

CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

Lesson 12

Origins of the Canon – Part Two

On February 23, 303 A.D., an edict from the Roman Emperor Diocletian was posted, ordering all copies of the Christian Scriptures and liturgical books to be surrendered and burned, all churches to be demolished, and no meetings for Christian worship to be held. The punishment for resistance was imprisonment, torture, and in some cases, death. Several documents, such as *Acts of Martyrs*, describe with vivid detail how this edict was carried out against Christians, their Scriptures and churches.

Imagine you were there when three young women, Agape, Irene, and Chione, were interrogated by the prefect Dulcitius of Thessalonica. "Do you have in your possession any writings, parchments, or books of the impious Christians?" Chione replied, "We do not, Sir. Our present emperors have taken these from us." The next day the prefect asked Irene, "Who is it that advised you to retain these parchments and writings up to the present time?" She replied, "It was almighty God, who bade us love him unto death. For this reason we did not dare to be traitors, but we chose to be burned alive or suffer anything else that might happen to us rather than betray them." All three were burned at the stake in 304, after being placed naked in the public, and the writings found in their cabinets were burned publicly.

In another incident, the police made a raid at Cirta, capital of Numidia (now part of Algeria). The mayor came to the house where the Christians met and made a demand for books. The library was found empty, but the police went to the house of church officials. One subdeacon brought out one large codex. When asked why only one, he sent them to the houses of readers. One produced 4 codices, another 5, then 8, 7, 2 with some loose sheets and finally the wife of one reader not at home produced 6 codices. All in a single round!

In another incident much earlier on July 17, 180 A.D., as related in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, twelve persons stood trial in Carthage. They refused to sacrifice to the gods or to swear by the "genius" of the Roman Emperor. During the trial, the proconsul asked, "What things do you have there in your satchel?" The answer was, "Books, and Epistles of Paul, a good man." This was probably a reference to the Gospels and the letters of Paul, incriminating evidence which substantiated their condemnation and execution by sword.

If you were in a similar situation, what devotion would you have to the Scriptures or to your faith? If you did not have the various parts of the Bible in one book, which parts would you gladly give to the interrogators. Would you guard any with your life? Are there any parts you could reproduce from memory?

Such experiences in early Christianity played a small role in demanding that believers decide which parts of the Bible were most cherished, which were even worthy of death.

But much larger forces were at work from the very beginning of Christian writings, forces which could never have been understood or analyzed at the time. These forces would eventually result in the collection of authoritative Christian writings which would serve as "the rule of faith," even to our own times.

QUESTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE NT CANON

Our task today is to review what we know about the development of the canon of the New Testament (NT). It may amaze you that in the annals of church history there are no detailed accounts of this significant process, but, nevertheless, we can ask several good questions and come up with reliable answers. Which writings were chosen and why? Which writings were rejected and why? How many years did this process take? Which writings were disputed for many years, but finally made it into the canon? Which came close, but did not make the cut and why? What criteria were being used? By whom? How important were the pronouncements about the canon by church leaders in the 4th century?

REVIEW

By way of review of Lesson 10, the Old Testament (OT) canon was pretty well fixed by the time of Christ and his apostles. It was only confirmed by the rabbis who met in Jamnia in about 90 AD. The OT, very much like we know it, was the Bible of Jesus. He studied it, quoted it, drew strength from it, interpreted it, promised to fulfill it and gave it new meaning through his life and teachings. (All the references in the NT to "the scriptures" refer to the Jewish scriptures, with the exception of 2 Peter 3:16's reference to "the other scriptures," in which the writer includes Paul's writings.) As Jesus and other Jews of the first century revered the OT (the law, the prophets and the writings), so we are not surprised that the followers of Jesus would revere the words of Jesus himself and the words of his apostles.

ORAL TRADITION

For years, the treasured words of Jesus and his apostles were handed down by oral tradition. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (about 70-140 A.D.), was thinking of this oral tradition, when according to Eusebius, he wrote, "For I did not think that information from books would help me so much as the utterances of a living and surviving voice." In other words, he preferred to hear from eye-witnesses what they could tell him from their experiences with Jesus and his apostles over the writings of others, even if they were close companions of the apostles. We would all agree, but then realize that all the apostles would die, including even John at an old age, along with other eye-witnesses. Obviously, their writings would become extremely important as time passed.

