

Canon, Creeds, & Revivals

How the Church Preserved our Christian Beliefs

Class 2 - Canon of the New Testament
Based on “The Canon of Scripture” by F. F. Bruce

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Course Outline

- **Week 1: Jesus & Acts through Maps** - The life of Jesus through the Gospels & early church through Acts
- **Week 2: Canon of NT** - Earliest use of writings and their collection before 100 AD (Canon from Lists); Challenge of Marcion & Gnostics 100-200 AD
- **Week 3: Canon From Quotes** - Church Father's references of Scripture 100-250AD
- **Week 4: On the Bubble/Rejected Writings** - Readings from docs that were on the bubble (65-200AD) and readings from docs that were rejected (90-200 AD)
- **Week 5: Apostle's and Nicene Creeds** - Rejection of Marcion and Gnosticism
- **Week 6: Chalcedonian Creed** - Rejection of other errors about Christ' nature
- **Week 7: Predestination and Free Will** - Augustine, Reformation, and today
- **Week 8: Confessions** - 2nd Helvetic Confession (Reformation Period) & ECO Tenets
- **Week 9: Denominations (Part 1)** - Early Church to Reformation
- **Week 10: Denominations (Part 2)** - First Awakening
- **Week 11 (Denonimations (Part 3))** - 2nd, 3rd, 4th Awakenings

Bible
Historicity
&
Canon
(4 weeks)

Creeds &
Confessions
Pred. v. FW
(4 weeks)

Denominations
(3 weeks)



How Important are the Records of Jesus?

Christianity is uniquely historical --- Christ must be a historical figure who truly resurrected from the dead.

I Cor. 15:3-6, 17-19 - “For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of them still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born...And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

NT Collections - The Fourfold Gospel

- Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (125 AD) - knew of Mark and at least one other Gospel (Matthew's compilation)

“Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately all that he remembered, whether the sayings or the doings of the Lord, but not in order - for he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but followed Peter later on, as I said. Peter was accustomed to teach as occasion required, but not as though he were making a compilation of dominical oracles. So Mark made no mistake in writing down certain things as he called them to mind; for he paid attention to one thing: to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no false statements in any of them.” (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 3.39.15.)

NT Collections - The Fourfold Gospel

- Tatian (Justin Martyr's disciple ~165 AD) wrote *Diatessaron* (harmony of four using John as framework). Some example edits:
 - Cleansing of temple (Jn. 2) placed during Holy Week.
 - Tatian was a Vegetarian and may have changed John the Baptist's “locust and honey” to “milk and honey”
 - Light shone around Jesus' baptism may have been take for Gospel according to Hebrews
- Utimately rejected (not source material) - Preferred gospel among Syriac-speaking churches for over 200 years but were forced to give it up in 5th century by episcopal pressure.

