one of the seven so-called Catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, **have been read publicly** in very many churches.

We now know that James was cited by several of the ‘ancients’ very early on.¹⁶ Eusebius was either unaware of this or was unimpressed.

As to 2 and 3 John, Eusebius wrote:

I recognize one epistle only as genuine and acknowledged by the ancient presbyters, and those that are called the Second and Third of John (these two remaining epistles are disputed), whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name.

It is interesting to see that early on up through Eusebius’ day that 3 John was always disputed.

15. For proof that Revelation is authentic, see *Canonicity of the Book of Revelation* at www.jesuswordsonly.com.

16. See www.earlychristianwritings.com/james.html and under *e-catena* it shows James was cited earliest by 1 Clement (80-140 A.D.), the Epistle of Barnabas (80-120 A.D.) and Justin (150-160 A.D.)

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Please also note that Eusebius is concerned whether the source is genuine rather than whether it is inspired. His list does not purport to list inspired texts. He lists only works which are genuinely written by the author to whom it purports to belong.

Council of Laodicea (363 A.D.)

This council is estimated to have taken place in 363 A.D. It was under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). The council rulings clearly reflect RCC practices. In canon 60 of the council decrees, it has a list of both approved Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament books. The only omission from the New Testament at odds with our present usage is the Book of Revelation. The only significant omission from the 'Old Testament' which Christians previously had accepted was the Book of Enoch. These two books would be politically incorrect to the Roman emperors.

Some claim the materials proving this list ever existed are inaccurate and unreliable.¹⁷ This criticism, however, is weak. The disputed Canon 60 appears in the oldest records. However, it does not appear in a work written in 544 A.D. In that year, a Roman Catholic historian Dionysius Exiguus omits Canon 60 from his version of the council decrees. Likewise, in 610 John of Antioch, a monk in Orthodox territory, omits it.

These later omissions are unimportant. What is ignored is why later Roman Catholic historians would omit canon 60 and want to rewrite history. It is fairly obvious. The Pope in the Council of Rome of 382 re-issued a new NT list. This list restored Revelation to approved reading material in the church. This rejoining Revelation to NT canon was repeated by Pope Innocent I in 405 A.D.

So why would Dionysius Exiguus in 544 A.D. omit canon 60 in his summary of the Laodicean decrees of 363 A.D.? The Roman Catholic church would not want to admit popes and councils make mistakes. If Dionysius repeated the significant deletion of the Book of Revelation in 363 which appears in the earliest reliable texts from the Council of Laodicea, it would embarrass the church. It would also promote uncertainty about the Book of Revelation, which the Roman Catholic church now was willing to endorse. These realities destroy our ability to rely upon Dionysius. John of Antioch apparently used Dionysius uncritically as his source. Thus, one biased presentation leads to a later unwitting repetition of that same bias.

Furthermore, the omission of Revelation in the Council of Laodicea was combined with deletion of the Book of Enoch in 363 A.D. This twin deletion completely matches the political-religious feelings at that time. It matches the thoughts and ideas of Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* written sometime after 325 A.D. Eusebius was Emperor Constantine's favorite bishop. Eusebius strongly disliked the Book of Revelation, and spoke vigorously against its inclusion in canon. Political issues explain his outlook. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was in the early 300s well on the way to becoming the official religion of the Roman empire. (This officially took place in 380 A.D.) The Roman bishop came to dominate all other churches within the empire. Previously, the Christian church was a loose confeder-

17. *History of the Canon of the New Testament* (4th Ed.) III at 428, excerpted at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/NPNF2-14/2ancyra/Laocn60.htm> (accessed 2005).

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tion of bishops. That original confederation traces directly to what we know today as the Orthodox church. It does not trace to Roman Catholicism, contrary to RCC myth. The Orthodox church of that earliest era was centered in Jerusalem. What could undermine this shift from the Orthodox council to a Rome-dominated church was precisely the Book of Revelation. Revelation was in turn a continuation of the Book of Enoch from the pre-Christian era. Thus, Constantine's imperative would be to erase the Book of Revelation and Enoch. He naturally feared how Christians would interpret end-time literature that made the "city on seven hills" (Rome) into the seat of the Great Whore/Beast/Anti-Christ. (Rev. 17:9.)

Thus, this list at Laodicea appears to be historically accurate, even though, for dubious reasons, it is not recognized.

Athanasius' List (367 A.D.)

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (Egypt), published the following list of approved reading sources in church in his *Easter Letter of 367 A.D.*:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, Peter (2), John epistles (3), Paul, 14 epistles total (naming Romans, Corinthians (2), Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians (2), Hebrews, Timothy (2), Titus, Philemon), and the Revelation of John.