EARLY STAGES - THE GOSPELS

As early as 150 A.D. Justin Martyr wrote about how it was customary on Sundays in the worship of Christians to read "the memoirs of the apostles [i.e. the Gospels] or the writings of the prophets." Narratives were compiled with the words of Jesus and his miracles and such are referred to in Luke 1:1-4. Paul appealed to such "words of the Lord" confidently in order to enforce some lesson (I Cor. 9:14; cf. Luke 10:7), or to settle some difficulty (I Thess. 4:15; I Cor. 7:10), or to confirm a teaching (I Cor. 11:23). Luke recorded Paul's message in Acts 20:35 to the Ephesian elders as he remembered "the words of the Lord Jesus," and then quoted these words we do not have in any of our four Gospels, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

These various documents/narratives were circulated in different churches, often one at a time. One church would have a copy of one Gospel, one would have another or perhaps two or three. For years, few churches, if any, had all four of the Gospels we have now. It is important to remember that each of the four was initially directed to a different audience, e.g., Matthew to Jews, Luke to Gentiles, etc. A church made up of Gentiles would naturally prefer Luke, while a Jewish church would prefer Matthew, but it really was not long before Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were regarded as authoritative and much superior to other such narratives.

APOSTOLIC LETTERS

The writers of the apostolic letters, such as Paul, dictated their writings with authority, but they showed no consciousness that their words would come

to be regarded as a permanent standard of doctrine and life in the church. They usually wrote for an immediate purpose, to answer a question or solve a problem, saying what they would in person had they been able to be present. It is easy, however, to see why such letters would be cherished, read over and over, copied and shared with others. Paul even encouraged such circulation when he wrote, "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea." (Col. 4:16) He also addressed one of his letters "to the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), so it would have to be passed around or copied. He also urged that I Thessalonians be read "to all the brothers" (I Thess. 5:27).

We have already studied several of the early writings usually called Apostolic Fathers, written shortly after the NT. Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and others typically used ideas and familiar phrases from the apostolic writers, though not quoting exactly, and they often alluded to their superior standing. This tended to set the earlier documents apart from contemporary writings and to lead eventually to their collection as a distinct body of literature. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries translations were made of apostolic writings into Latin, Syriac and the Coptic dialects of Egypt. The range of books which were translated, formed a collection of scripture in these districts, though in some cases such a collection included books that were not generally recognized elsewhere.

A LONG, GRADUAL PROCESS

The development of the NT canon was a long, continuous process, which included not just the collecting of writings, but of sifting through them and rejecting some of them. It took place gradually over many years by the pressure of various kinds of circumstances and influences, some external (e.g., persecutions mentioned above) and others internal to the life of the churches. Different factors operated at different times and in different places, but Christian believers are confident that God was involved at every level. His providential guidance could not have been perceived in the early years, but it was extremely important throughout the whole process, without a doubt.

THE HERESY FACTOR

One of the factors or influences which was used by God in this development process was heresy (false teaching). There are different opinions among scholars as to how important this influence really was. The two earliest (2nd

century) heretics who impacted the NT canon are Marcion and Montanus . You may recall that Marcion, who is generally regarded as one of the Gnostics (though some would argue he is not a full-fledged Gnostic), had a very limited canon. He jettisoned the entire OT because he thought the God of the OT should be rejected. He saw only wrath, vengeance and other attributes he thought unworthy of deity. Further, he decided that only the Gospel of Luke should be used, but he altered it drastically by deleting the birth narrative and other parts. Still further, he chose Paul as the only faithful apostle and he chose 10 of his letters as the only ones to be read and studied. But, he had to edit even these 10 to eliminate any references to the OT, the God of Israel, etc. We will see later that the earliest list of NT books includes anti-Marcion sentiment. In fact, some would argue that it was written specifically to counter Marcion and his limited canon.