NT Collections - The Fourfold Gospel

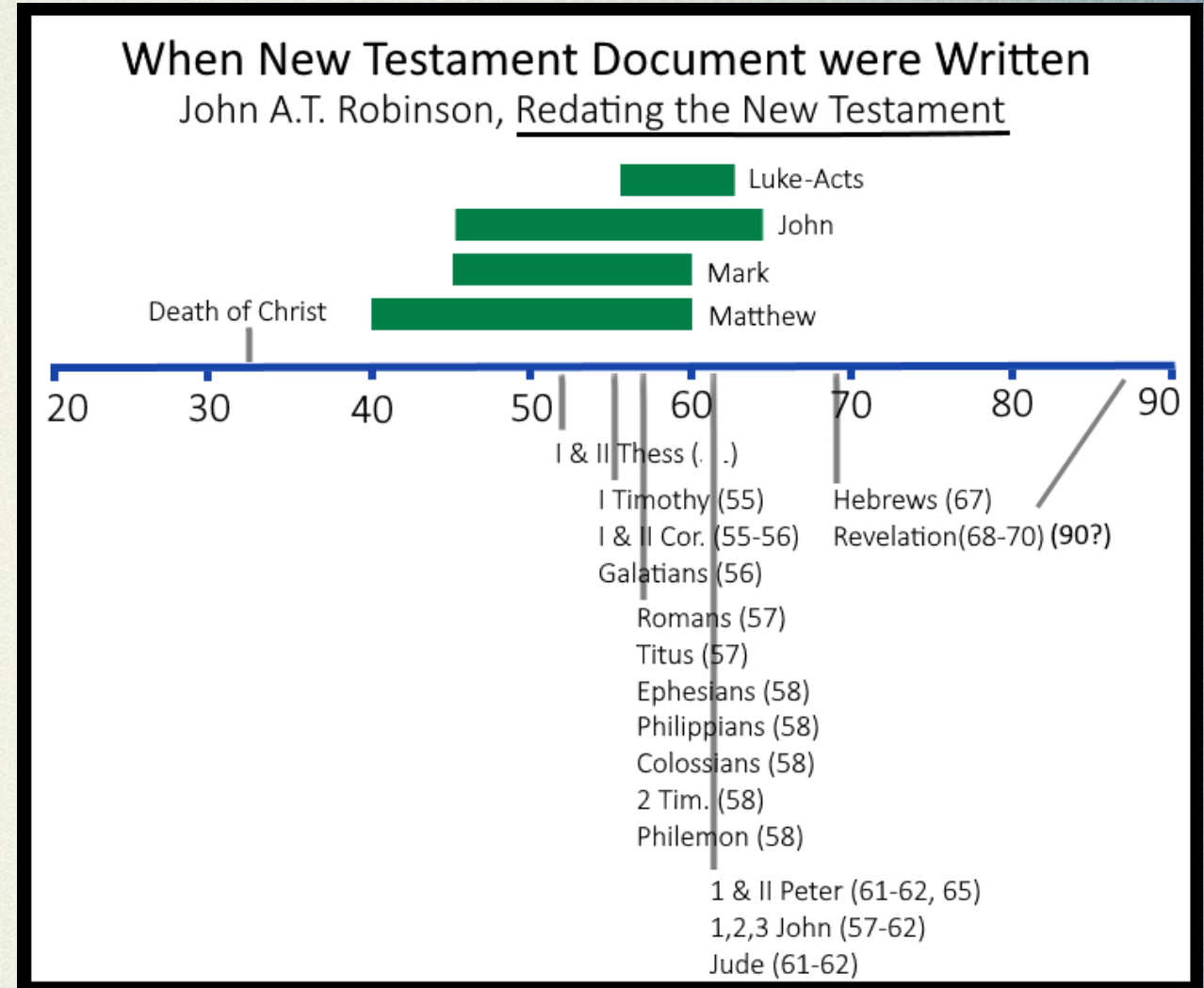
- From Papias, we know that Mark was established by at least 125AD
- From the *Diatessaron*, we know that the entire four gospels were established by at least 165 AD
- The Gospel of John took the longest since it was used by gnostics to support their position. Justin Martyr (martyred 165 AD), who read it more carefully found it supplied more effective anti-gnostic ammunition than any other NT book
- Fragment of John 18 (Rylands collection) - 130 AD
- Full Fourfold Gospel (Bodmer collection) - late 2nd century or early 3rd century

NT Collections - Pauline Writings

- Paul's letters were collected and circulated as a collection by the early second century
 - Paul encouraged collection in Colossians 4:16, Galatians
- Earliest surviving copy (Chester Beatty manuscripts) around 200 AD for Greek speaking Egyptian Christians
 - did not include 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus but includes Hebrews
- Clement of Rome (96 AD) sent “godly admonition” to church of Corinth, he plainly had access to a copy of 1 Corin. and some other Pauline letters and Hebrews

NT Collection

- Dating is non-definitive
- I prefer the earlier dating estimates of John A.T. Robinson.
- The Gospel took years --- first as very early notes predating their completion.
- The Pauline letters are very early because they were addressing needs of the Gentile churches



Marcion (The first Challenge to the Canon)

- Marcion was the first person known to us who published a fixed collection of what we should call New Testament books
- Born in 100 AD, he embraced Paul's gospel of justification by divine grace apart for legal works.
 - He was devoted to Paul --- believing that the other Apostles corrupted the Master's teaching.
- He took this to mean not only a rejection of law keeping for salvation but a rejection of the Old Testament itself
- He distinguished the God of the OT from the God of the NT, the former an inferior deity, a wrathful god with his material world inherently evil