It therefore omits Jude.

The Syrian Apostolic Canons (380 A.D.)

The Syrian book of church order includes on its list of approved reading sources a book entitled *The Constitutions of the Apostles*. It purports to be first person statements by Peter, John, Andrew and other apostles. It is a blatant imposture. No scholar seriously contends otherwise today. However, it contains a list of approved NT-era reading sources as of 380 A.D.

The list includes Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Also Paul, 14 epistles (which means it includes Hebrews), Peter (2), John (3), James, Jude, Acts, Clement's Epistles, and lastly the Constitutions of the Apostles. The latter two are no longer in our NT.

Rufinus List (380 A.D.)

Rufinus, an elder at Aquileia in northeastern Italy, prepared a list in 380 A.D.

His list includes Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. Also Acts, Paul, 14 epistles (which means he includes Hebrews), James, Jude, John [3], and Revelation. He totally excludes the two epistles of Peter.

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Augustine & Council of Carthage (397 A.D.)

Augustine, the famous bishop of Hippo (West Africa) who was the principle formulator of Roman Catholic doctrine, made up a list in 397 A.D. This list was identically adopted by three other African Bishops at the regional Council of Carthage. It is the same as our modern New Testament list.

The Carthage ruling provides us little context to deduce upon what criteria inclusion or exclusion was based. Its decree was:

The books of the New Testament: the Gospels, four books; the Acts of the Apostles, one book; the epistles of the apostle Paul, thirteen; of the same to the Hebrews, one epistle; of Peter, two; of John the apostle, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Revelation of John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the Church across the sea [*i.e.*, Rome] shall be consulted. On the anniversaries of martyrs, their acts shall also be read.

Thus, even this list was uncertain. It needed confirmation and input from the church at Rome. No one knows if such confirmation was ever obtained.

How We Arrived At Our Modern Canon

The foregoing history is the sole tradition of how our current list of New Testament books were formed prior to the modern era.

In 1522, Luther assembled a New Testament based on the 397 A.D. list. However, in his *Preface* to the NT, Luther specifically declared the Epistle of James and the Book of Revelation were uninspired and should not be viewed as scripture.

As a response to Luther, in 1543 the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent created an identical list to our current New Testament canon. The council decreed that the basis of this list was its traditional acceptance, not whether there was prophecy that justified inclusion of any specific book.

Then later in the 1500s, Calvin declared Second Peter should not be regarded as a valid part of scripture, as discussed next.

After Calvin's statement, credible challenges to canon by sincere Christians have ceased.

The Special Question of Second Peter

As the history detailed above shows, the only consistently rejected document (until 367 A.D. but dropped again in 380 A.D.) in our current New Testament canon is Second Peter. This bespeaks forgery. It should now be finally eliminated. The word of God is too precious to permit tradition to justify inclusion.

This recommendation is not the product of radical liberal insight. The flaws of Second Peter are so self-evident that even Calvin provides support for it being a pseudograph. As Metzger explains:

Calvin applies philological tests as to authorship of various books...The style of 2 Peter differs from that of 1 Peter and

Appendix B: How the Canon Was Formed

was therefore probably not written by the apostle himself....¹⁸

Furthermore, Eusebius thought it a pseudograph in 325 A.D.¹⁹ Eusebius wrote that among the disputed books are “the second epistle of Peter.” One of his reasons was how few early church leaders cited Second Peter. Especially troublesome was that those who knew of First Peter did not know of Second Peter. Polycarp and Irenaeus, for example, only reveal knowledge of First Peter. One can verify this by visiting the computerized cross-reference of every verse of First and Second Peter to the writings of the early Church leaders. You can find this resource at Peter Kirby’s excellent website: www.earlychristianwritings.com/2peter.html.

However, as Peter Kirby explains, there are many other reasons to believe Second Peter is a pseudograph. One telling internal evidence is a reference by “Peter” to Paul’s writings as if they already had been collected and assembled in “Scripture.” (2 Peter 3:16.) Such an event did not occur until well after Peter’s death. Peter Kirby then explains: “Accordingly, we find ourselves without doubt far beyond the time of Peter and into the epoch of ‘early Catholicism.’” *Id.* The pseudograph nature of Second Peter is now “widely acknowledged.” *Id.*

18. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) at 245.

19. See “The Canon of Eusebius,” *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (ed. Bart D. Ehrman) (Oxford University Press: 2003) at 337-38.