Montanus, also previously studied in this class, led a movement in the last half of the 2nd century which was variously tagged enthusiastic, charismatic or apocalyptic. He believed he had special revelations and could speak for God. He and his followers relied heavily on Revelation and the Gospel of John to advance their cause. They believed they could add to apostolic writings, even supercede them with their own scriptures. One vigorous anti-Montanist bishop named Gaius even wanted to make Revelation and the Gospel of John non-canonical because of Montanism. Others who followed Gaius in this thinking were dubbed "Alogoi," which could mean "irrational" or "rejecting the Logos." The Gospel of John did not suffer at all for such use by heretics, but Revelation had much difficulty being accepted into the canon because of this and because it was so different from the rest of NT writings and easily misused.

How much influence did these heresies have on the formation of the NT canon? No one can really measure, but there is no doubt they had an impact. If nothing else, they served as catalysts to make more urgent this process of determining which books were authoritative and which could not be considered reliable.

FIRST LIST EXACTLY LIKE OUR NEW TESTAMENT

The first time that a list of NT writings, exactly as we know the canon today, without any additions, was put in writing, was in a letter written by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in 367 A.D. Not everyone was ready to accept that same canon immediately, but eventually that list was confirmed and the minor fluctuations in the East as well as the West were eliminated. It may surprise

you that the largest part of the NT canon, however, was already determined even 200 years earlier, as shown in a study of what is called the Muratorian Fragment.

THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT

Because this is one of the most important documents in the study of NT canon, it is attached at the end of this lesson. It is called a fragment because the first few lines are missing and there are only 85 lines total. Named after its discoverer Ludovico Antonio Muratori, it was published in 1740. It was in Latin and shows great carelessness in the scribal work, but it gains significance by an early dating (170 A.D.). This date is based primarily on phrases in the text about Hermas who wrote the Shepherd of Hermas "very recently" and his brother Pius as bishop in Rome.

If you read this document carefully, you will notice some fascinating things. The beginning implies that Luke which is called the third Gospel was preceded by Matthew and Mark. John is named with a rather long statement about its origin, as if defending it (perhaps because of Montanism). The book of Acts is named, with the phrase "of all the apostles," which could be directed against Marcion (Paul only) or the growing number of apocryphal books called acts of various apostles. The author seems to be familiar with the Acts of Peter (though it is not named) because he refers to Paul's trip to Spain and Peter's crucifixion, both of which are detailed in that writing.

Thirteen letters of Paul are named (Corinthians, Galatians and Romans are given twice), but there is emphasis on the idea that Paul wrote all these to only 7 churches (like John his predecessor in Revelation, though we can be sure John wrote after Paul). The key in this is the symbolic value of 7, meaning the whole church. The author reasoned that Paul's letters should be read and applied by all churches. Then he named two writings to be rejected for their connection to Marcion, the letter to the Laodiceans and one to the Alexandrians. (Neither of these is known, but later at the close of the 3rd century, because of Col. 4:16, someone composed a letter pretending to be by Paul to Laodicea. It has only 20 verses and is a feeble patchwork of words from genuine Pauline letters, especially Philippians. Although Jerome in the 4th century said it was rejected by everyone, it commanded much respect for over 1000 years in the West and was printed in the first German and Czech Bibles in 1488.)

Jude and two letters of John are mentioned next. Are these 1 and 2 John or 2 and 3 John? Because the author quoted 1 John in his notes about the Gospel of John, some think he refers to 2 and 3 John here. An unexpected reference to what is generally regarded as OT apocrypha, Wisdom of Solomon, is next. No one really knows why, but it has a date very close to NT writings. Then two Apocalypses are named, John's (we know as Revelation) and Peter's, but he noted that "some of us are not willing that the latter should be read in church." The Shepherd of Hermas is then mentioned with the note that it should not be read publicly because of its recent origin and inferior standing below the prophets and the apostles. He did encourage private reading, however. Finally, writings by specific authors were rejected altogether, namely, Arsinous, Miltiades, Valentinus and Basilides. along with a book of psalms for Marcion (who rejected the OT Psalms). The Cataphrygians in the last line refers to the Montanists.