Marcion's New Testament (140-155 AD)

- Created his own NT (mid-2nd century) giving us an indication of the circulated books of NT
- Gospel - Luke exclusively and he purged elements inconsistent with his understanding, rejecting OT references such as:
 - birth of John the Baptist
 - birth of Jesus
 - Genealogy
 - the Temptation (4:1-13),
 - preaching in Synagoge in Nazareth (4:16-30)
 - Lord's Prayer - instead of "thy kingdom come" - "Let thy HS come on us and cleanse us"
- Apostle - Ten letters of Paul (without I & II Timothy and Titus) purged of OT references
 - e.g. In Romans, removed 1:19-2:1, 3:21-4:25, 9-11, after 14:25 --- establishing law through faith, story of Abraham, Israel's unbelief, endowment of OT values

Marcion's Canon
(12 of 27 books)

Gospel of Marcion
(assumed Luke)

Galatians	1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians
2 Corinthians	Ephesians
Romans	Colossians
	Philemon
	Philippians

Valentinian Literature (Gnostics)

- Valentinus was contemporary of Marcion and lived in Rome 135-160 AD. Became founder of Gnostic school focused on secret knowledge.
- In 1945, discovery of Nag Hammadi 52 documents, especially “the Gospel of Truth” (called the manifesto of Valentinian school dated 140-150 AD)
 - “Gospel of Truth” - It alludes to Matthew and Luke (possible with Acts), the gospel and first letter of John, the Pauline letters (except Pastorals), Hebrews and Revelations.
 - “Epistle to Rhegiuns on Resurrection” - Interprets 1 Cor. 15 with echos of Romans, II Corin. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

Gnostics (100 - 200 AD)

- Many gods - Aeons
- Material world is evil
- Secret knowledge

Marcionite (100-200 AD)

- Rejects OT God - two Gods
- Material world is evil
- Jesus sent by true God
- Salvation by faith

The Churches Response

- Challenge of Marcion (sectarian)/Valentinus - What constitute the Bible? What is the Apostolic teaching?
- Tertullian - there are two way to nullify the scripture. One way was Marcion's way: He used the knife to excise from the scripture whatever did not conform with his own opinion. Valentinus, on the other hand, seems to use the entire NT but perverts its meaning by misinterpreting it. (Tertullian, *Prescription*, 38)

The Catholic Response

- The Church responded was “catholic” --- to accept all that was thought to be truly apostolic.
 - They accepted the Old Testament
 - They accepted not only one Gospel but all four unmutilated
 - They accepted not only 10 letters of Paul but 13 including Pastorals
 - They accepted Acts of Apostles
 - Marcionites rejected Acts since it give authority to other Apostles.
 - Acts play a crucial role being the hinge of the NT collection giving it its organic structure
 - Peter, Paul, and James are honored in it together with such leaders of the Hellenistic advance as Stephen and Philip
 - They made room for both Paul and James

Muratorian Fragment

- Published in 1740, by Lodovico Antonio Muratori, from a codex copied in 7th or 8th century in monastery of Bobbio, in Lombardy. Later kept in Ambrosian Library, Milan where it is still.
- It is a list of NT books in Latin dated at end of the second century (~180AD)
- Mutilated at beginning so first complete sentence mentions Luke as third book of the Gospel. Matthew and Mark are probably the first two.
- 21 of the now accepted NT books are present. Missing are Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John.
 - Hebrews, among the Roman church was not given authority of enjoyed by the letters of Paul
 - I & II Peter may be an copist omission (Theodor Von Zahn)
- It adds Wisdom of Solomon (an Old Testament document)



Muratorian Fragment Full Text

“The third book of the Gospel—the one according to Luke, the well-known physician—was written by Luke in his own name, sequentially, after the ascension of Christ at the time when Paul had associated him with himself as one studious of righteousness. [Luke] himself did not see the Lord in the flesh. As he was able he began his narrative with the birth of John [the Baptist].”

Muratorian Fragment Full Text (Cont.)