In summary, what do we learn from the Muratorian Fragment? Many of what we know as NT books were already accepted universally. There was one disputed book, The Apocalypse of Peter. There was one book which, though rejected for public reading, could be read privately, the Shepherd of Hermas. Finally, there were several books which were totally rejected for both public and private reading. Not mentioned are 1 and 2 Peter, James and Hebrews. Most surprising of these is 1 Peter, but scribal carelessness may be the cause. The tone of the writing is not legislation, but explanation. On the Gospel authors, there is emphasis on their submission to the guidance of the Spirit. There is also an emphasis on the universal (catholic) church. And, the comment connected to Romans is especially interesting. "Christ is the principle of the Scriptures," reminds us of Martin Luther's later criterion, "what promotes Christ."

OTHER LISTS OF NT BOOKS

A quick survey of other canons (lists) of authoritative Christian writings will show the gradual process unfolding, but the nucleus of what we call the NT has been set. It is the disputed writings and those not mentioned in the Muratorian Fragment which are gradually sifted and sorted in the years that follow. Origen (185-254 A.D.) of Alexandria and later of Caesarea is the one who joined the Gospels and the apostolic writings under the name of "the New Testament" and stated that they were "divine Scriptures" from the same God of the OT. He has no questions about most of the NT (including Hebrews), except James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John.

Eusebius of Caesarea (265-340 A.D.) also gave a list which deserves mention. In the first half of the 4th century, he put his instinct for historical research to work on the canon and classified the apostolic and pretended apostolic writings into four categories. Universally accepted were the "homologoumena," which had 22 in

number, including Revelation (which he also listed as spurious). Disputed, but familiar to most churches were the "antilegomena," in which he named James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John. Votes were divided on those. Rejected, illegitimate or spurious were the "notha," in which he named the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermias, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, Teachings of the Apostles, Gospel according to the Hebrews, and he adds, the Apocalypse of John. He seems to be saying that Revelation is orthodox but uncanonical, by listing it twice in different categories. A 4th category had worse than spurious books, e.g., gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, Acts of Andrew, John and others. His list leaves the reader perplexed, but we still see the nucleus in place.

One more note on Eusebius is most interesting. After the Diocletian persecution, Constantine became Roman Emperor and supposedly converted to Christianity (311-313 A.D.) Constantine directed Eusebius in about 332 A.D. to make 50 copies of the Christian Scriptures and supplied all he needed for this project. It is disappointing that Eusebius does not record one word on his NT canon for these Scriptures. Some think codex Sinaiticus and codex Vaticanus were among these. Sinaiticus contains the NT as we know it, in a slightly different order, and adds the Epistle of Barnabas and part of the Shepherd of Hermas. Vaticanus is similar with Hebrews after Thessalonians, but the manuscript breaks off after Heb. 9:14.

Other canons of interest which can only be mentioned here, include these: Codex Claromontanus (sometimes referred to as Clermont) (6th century), the canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (about 350 A.D.), the Cheltenham canon (about 360 A.D.), the canon approved by the synod of Laodicea (363 A.D.), the canon of Athanasius, mentioned above (367 A.D.), the canon approved by the "Apostolic Canons" (380 A.D.), the canon of Gregory of Nazianus (329-389 A.D.), the canon of Amphilochius of Iconium (a Cappadocian lawyer and later bishop who wrote his canon in iambic verse about 394 A.D. He appears to reject 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation, but adds, "This is perhaps the most reliable canon of the divinely inspired Scriptures.") and the canon approved by the third synod of Carthage (397 A.D.). This last canon is the same as our present NT canon, which was accepted in 393 A.D. at a synod in North Africa, but the documents were lost.

CRITERIA FOR THE CANON

It is important to ask what criteria early Christians used to determine if certain writings should be included in an authoritative collection. Even before this process began, Paul anticipated the need for such criteria. He wrote in 1 Cor. 12:3 that "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the

Holy Spirit." Later, John suggested a more specific test in 1 John 4:2. "Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." Paul wanted to be sure his readers knew which letters were genuinely his, so he sometimes wrote the final greetings himself and sometimes put his actual signature (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19). In 2 Thess. 2:2, he referred to "some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us." It is no wonder that in the years to follow there were numerous writings which had to be validated through various criteria.

The order of these by importance can be argued, but somewhere near the top is what can be called **apostolic authority**. If the writing was clearly by one of the apostles, it was definitely regarded as authoritative and was certain to be included in the canon. Paul's letters were among the first, if not the first, of our NT documents to be gathered together and to circulate as a collection. His name was on them, but Hebrews, on the other hand, was anonymous. The continuing discussion about Hebrews is whether Paul wrote it, with the idea that if he wrote it, it should be in the canon. If not, maybe not. Origen accepted Pauline authorship initially, but later decided against it. Despite this change of mind, he still thought it should be regarded as authoritative and included in the canon.

The fact that all four Gospels are anonymous is remarkable, in view of this criteria. The apostolic authorship of Matthew and John was well established in tradition, but what about Mark and Luke? It was very early (Papias, 70-140 A.D.) that Mark was connected to Peter and Luke to Paul, in order to validate their writings by apostolic association. You could easily argue that these two Gospels have authority without this connection. Several writings claimed Peter's name and there was no difficulty about 1 Peter. It was undisputed, but 2 Peter was among the last to be accepted as canonical. As mentioned above, different writings with John's name attached received different responses, depending on the contents. The Gospel was readily accepted, along with 1 John, but 2 and 3 John found difficulty and Revelation found great difficulty because of Montanism and because of its apocalyptic nature with so much symbolism and potential for misinterpretation (seen even today).

Membership in the family of Jesus apparently carried with it near-apostolic authority as well. Because the author of James was identified with the brother of Jesus, it was more readily accepted. The author of Jude called himself "a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James," but both James and

Jude encountered hesitation, in Jude's case, primarily because of its contents.

A second criterion can be called **antiquity**. It had to be old enough to belong to the apostolic age. This was applied effectively by the writer of the Muratorian Fragment to the Shepherd of Hermas and could have been applied to many other writings when so many works were appearing which claimed to have been written by apostles and their associates.

A third is **orthodoxy**. This judgment of the theology of the writing was an effort to decide if this document taught what conformed to the apostolic faith. Did it agree with what was taught in other writings which were undoubtedly apostolic? What did it teach about the person and work of Christ? A good example of this criterion being applied is when Bishop Serapion, according to Eusebius, heard that the Gospel of Peter was being read in the church of Rhossus. When he discovered that its account of the death of Jesus contained hints of docetism (Jesus did not really suffer because he was not really human), he visited the church to be sure they were not led astray.

A fourth is **catholicity**. A work acknowledged as authoritative by the greater part of the universal church would receive recognition sooner or later. This criterion was on display with Hebrews, when the Roman church accepted it because of its widespread acceptance elsewhere. When we remember that each document began with local acceptance and had to be gradually circulated without printing, mail or email, it is amazing that the NT canon was as large as it was so early.

A fifth concerns **inspiration**. Though this is not the time or place for a lengthy discussion of this topic, there is little doubt that inspiration was an important criterion. The operation of the Holy Spirit enabled men and women to speak the word of God in their own vocabulary. Only one of the NT writers bases his authority on prophetic inspiration and that is John in Revelation (2:7, 12:11, 19:10, 22:9,19). Paul claimed to have the mind of Christ, to be attended by the demonstration of the Spirit and to impart words taught him by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-16), but for authority he often appealed to his apostolic commission by which Christ was speaking in him (2 Cor. 13:3). Bruce M. Metzger in his book, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987) condenses these to three criteria -- **orthodoxy, apostolicity and consensus among the churches**. These began to be used during the 2nd century and were never modified, but there was much variation in the manner in which they were applied. Which should have more weight? What does the

leading church in an area think? What is the opinion of a much-respected bishop? The process rested on a dialectical combination of historical and theological criteria, so there should be no surprise that a few books remained doubtful. What is really remarkable is that there was so much agreement on the greater part of the New Testament within the first two centuries.

CANON AND AUTHORITY

There is a difference between the canonicity of a book and the authority of that book. A book's canonicity depends on its authority. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 14:37, "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command." That letter had authority when he wrote it, but it could not be referred to as canonical until it was received in a list of accepted writings which was formed years later. Paul's writings, and others, first had divine authority based on its inspiration, and later it attained canonicity because of its general acceptance as a message from God. No church council or synod could make the books of the Bible authoritative by an official decree. The canonical books possessed their own authority long before there were any church councils making decrees. The councils of the 4th century only confirmed what was well established and already obvious to most believers about the authoritative books of the NT.