“The fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples. When his fellow disciples and bishops pleaded with him, he said, “Fast with me for three days, and then we'll tell each other whatever may be revealed to any of us.” That very night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should write everything in his own name as they remembered them.

As a result, although different points are taught to us in the various books of the Gospels, there is no difference as regards the faith of believers. In all of them under [the influence of] one imperial Spirit, everything is told which concerns the Lord’s birth, his suffering, his resurrection, his conduct with His disciples, and his twofold coming: the first in the humiliation of rejection, which is now past, and the second in the glory of royal power, which is still in the future.

What a marvel it is, then, that John presents these various things so consistently in his letters, too! He says in his own person, “What we have seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, that have we written.” For in this way he testifies that he is not only the eye-witness, but also the hearer. Besides that, he is also the historian of all the wondrous facts concerning the Lord in their order.”

Muratorian Fragment Full Text (Cont.)

“In addition, the Acts of all the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book and addressed to the most excellent Theophilus, because these events took place when he was present himself. He shows this clearly, i.e., that the principle on which he wrote was, to give only what fell under his own notice by the omission of the suffering of Peter, and also of the journey of Paul when he went from the city of Rome to Spain.”

Muratorian Fragment Full Text (Cont.)

“As to the epistles of Paul: again, to those who will understand the matter, they give their own indication of what they are, from what place or with what purpose they were directed. He wrote first of all—and at considerable length—to the Corinthians, to check the schism of heresy; then to the Galatians, to forbid circumcision; then to the Romans on the rule of the Old Testament Scriptures—and also to show them that Christ is the first object in these, which it is necessary for us to discuss separately.

The blessed Apostle Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches by name, in this order: the first to the Corinthians, the second to the Ephesians, the third to the Philippians, the fourth to the Colossians, the fifth to the Galatians, the sixth to the Thessalonians, the seventh to the Romans. In addition, though he writes twice to the Corinthians and Thessalonians for their correction, still it is apparent—by this sevenfold writing—that there is one Church spread abroad through the whole world. John, too, in the Revelation, although he writes only to seven churches, yet addresses all.”

Muratorian Fragment Full Text (Cont.)

“[Paul] wrote, besides these, one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy, in simple personal affection and love indeed. Nonetheless, these are holy in the esteem of the catholic [i.e., universal] Church, and in the regulation of church discipline.

There are also in circulation one to the Laodiceans and another to the Alexandrians, forged under the name of Paul and addressed against the heresy of Marcion. There are also several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church, for it is not suitable for gall to be mingled with honey.”

Muratorian Fragment Full Text (Cont.)

“The Epistle of Jude, indeed, and two belonging to the above-named John—or bearing the name of John—are reckoned among the catholic epistles, along with the book of Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honor.

We also receive the Revelation of John and that of Peter, though some among us will not have this letter read in the Church.

Hermas write very recently in our times in the city of Rome, while his brother, bishop Pius, sat in the chair of the Church of Rome. Therefore it also ought to be read, but it cannot be read publicly in the church to the people, nor placed among the prophets—as their number is complete—nor among the apostles to the end of time.

Of the writings of Arsinous, also called Valentinus, or of Miltiades, we receive nothing at all. Those are also rejected who wrote the new Book of Psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides and the founder of the Asian Cataphrygians.”

Progress of the NT Canon

Marcion (140-155AD)	Valentinus (140-150AD)	Muratorian (180AD)
Luke	Matthew	Matthew/Mark? (missing due to mutilation)
	Luke/Acts	Luke/Acts
	John	John
Romans	Romans	Romans
I & II Corin.	I & II Corin.	I & II Corin.
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
I & II Thess.	I & II Thess.	I & II Thess.
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
		I & II Tim., Titus
	I John	I & II John
	Hebrews	
		Jude
	Revelations	Revelations

Conclusions

- The Church rejected excising (Marcion) or misinterpreting scripture (Valentinus)
- The Church chose the catholic path --- to accept all that was Apostolic even if there were different perspectives
- Acts became the unifying book that joined the Gospel (sequel) and Letters (background)
- The main body of the NT was already accepted by 180 AD (Muratorian) and books were in circulation in 150 AD (Marcion & Valentinian)