In his book, *The Books and the Parchments* (Fleming H. Revell, 1950, p. 113), F. F. Bruce concludes his chapter on the canon of scripture with a powerful statement which is appropriate here.

We may well believe that those early Christians acted by a wisdom higher than their own in this matter, not only in what they accepted, but in what they rejected. Divine authority is by its very nature self-evidencing; and one of the profoundest doctrines recovered by the Reformers is the doctrine of the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, by which testimony is borne within the believer's heart to the divine character of Holy Scripture. This witness is not confined to the individual believer, but is also accessible to the believing community; and there is no better example of its operation than in the recognition by the members of the Early Church of the books which were given by inspiration of God to stand alongside the books of the Old Covenant, the Bible of Christ and His apostles, and with them to make up the written Word of God.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. God's Word has the very greatest authority of all authority, whether it is spoken or written. It had it in the days of Christ and his apostles. It still has the same authority today! Give it that place in your life, your home and your work. Paul's doxology in Romans 11:33-36 expresses something of God's authority. "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." (11:34-36)
2. There has been much discussion about "a canon within the canon," which we did not include in this lesson. Martin Luther, for example, regarded four NT books as having less authority than the rest, Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. He did not reject them altogether, but he put them at the end of the NT. Do you have a canon within the canon? Are there teachings of Jesus and His apostles which you have chosen not to hear and obey? How about His teaching on your heart, your money, your sexual purity?
3. No doubt God was at work, behind the scenes, in all the developments of the canon. Are you aware that He is still at work in your life today? Are you praying and believing that He will provide you with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3)? It may be years before you see His hand and know what He did or is doing. It may not be obvious in your lifetime in some matters, but there is no doubt He is at work. "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen." (Eph. 3:20-21)

THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT

The numbers indicate the lines of the original Latin text which suffered from being copied by one or more barely literate scribes. Translational expansions are enclosed in square brackets. Alternative translations are enclosed in parentheses.

- (1) . . . at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative].
- (2) The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke.
- (3) Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ,
- (4-5) when Paul had taken him with him as one zealous for the law,
- (6) composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not
- (7) seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events,
- (8) so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.
- (9) The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples.
- (10) To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write],
- (11) he said, 'Fast with me from today for three days, and what
- (12) will be revealed to each one,
- (13) let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed
- (14) to Andrew, [one] of the apostles,
- (15-16) that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various
- (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels,
- (18-19) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of the believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things
- (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the
- (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection,
- (22) concerning life with his disciples,
- (23) and concerning his twofold coming;
- (24) the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place,
- (25) the second glorious in royal power,
- (26) which is still in the future. What
- (27) marvel is it, then, if John so consistently
- (28) mentions these particular points also in his Epistles,
- (29) saying about himself: 'What we have seen with our eyes
- (30) and heard with our ears and our hands
- (31) have handled, these things we have written to you'?
- (32) For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer,
- (33) but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.
- (34) Moreover, the Acts of all the apostles
- (35) were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled
- (36) the individual events that took place in his presence --
- (37) as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter
- (38) as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome]
- (39) when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of

(40-41) Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent.

(42) First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms;

(43) next, to the Galatians, against circumcision;

(44-46) then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary

(47) for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed

(48) apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor

(49-50) John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians

(51) first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third,

(52) to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth,

(53) to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans

(54-55) seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition,

(56-57) yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the

(58) Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches,

(59-61) nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love, one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred

(62-63) in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to

(64) the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's

(65) name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others

(66) which cannot be received into the catholic church

(67) -- for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.

(68-69) Moreover, the Epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom,

(70) written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.

(71) We receive only the Apocalypses of John and Peter,

(72) though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.

(73) But Hermas wrote the Shepherd

(74) very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome,

(75) while bishop Pius, his brother was occupying the [episcopal] chair

(76) of the church of the city of Rome.

(77) And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but

(78) it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among

(79) the prophets, whose number is complete, or among

(80) the apostles, for it is after [their] time.

(81) But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades,

(82) who also composed

(83) a new book of psalms for Marcion,

(84-85) together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians . . .