TWO

"The Truth Above All Demonstration": Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine

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Nearly two millennia after their latest constituent member saw the light of day, the books that make up the Christian Bible continue to play an indispensable role in the spiritual lives of churches and individual believers. Yet today, many who wish to honor Scripture as the word of God can scarcely do so unaware that nearly every aspect of the study and use of their prized volume is under dispute. Whether the topic be the origins of Scripture's individual books, the early scribal transmission of those books, their eventual collection into an exclusive "canon," their interpretation, their reliability or truthfulness, or the role they play in the church's attempt to define itself (and others), the reader of Scripture faces no lack of critical scrutiny. It is not surprising, then, that many should think of looking to the "pre-critical" past and should hark back specifically to the early centuries of the Christian era, when the foundations for scriptural exegesis in the Christian tradition were being laid and when Scripture was finding its place in the worshiping life of the church.

Such a pursuit is surely healthy and, in my view, much to be encouraged. Two preliminary considerations, however, may be mentioned. First, even in the patristic period one may look in vain for an idyllic past when scriptural exegesis flourished entirely unencumbered by criticism. From the very beginning there was strife with fellow Jews over the rightful interpretation of Scripture; gnostic, Marcionite, and Valentinian exegesis of the church's books quickly added an array of serious challenges for Christian expositors. And if these somewhat "intramural" problems were not enough, just about as soon as Christians could lift their heads and venture into the public arena, their sacred writings were hit with the literary-cultural criticism of Greco-Roman intellectuals such as Celsus, Galen, Lucian, and, most devastatingly, Porphyry of Tyre. Second, the general dearth of lengthy systematic reflection on the doctrine of Scripture in this period, and the historical delay and disorder in achieving a consensus on the canon, have convinced some that a high respect for Scripture and a conviction of its central importance for the life of the church is a Protestant thing, or more narrowly,

a product of Protestant evangelicalism and therefore very much a historically circumscribed phenomenon. In the patristic period, it is thought, there was no canon of Scripture to appeal to, only a canon or rule of faith. And while the Scriptures, particularly the Jewish Scriptures, were regarded as authoritative, they were not consulted as much as were the various creedal summaries and an authoritative church hierarchy. The growing influence of specifically Christian writings (later called the New Testament) is often depicted as gradual, as is the slow dawn of the idea that there ought to be a limit to the number of books to which authoritative appeal in the church should be made.

What I hope to show in this brief foray into the patristic period is, first of all, something of the foundational role that Scripture played in Christian intellectual and spiritual life, even from the earliest times and even in the midst of conflict. This chapter will first seek to summarize how Christians conceived of Scripture as divine, as God's self-attesting word, and as consistent, harmonious, or inerrant. The second part will consider the rise of the New Testament canon, engaging some of the current controversy about this subject. Then follows an examination of the relationship between Scripture and tradition (including the rule of faith) in one important writer, Irenaeus of Lyons; an exploration of Scripture's inspiration in relation to certain "inspired" alternatives; and, finally, a glimpse at the path by which Scripture came to be part of the day-to-day spiritual lives of Christian clergy and even of laypeople.

Conception (Doctrine) of Scripture

Divinity

The Christian church did not so much construct a doctrine of Scripture as inherit one. It succeeded to its conception of the divinity and authority of Holy Scripture, one might say, as bequeathed to it from the broad Jewish heritage in general. As the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo said, "all men are eager to preserve their own customs and laws, and the Jewish nation above all others; for looking upon their laws as oracles (*logia*) directly given to them by God himself, and having been instructed in this doctrine from early youth, they bear in their souls the images of the commandments contained in these laws as sacred" (*On the Embassy to Gaius,* 210).[1] Yet it would also be correct to say that the church received its conception of Scripture from Scripture itself, and from Jesus and his apostles in what soon became a new body of Scripture. "Until heaven and

1. Translation modified from C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged,* new updated edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). Cf. Paul's words about Timothy's upbringing in 2 Tim. 3:15.

earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished"; "Scripture cannot be broken"; "Thy word is truth"; "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable"; "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Such conceptions were taught and received by the first Christians. Throughout subsequent Christian history the divinity of Scripture, that is, its ultimate divine authorship, sanctity, and authority, is the common assumption of the faith. Two examples from the third century will give a taste of the doctrine that undergirded Christian thought.

Origen:

> The sacred books (*tas hieras biblous*)[2] are not the compositions of men, but . . . composed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (*ex epipnoias tou hagiou pneumatos . . . anagegraphthai*), agreeably to the will of the Father of all things through Jesus Christ, and they have come down to us. (*De Principiis* 4.1.9)

Hippolytus:

> There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures (*tōn hagiōn graphōn*),[3] and from no other source. For just as a man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to get at it in any other way than by mastering the dogmas of philosophers, so all of us who wish to practise piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other quarter than the oracles (*tōn logiōn*) of God. Whatever things, then, the divine Scriptures (*hai theiai graphai*) declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn; and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; and as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as he wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures, so let us discern them. (*Contra Noetum* 9)

Even schismatics and heretics used, and had to use, the Holy Scriptures, for all knew the final court of appeal among the churches was the voice of God speaking in the Scriptures. The arguments were not about whether to use Scripture, or (with notable exceptions)[4] about which Scriptures to use, but about the in-

2. The Greek of *De Principiis* is taken from J. Armitage Robinson, *The Philocalia of Origen: The Text Revised with a Critical Introduction and Indices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

3. Greek text from E. Schwartz, "Zwei Predigten Hippolyts," *SBAW* 1936, no. 3: 3-51.

4. As when Athanasius, in his thirty-ninth festal letter and elsewhere, accused the Melitians

terpretation of the Scriptures given by God. Novatian, widely criticized for his schism in Rome in the third century, appeals to "the heavenly Scripture," "the divine Scripture" (*De Trinitate* 6), as did every other church leader. In the fourth century, before controversy broke out over his theological statements, Arius had become famous for his commentaries on Scripture.[5] All the great doctrinal debates were at their cores debates about the meaning of Scripture. Eusebius gives an interesting report to his somewhat skeptical home church in Caesarea after his participation in the Council at Nicea:

> I had no criticism of the anathemas which were put after the creed. It forbade the use of un-Scriptural terms, which has been the cause of nearly all the confusion and anarchy in the Church. Because sacred Scripture makes no use of the term "out of nothing" or of "there was once a time when He was not" or of like words, it did not seem right to say these things or to teach them.

The Criterion of Truth: Scripture as Indemonstrable First Principle

The high confidence Christians placed in the divine writings was not at that time, as it is still not today, well understood or appreciated by outsiders. While Christians responded to numerous attacks on Scripture by defending it against charges of falsehood of various kinds, the divine origin and authority of their Scriptures was not, generally speaking, something they could or needed to "prove," but was that by which they proved all things.

It is true that Christian writers throughout the period frequently turned to the "proof from prophecy." The fulfillment of the prophets' words was very often pointed to as showing that their written words truly were inspired by God's Spirit (e.g., Origen, *Princ.* 4.1.6; Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* 1.1). But even this is best seen as an appeal to the way Scripture manifested its own divinity and not as a humanly constructed argument for its divinity "from the ground up," so to speak. Though often lost sight of today, the self-authenticating quality of Scripture was perhaps surprisingly well represented, especially among some early Greek writers.

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of using Apocryphal writings. See David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter,*" *HTR* 87 (1994): 395-419 at 410-17.

5. See, e.g., Charles Kannengiesser, "The Bible in the Arian Crisis," in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity,* ed. and trans. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 217-28; "[T]he oldest chroniclers of Christianity felt confident to declare that Arius had become famous in his lifetime for commentaries on Scripture he delivered in preaching to the Alexandrian parish for which he had become responsible under Bishop Alexander. His congregation was astounded by the originality of his interpretations" (218).

Justin, Ps. Justin, and an Old Man

The conversion of the philosopher Justin to Christianity, probably sometime before about 130 C.E., occurred after his encounter with an older man whose name Justin never reveals. In the course of their conversation, as Justin relates it, the old man introduced Justin to the Hebrew prophets,[6] who in their writings spoke, he asserted, by the divine and Holy Spirit. One derives more help on philosophical matters, he said to the young philosopher, from the prophets than from the philosophers themselves. For these prophets "did not use demonstration (*apodeixeōs*) in their treatises, seeing that they were witnesses to the truth above all demonstration (*anōterō pasēs apodeixeōs*), and worthy of belief (*axiopistoi*)" (*Dial.* 7.2).[7]

It is important to observe that, though the old man spoke specifically of the Hebrew prophets, this same quality of self-authentication apparently applied to "the words of the Saviour," which, Justin later came to see, also "possess a terrible power in themselves, and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; while the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them" (*Dial.* 8.2). These words, "filled with the Spirit of God, and big with power, and flourishing with grace" (*Dial.* 9.1),[8] are words Justin knew from the memoirs of Jesus' apostles, books known as Gospels (cf. *Dial.* 10.2).[9]

After exhorting Justin to believe the prophets' testimony about the Creator and "his Son, the Christ," the old man counseled him also to pray for light, "for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom" (*Dial.* 7.3, cf. Matt. 11:25-27). Thereafter a love for the prophets and for the "friends of Christ" (no doubt his apostles) was indeed kindled in Justin's soul.

These two principles, that Scripture is divine and therefore not in need of philosophical defense or demonstration, and that it could only be truly and fully apprehended through divine aid, would often recur together.

A treatise *On the Resurrection,*[10] once attributed to Justin but probably deriv-

6. Justin's student, Tatian the Syrian, too would later testify that it was his reading of the Hebrew Scriptures that led him to faith (*Address to the Greeks* 29).

7. Greek of the *Dialogue* from Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone,* PTS 47 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

8. The apologist Aristides hopes that the emperor will be able to "judge the glory of his [Christ's] presence from the holy gospel writing" (15.1).

9. See C. E. Hill, "Was John's Gospel among the Apostolic Memoirs?" in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds,* ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 88-93.

10. Attributed by John of Damascus to Justin, this anonymous treatise, according to Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History,* 2 vols.: vol. 1, *From Paul to the Age of Constantine,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Peabody, MA:

ing from another second- or early third-century writer, shares the old man's idea that the truth, because it is from God, is self-attesting and beyond demonstration. This author opens his work in this way:

> The word of truth is free, and carries its own authority (*autexousios*),[11] disdaining to fall under any skilful argument, or to endure the logical scrutiny (*di' apodeixeōs exetasin hypomenein*) of its hearers. But it would be believed for its own nobility, and for the confidence due to him who sends it. Now the word of truth is sent from God; wherefore the freedom claimed by the truth is not arrogant. For being sent with authority, it were not fit that it should be required to produce proof of what is said; since neither is there any proof beyond itself, which is God. For every proof (*apodeixis*) is more powerful and trustworthy than that which it proves. . . . But nothing is either more powerful or more trustworthy than the truth. (*Res.* 1.1-6)

Clement of Alexandria

Such ideas may have been quite common among Christians, for they (or caricatures of them) are noted, though not appreciated, even by outsiders. Writing in about 180, the physician Galen complained about Jews and Christians not using demonstration in their treatises but relying on faith instead.[12] Galen had evidently read Moses, whose method, he judges, was "to write without offering proofs, saying 'God commanded, God spake.' " The schools of Moses and Christ speak of "undemonstrated laws" and order their followers "to accept everything on faith."[13] He clearly did not much admire the Christians' intellectual achievements, as he knew them: "Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them . . . just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables and miracles and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize]."[14]

Hendrickson, 2005; Italian original 1995), 202, "fits perfectly into the debates at the end of the second century." A. Whealey, "Pseudo-Justin's *De Resurrectione:* Athenagoras or Hippolytus?" *VC* 60 (2006): 420-30, argues it is the work of Hippolytus of Rome or someone in his circle.

11. Greek text from Martin Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin — Über die Auferstehung. Text und Studie,* PTS 54 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001).

12. See R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 11-15.

13. The citations, in order, are from *On His Own Books 1; On the Differences of Pulses* 2.4: *On the Prime Unmoved Mover* (Arabic). All of these, and the next, have been taken from Robert M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments,* 2nd edition (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 11-12, which see for more quotations.

14. Arabic excerpt from Galen's lost summary of Plato's *Republic.*

In the next decade, Clement of Alexandria would write very much aware of this kind of disdain. Clement's understanding of Greek philosophy, and in particular its discussions of logic (including epistemology) is quite impressive and he does not shy away from the issue of demonstration. His response to charges such as those leveled by Galen is not to deny them by asserting that Christians do indeed demonstrate everything before believing. Rather, he defends the priority of faith[15] by pointing out that some things (both ideas and material objects) do not stand in need of demonstration. In several places in the *Stromateis* Clem-ent discusses what Aristotle had called "first principles" (*archai*), things that are true and primary, and "convincing on the strength not of anything else but of themselves."[16] Clement found this concept conducive to explaining the role of Christian faith to critics like Galen: "Should one say that knowledge is founded on demonstration by a process of reasoning, let him hear that first principles are incapable of demonstration" (*ei de tis legoi ten epistēmēn apodeiktikēn einai meta logou, akousatō hoti kai hai archai anapodeiktoi*) (*Stromateis* 2.4.13.4).[17] What is par-amount here is to recognize that for Clement, whatever God says in Scripture has, perforce, the character of an indemonstrable first principle. Not only is this first principle indemonstrable by human reasoning, it is at the same time irrefut-ably demonstrated by God himself: "If a person has faith in the divine Scriptures and a firm judgment, then he receives as an irrefutable demonstration (*apodexin anantirrhēton*) the voice of the God who has granted him those Scriptures. The faith no longer requires the confirmation of a demonstration (*di' apodeixeōs ōxyrōmenē*). 'Blessed are those who without seeing have believed' (John 20:29)" (*Strom.* 2.2.9.6).[18] While his most comprehensive work on logic and demonstra-

15. Faith here is a "preconception by the will, an act of consenting to religion" (*Stromateis* 2.2.8.4).

16. Aristotle, *Topics* 100b19, cited from Silke-Petra Bergjan, "Logic and Theology in Clement of Alexandria: The Purpose of the 8th Book of the *Stromata*," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 12 (2008): 396-413 at 405. On the background in philosophical thought, see Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 118-31; more recently, Andrew C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the* Stromateis *of Clement of Alexandria,* SuppVC 97 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 94-104; and the fine discussion in Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity,* Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40-49. Itter points out that Clement is close to Aristotle in his exposition of first principles but that he "primarily develops his own Christian thesis" on them (94).

17. Here he may be invoking against Christianity's critics the authority of Aristotle himself, who, in a discussion of philosophy, said that first principles were indemonstrable (*hai d' archai anapodeiktoi*), *Magna Moralia* 1197a 23-29.

18. *Clement of Alexandria* Stromateis *Books One to Three,* FTC 85, trans. John Ferguson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991). Greek text of Clement from Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus,* vol. 2, *Stromata Buch I-VI,* GCS 15 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906).

tion (*apodeixis*) comes in the enigmatic book 8, the discussion most relevant to Scripture specifically comes in book 7.

> For in the Lord we have the first principle (*tēn archēn*) of instruction, guiding us to knowledge from first to last "in divers ways and divers portions" (Heb. 1:1) through the prophets and the gospel and the blessed apostles. And, if any one were to suppose that the first principle stood in need of something else, it could no longer be really maintained as a first principle. He then who of himself believes the Lord's Scripture and his actual voice (*tē kyriakē graphē te kai phōnē*) is worthy of belief. . . . Certainly we use it [Scripture] as a criterion (*kriteriō*) for the discovery of the real facts. But whatever comes into judgment is not to be believed before it is judged, so that what is in need of judgment cannot be a first principle. With good reason therefore having apprehended our first principle by faith without proof (*anapodeikton*), we get our proofs (*apodeixeis*) about the first principle *ex abundanti* from the principle itself, and are thus trained by the voice of the Lord for the knowledge of the truth. For we pay no attention to the mere assertions of men, which may be met by equally valid assertions on the other side. If, however, it is not enough just simply to state one's opinion, but we are bound to prove (*pistōsasthai*) what is said, then we do not wait for the witness of men, but we prove the point (*pistoumetha*) in question by the voice of the Lord, which is more to be relied on than any demonstration or rather which is the only real demonstration (*apodeixis*). (*Stromateis* 7.16.95)[19]

> So too we, obtaining from the Scriptures themselves a perfect demonstration concerning the Scriptures, derive from faith a conviction which has the force of demonstration (*apodeiktikōs*). (*Stromateis* 7.16.96)

God himself, of course, is the ultimate first principle, and Scripture, God's voice, therefore gives us sure knowledge that proves other things but is not itself subject to proof. As Eric Osborn observes, this "foundationalism" is certainly not "naïve."[20] For Clement, the Bible was "divine oracle and . . . true philosophy,

19. Translation from Henry Chadwick and J. E. L. Oulton, eds., *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 155. Greek from Otto Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus,* vol. 3, *Stromata Buch VII und VIII, Excerpta ex Theodoto, Eclogae Propheticae, Quis Dives Salvetur, Fragmente,* GCS 17 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1909).

20. Eric Osborn, "Clement and the Bible," in Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et la Bible/Origen and the Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30 août-3 septembre 1993* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 121-32 at 121. He believes "Clement confronted and overcame the kind of divide which exists today between post-modernist and analytic philosopher" (122 n. 3).

which always included argument."[21] Argument, however, is secondary, for investigating, understanding, and explicating what is received through an act of faith. Clement the teacher was all about investigation. But he held that investigation to be best which "accompanies faith and which builds the magnificent knowledge of the truth on the base represented by faith" (*Strom.* 5.1.5.2).

We note that Clement's description of Scripture, God's voice, as a first principle that does not submit to human demonstration applies not only to the words of prophets, but to "the gospel and the blessed apostles."

Origen

Origen continues the theme and derives support for it from the apostle Paul. Near the beginning of his great work against Celsus, written ca. 246, he wrote,

> We have to say, moreover, that the Gospel has a demonstration (*apodeixis*) of its own (*oikeia*), more divine (*theiotera*) than any established by Grecian dialectics. And this diviner method is called by the apostle the "manifestation (or demonstration, *apodeixin*) of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4): of "the Spirit," on account of the prophecies, which are sufficient to produce faith in any one who reads them, especially in those things that relate to Christ; and of "power," because of the signs and wonders that we must believe to have been performed, both on many other grounds, and on this, that traces of them are still preserved among those that regulate their lives by the precepts of the Gospel. (*CCels.* 1.2)

Almost twenty years earlier, Origen had begun his treatise *On First Principles* with a statement of his Christian epistemology. All who are assured that grace and truth came in Jesus Christ "derive the knowledge which incites men to a good and happy life from no other source than from the very words and teaching of Christ." This does not mean merely those words Jesus uttered while on earth. For Christ, the Word of God, spoke in Moses and the prophets (citing Heb. 11:24-26). Jesus spoke also in his apostles, as "is shown by Paul in these words: 'Or do you seek a proof (*dokimēn*) of Christ, who speaketh in me?' " (2 Cor. 13:3). Thus, that knowledge which leads to a good and happy life comes from Christ alone, through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Of the several teachings that Origen regards as first principles, derived from apostolic preaching, is that the Scriptures come from God,[22] and that there is a spiritual meaning to Scripture that often lies hidden behind the material (*Princ.* praef. 8).

21. Osborn, "Clement and the Bible," 122.
22. Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature,* vol. 1, *From Paul to*

Origen does not ignore the subjective effects that Justin and his teacher had spoken of, which Reformation theologians would call the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit: "And he who reads the words of the prophets with care and attention, feeling by the very perusal the traces of the divinity (*ichnos enthousiasmou*)[23] that is in them, will be led by his own emotions to believe that those words which have been deemed to be the words of God are not the compositions of men (*ouk anthrōpōn*)" (*Princ.* 4.1.6).

Eusebius

Of course, not all readers of Scripture were so led. Christianity's intellectual opponents were evidently not placated by the appeal to Scripture's self-authenticating divinity — though it is certainly questionable how seriously this appeal was ever engaged by those opponents. The written refutations by people like Hierocles, a Roman official who helped instigate the great persecution, and especially of Porphyry,[24] who struck hard at Scripture, had gone deep, but their essential criticism of Christian thought apparently had not moved much beyond Galen's.

> As we have such a mob of slanderers flooding us with the accusation that we are unable logically to present a clear demonstration of the truth we hold, and think it enough to retain those who come to us by faith alone, and as they say that we only teach our followers like irrational animals to shut their eyes and staunchly obey what we say without examining it at all, and call them therefore "the faithful" because of their faith as distinct from reason. (*Proof* 1.1.10)[25]

With these criticisms in mind, Eusebius wrote his great two-volume defense, *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Demonstration of the Gospel,* to show that "our

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the Age of Constantine, 285, observe that Origen "intends to take as his point of departure and justificatory criterion the data of the Scriptures. On that foundation he will develop rational arguments, but without forgetting those who reject such proofs, claiming that they wish to restrict themselves to the biblical data." As John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology,* vol. 1, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 33, summarizes, "These first principles, grasped by faith, are the basis for subsequent demonstrations, and are also subsequently used to evaluate other claims to truth, acting thus as a 'canon.'"

23. This word often carries the connotation of ecstatic frenzy, but here "divinity" is a better translation, as will become clear in the section on "Inspiration and Frenzy," 81–83 below.

24. See Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors* 16.4; *The Divine Institutes* 5.2; Macarius, *Apocriticus.*

25. Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry against the Christians,* Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts, Studies in Platonism, Neoplationism, and the Platonic Tradition 1 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 137 n. 16, notes that this was "an authentic critique likely raised by Porphyry."

devotion to the oracles of the Hebrews thus had the support of judgment and sound reason" (*Proof* 1.1.10). Scripture certainly functioned for Eusebius as supreme authority, as God's own voice, though it does not appear that Eusebius stated so clearly as some of his predecessors did the principle of Scripture as the indemonstrable first principle of knowledge, due perhaps to the pressure he felt to answer the specific charges of Porphyry. But the principle is indeed alive and seems to cast a shadow over his entire work. At one point Eusebius observes that Plato himself said "we must in obedience to the law believe, even though . . . without certain or probable proofs (*apodeixeiōn*)" (Timaeus 40e; *Preparation* 2.7.76b).

Eusebius does refer to some predecessors, who gave "demonstrations without number" in written defenses, and refers to commentaries on "the sacred and inspired Scriptures (*hieras kai entheous graphas*), showing by mathematical demonstrations (*apodeixesi*) the unerring (*adiaptōton*) truthfulness of those who from the beginning preached to us the word of godliness"[26] (*Preparation* 1.3.7c). Like Origen, Eusebius appealed to the man he says was the first Christian to deprecate "deceitful and sophistical plausibilities, and to use proofs (*apodeixesin*) free from ambiguity . . . the holy Apostle Paul, who says in one place, 'And our speech and our preaching was not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' " (1 Cor. 2:4, *Preparation* 1.3.7b, citing then 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:5). Eusebius's substantial apologetic work is his attempt to keep Peter's exhortation "to be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason concerning the hope that is in us" (1 Pet. 3:15), and to show that Christians have not devoted themselves to an "unreasoning faith, but to wise and profitable doctrines which contain the way of true religion" (*Preparation* 1.5.14b). But in line with Christians before him, Eusebius places no ultimate confidence in the force of logical demonstrations but depends on "the help which comes down from the God of the universe" supplying "to the teaching and name of our Saviour its irresistible and invincible force, and its victorious power against its enemies" (*Preparation* 1.4.9d-10a).

Even when not stated in terms of an "indemonstrable first principle," Scripture's divine and foundational authority appears to be the common assumption and the common confession of the church. Gregory of Nyssa, more than perhaps any other fourth-century Christian author, absorbed Greek philosophy. He has been accused of merely applying Christian names to Plato's doctrines and calling it Christian theology.[27] Nonetheless, Gregory affirmed "We are not able to affirm what we please. We make Holy Scripture the rule and the measure of every tenet. We approve of that alone which may be made to harmonize with the intention

26. I take it he means the apostles.

27. The charge is that of H. F. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa,* University of California Publications in Classical Philology 11.1 (Berkeley, 1930), 62; see Quasten, 3, 283-84.

of those writings" (*De anima et resurr.,* MG 46, 49B). Scripture is "the guide of reason" (*Contra Eunom.* I, 114, 126), "the criterion of truth" (107).[28]

Two things perhaps need emphasizing here. On the one hand, the assertion that Scripture's truth and divinity are beyond human demonstration, despite the carping of critics, cannot not be regarded as anti-intellectual. The charges leveled by Galen in the second century have echoed through the centuries right up to the present, but they ring no less hollow. Quite obviously, none of the Christian writers treated above found that faith in the teachings of Scripture impeded the robust and exacting employment of logic, historical study, philosophy, or any other tool of human erudition. For them, this view of Scripture provided the only sure foundation for intellectual endeavors of any kind. From Justin and his unnamed Christian teacher, to Clement, Origen, Gregory, and Augustine in our period, through the intellectual achievements of the Middle Ages, right up to Reformed Epistemology in the present, a Scripture-based Christianity has not avoided the encounter with non-Christian philosophies nor has it shirked a responsibility to "lead every thought captive to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) and to do the positive labor of ordering human thought in accordance with Scripture. The words of Scripture, the voice of God, have been the criterion of truth that has legitimized human intellectual activity. Ultimately, Galen's disparagement has proved to be reactionary and misinformed.

On the other hand, the adoption of terminology and ideas from the Greek philosophical tradition could be viewed as a sign of the church's abandonment of Hebrew thought and its rapid capitulation to Hellenistic thought. While in some areas of Christian theology this charge might be made more or less compellingly, I would argue that in what we have seen regarding the doctrine of Scripture, the adoption of terms was essentially defensive and reciprocal. Adopting the philosophical term "first principle" for the privileging of Scripture was a way of "plundering the Egyptians," or, of hoisting the critic with his own petard. The entire fabric of the effort from the Christian side was designed to assert the priority of divine revelation, and faith in that revelation, to syllogistic human reasoning exemplified in the demand for external "demonstration." These early authors saw their approach as a working-out of what was implicit in scriptural passages such as John 20:29 and 1 Corinthians 2:4.

Scripture's Internal Harmony, Consistency, and Inerrancy

Because Scripture was divine and sacred, it was also received as internally consistent, harmonious, and a faultless expression of the divine will. We saw

28. All these cited from J. Quasten, *Patrology,* 3 vols., vol. 3, *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics Inc., 1984 repr. of 1950 orig.), 284.

above Eusebius's allusion to the apostles' unerring truthfulness (*to apseudes kai adiaptōton*), which could plausibly be seen as one testimony to a belief in scriptural inerrancy. Most of the explicit expressions along these lines, though, have to do with Scripture's consistency or harmony.

Following directly the claims made by NT authors themselves, the first noncanonical writers maintain Scripture's truthfulness and harmony. Before referencing a string of scriptural passages Clement of Rome reminds his readers, "You have searched the holy scriptures (*tas hieras graphas*), which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous (*adikon*) or counterfeit (*parapepoiēmenon*) is written in them" (1 *Clem.* 45.2-3). Justin at one point scolds his opponent:

> If you spoke these words, Trypho, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other (*enantias . . . allēlais*), you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext [for saying] that it is contrary [to some other] (*hōs enantia ousa*), since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another (*hoti oudemia graphē tē hetera enantia estin*), I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion as myself. (*Dial.* 65)

Irenaeus too was confident that "the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them" (*AH* 2.27.2), that "the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit" (2.28.2). Such confidence in Scripture's divinity, harmony, and perfection promoted a hermeneutic by which the ambiguous passages could be interpreted by reference to the clear: "all Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent; and the parables shall harmonize with those passages which are perfectly plain; and those statements the meaning of which is clear, shall serve to explain the parables; and through the many diversified utterances [of Scripture] there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who created all things" (2.28.4).

While it may be true that not all the difficulties unearthed by critics since the Enlightenment were known to or acknowledged by the ancients, I dare to say that a great many of them were. The ancients were not ignorant of "the phenomena" of Scripture. Because of their relatively greater accessibility and their centrality to the evangelistic and apologetic task, the four Gospels became a very public forum for attack, defense, and discussion of the harmony of Christian Scripture. From at least the time of Papias's elder, probably ca. 100, discrepancies between the narratives of the Gospels were known and treated by Christians. The elder

defended Mark's "order" (*taxis*), or lack thereof, on the basis of his intention to record simply but faithfully what he had heard from Peter (Eusebius, *HE* 3.39.15-16). The author of the *Muratorian Fragment,*[29] too, acknowledged differences, but credited the Gospels with a Spirit-authored unity.

> And so, though various elements [or beginnings] may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future.[30]

Confidence in this harmony between the Gospels had already resulted in a new literary form, the *Diatessaron,* which attempted to combine all four Gospel accounts into a single harmonized narrative. We know of at least two before Irenaeus, one by Theophilus of Antioch and the more famous one by Tatian the Syrian. The name given to these productions, diatessaron, itself was a musical term for the interval we call "a fourth" and may well have been chosen because of a conception of harmony that was quite in keeping with that which Irenaeus would soon articulate concerning the four Gospels (*AH* 3.11.8) and Scripture in general. This conviction of an underlying harmony between the evangelists is no doubt also responsible for a significant number of "harmonizations" introduced by "well-meaning" scribes into the textual tradition of the Gospels, and of the NT generally.

The analogy with musical harmony is seen in Origen as well. Those who claim to find disharmony in Scripture, he says, are like those who do not recognize harmony in music. The blessed peacemaker (Matt. 5:9) "knows that all the Scripture

29. The traditional date of the *MF* (late second or early third century) has been contested in favor of a date in the second half of the fourth century. The main arguments for the later date have been made by A. C. Sundberg, "Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon," *Studia Evangelica* 4, no. 1 (1968): 452-61; "Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List," *HTR* 66 (1973): 1-41; and G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). The theory fails, however, to account adequately for the fragment's dating of itself not long after Hermas's *The Shepherd,* and ignores much of the evidence for a late second-century context; see C. E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 129-34. The most thorough response to Sundberg/Hahneman is Joseph Verheyden, "The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute," in J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge, *The Biblical Canons,* BETL 163 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 487-556.

30. The translation of Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 305-6.

is the one perfect and harmonized [or fitted] instrument of God, which from different sounds gives forth one saving voice to those willing to learn, which stops and restrains every working of an evil spirit, just as the music of David laid to rest the evil spirit in Saul, which also was choking him (1 Sam. 16:14)" (*Comm. Matt.* 2).[31] In Origen, however, we encounter a more complex musicology; Scripture's perfect harmony did not mean that it contained no "errors," on the material (as opposed to spiritual) level. "The chief concern of the evangelists," he wrote, "was related to the mysteries; they did not so much care to report the accurate history of the events as to set forth the mystery of those things that derive from the historical facts. . . . The evangelists sometimes changed historical circumstances to the benefit of the spiritual purpose, so that they reported that something happened in a determined place and time, although in fact it happened in another place and time" (*Comm. John* 10.5.19). Michael Holmes summarizes Origen's statements: "in order to accomplish its primary goal the Word utilized whenever possible actual historical events. But when these were not suitable, the Word worked fictional elements into the narrative in order to get the desired message across."[32] This applied to both the OT and the NT.

Holmes observes that Origen might be called an inerrantist with respect to the spiritual meaning of Scripture, but certainly not with respect to its literal meaning, at least not as inerrancy is usually understood. One might also observe that these things in Scripture that in Origen's view "are not true according to the bodily sense" (*Princ.* 4.2.9) may be historically inaccurate or factually false, but are not exactly mistakes or "errors," for they are deliberately placed there by the Spirit, intended not to deceive but to lead into deeper spiritual truth. It is only the sensual man who is led astray by focusing on the mere letter (*Hom. Gen.* 10.5).

Origen's openness to recognizing historical untruths "according to the letter"[33] cannot be separated from his particular hermeneutical approach and his enthusiasm to get to the "spiritual realities" of which the bodily realities are fig-

31. *ANF* 10, 413.

32. Michael Holmes, "Origen and the Inerrancy of Scripture," *JETS* 24 (1981): 221-31 at 227. See also Enrique Nardoni, "Origen's Concept of Biblical Inspiration," *Second Century* 4 (1984): 9-23 at 18. He cites S. Laeuchli, "The Polarity of the Gospels in the Exegesis of Origen," *Church History* 21 (1952): 215, "In definitive contrast to Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch, here for the first time a theologian of the church realizes the full impossibility of any historical harmonization of the gospels."

33. Origen sometimes drew distinctions between those parts of Scripture that had the quality of direct revelation, and those that came from the mind of the writer. Though all the Scriptures current in the church "are believed to be divine" (*Comm. John* 1.14), Origen also sometimes speaks as though there is a hierarchy among them: "we must say that the apostolic writings are wise and trustworthy and most beneficial; they are not, to be sure, on a par with 'Thus says the Lord almighty'" (*Comm. John* 1.15). Because of his many assertions of the divinity, sanctity, and authority of all the Scriptures, one imagines that the distinctions he has in mind here are much like genre distinctions.

ures. Historical irregularities merely alert the reader that there is a deeper spiritual meaning to be found. Thus, one can understand how the hunt to discover spiritual treasures for the church[34] might not only dampen interest in resolving an apparent discrepancy, but perhaps even magnify the discrepancy. This appears, for example, in his exposition of Genesis 24:16, where Origen explains, "history is not being narrated, but mysteries are interwoven" (*Hom. Gen.* 10.4). Precisely this tendency has been observed in Origen's predecessor and "mentor" in allegorical method, Philo of Alexandria. Maren Niehoff writes that Philo "stresses problems in the literal text in order to make room for allegory. . . . The literal dimension of Scripture is thus not altogether dismissed, but shown to be problematic to a degree that renders the allegorical meaning plausible."[35] A desire to showcase the benefits of spiritual exegesis can open one's eyes to literal contradictions where others may not see them.

In Origen's Christian context, when it came to admitting factual or historical untruths in Scripture, it may be that he was not "an isolated example."[36] Yet it is not easy to find even among his many admirers[37] any who were as quick to concede the presence of "inerrant errors" in Scripture as he was, or as willing to abandon the attempt to reconcile Scripture with reason or history or itself (even Origen, of course, did this at times). Recall the comment of Eusebius, one of Origen's most enthusiastic supporters,[38] about the apostles' unerring truthfulness. We know that Origen was opposed even in his lifetime by Christians who believed he had exceeded the bounds of responsible exegesis. But another reason for the general failure of other Christian writers to match Origen's boldness in this regard had to be the publication of a work called *Against the Christians* by a neo-Platonist critic who claimed that, as a young man, he had known the great Christian teacher.[39] Porphyry of Tyre, says Kofsky, "sharply criticized the tendency to allegorical

34. By his allegorical treatment of Genesis 24:15-16, he aims to "edify the Church of God" and to challenge "very sluggish and inactive hearers with the examples of the saints and mystical explanations" (*Hom Gen* 10.5).

35. See Maren R. Niehoff, "Philo's Scholarly Inquiries into the Story of Paradise," in *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views,* ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28-42 at 37. Niehoff notes as well some of the earlier background in pagan allegorizations of Homer.

36. So Holmes, "Inerrancy," 230.

37. For an example of one of his critics (Epiphanius), see Hill, *Johannine Corpus,* 186-90.

38. See Charles Kannengiesser, "Eusebius of Caesarea, Origenist," in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism,* ed. Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 435-66 at 459.

39. See Eusebius, *HE* 6.19.3-8. It has of course been questioned whether Porphyry was referring to Origen the Christian or another man by that name. But Porphyry's description, given by Eusebius (*HE* 6.19.3-8), makes it hard to think it was not the famous biblical scholar we know. See also R. M. Berchman, "In the Shadow of Origen: Porphyry and the Patristic Origins of New Testament Criticism," in G. Dorival and A. Le Boulluec, *Origeniana Sexta: Origène et*

interpretation popular among Christians. He was well aware that this exegetical approach offered a solution to difficulties presented by the Scriptures. . . . By ruling out allegorical interpretation one exposed the difficulties presented by the text."[40] Porphyry specifically named Origen as the one who took from the Greeks the absurdity (*atopia*) which is the allegorical method (*ton metalēptikon tropon*) and introduced it to the Christians (Fr. 39).[41]

Despite the best efforts of Diodorus of Tarsus and other teachers of the Antiochene school, Christians of course never completely discarded the allegorical method. Yet its vulnerability to abuse, particularly when used as a facile way to avoid exegetical difficulties, came to be widely recognized. Particularly after the withering critique of Porphyry, Christian scholars in general would not be so blithe as Origen sometimes seemed to be about the historical, factual, or internal consistency problems in Scripture. Apologetic responses to informed attacks on Scripture required greater sophistication and facility with the tools employed by the critics. According to Berchman, Porphyry's critique "led Christians to a defense of scripture on historical and literary grounds. They became higher critics of scripture themselves."[42] The use of literary and historical methods by Christian writers perennially raises questions among Christian communities about compromise and corruption from without. But it would be wrong to surmise that even the appropriation of the methods of ancient higher criticism by Christian scholars meant or must mean a weakening of faith in the transcendent power and veracity of Scripture.

"If we are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in Scripture," wrote Augustine in his response to Faustus (397-400), "it is not allowable to say, The author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty,[43] or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood" (*CFaust.* 11.5). Faustus had rejected the Gospel testimonies because of the different genealogies of Jesus given in Matthew and Luke (a problem also observed by Porphyry). Augustine points out that many able and learned men had seen the obvious inconsistency and had found that "there is more in it than appears at first sight" (11.2). "But with a due regard to the high authority of Scripture, they believed that there was something here which would be given to those that ask, and denied to those that snarl; would be found by those that seek, and taken away from those that criticise; would be open

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la Bible/Origen and the Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum Chantilly, 30 août-3 septembre 1993 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 657-73.

40. Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea Against Paganism* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29. See also Berchman, *Porphyry,* 58: "What angered Porphyry was the way in which Christians used allegory to explain away, as he saw it, the difficulties in the Jewish Bible."

41. Kofsky, *Eusebius,* 58.

42. Berchman, *Porphyry,* 60.

43. Berchman is mistaken when claiming (*Porphyry,* 69) that Augustine never appealed to copyist error in resolving difficulties. E.g., *On the Harmony of the Evangelists* 3.7.29.

to those that knock, and shut against those that contradict. They asked, sought, and knocked; they received, found, and entered in" (*CFaust.* 3.2). As he would say elsewhere, "It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones" (*OCD* 2.15, Green's translation).

What Augustine found when he sought concerning this difficulty was not a spiritual lesson derived by allegory, but simply that one evangelist's account gave Joseph's biological father, the other his adoptive father. Augustine then summarizes his dealings with the variations between the evangelists: "if one says one thing, and another another, or one in one way and another in another, still they all speak truth, and in no way contradict one another; only let the reader be reverent and humble, not in an heretical spirit seeking occasion for strife, but with a believing heart desiring edification" (*CFaust.* 3.5).[44]

Well aware of the critical attacks of Porphyry and others,[45] Augustine could assert that the evangelists "in no way contradict one another." In about the year 400 Augustine wrote a laborious treatise *On the Harmony of the Evangelists.* While his solutions may not always completely satisfy, he remained faithful to his conviction of Scripture's truthfulness, harmony, and consistency. We even have in his letter to Jerome (*Ep.* 82.1.3) dated to 404/405 (PL 33) at least one statement of inerrancy proper.[46]

> I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error *(ut nullum eorum auctorem scribendo aliquid errasse firmissime credam)*.[47] And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the Ms. *(codicem)* is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what

44. Faustus, like many who would follow, showed a tendency to declare inauthentic those portions of the New Testament that did not support his doctrines. This ploy, in Augustine's view, "is the last gasp of a heretic in the clutches of truth; or rather it is the breath of corruption itself" (*CFaustum* 10.3).

45. Berchman, *Porphyry,* 224-25, "By employing the very critical approaches Porphyry used to ridicule the truth claims of the Bible, Augustine turned Porphyry on his head. He defended the truth claims of scripture by demonstrating them efficacious — in reference to correspondence theories of truth." Berchman speaks of Augustine's approach as necessitating an abandonment of "Origen's coherence interpretation of the Bible, which was based on allegorical and symbolic interpretations of scripture" (225 n. 8).

46. It is evident that Augustine is thinking not merely of intentional deception when he says he believes that Scripture's authors are completely free from error. On the assertions of Rogers and McKim to the contrary, see John Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 44-46.

47. I have taken the Latin text of Augustine's writings from the *S. Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia — edition latina* at http://www.augustinus.it/index2.htm.

> was said, or I myself have failed to understand it. As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason.

Identity (Canon) of Scripture

Self-Authenticating and Self-Delimiting?

One advantage of considering the kinds of materials we have reviewed in the first section of this essay is that it helps us to comprehend how differently the ancients viewed the Scriptures from the way moderns do.[48] It is widely taught today that the Scripture "selection process" began in the second century,[49] arising out of the churches' felt needs for a new set of authoritative Scriptures,[50] and was pursued through criteria developed by the church over time. Any conviction that there were or ought to be boundaries for this new set of Scriptures, we are often told, came fairly late: "In the early church there appears to be no interest in fixed collections of scriptures much before the fourth century."[51]

But the confession of early church leaders presents a problem for this ap-

48. Much of the material in this section will be found in expanded form in C. E. Hill, "God's Speech in These Last Days: The New Testament Canon as an Eschatological Phenomenon," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church. Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.,* ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 203-54, and "The New Testament Canon: *Deconstructio ad Absurdum?*" *JETS* 52 (2009): 101-19.

49. As representing this view, see, e.g., Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

50. If the first century is mentioned, it is often only to say how the church at that time felt no need for any new Scriptures, let alone any closed canon of Scripture: McDonald, *Biblical Canon,* 422; Dungan, *Constantine's Bible,* 79. Allert, *High View,* 125, following von Campenhausen and Kurt Aland, extends this claim through the second century as well, saying the church had no need of a canon because it had the rule of faith. But if this is true, it had no need of Scripture either. On the rule of faith, see the section on "Scripture, Tradition, and Authority," ♦ 72–76 below.

51. Lee Martin McDonald, "What Do We Mean by Canon? Ancient and Modern Questions," in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of "Canonical" and "Non-Canonical" Religious Texts,* ed. James H. Charlesworth and Lee Martin McDonald (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 8-40 at 11.

proach. Clement's statement, quoted above, rings in the ear: "whatever comes into judgment is not to be believed before it is judged, so that what is in need of judgment cannot be a first principle." How could a church which confessed that Scripture is the self-authenticating voice of God presume to determine *if* it needed a new set (or even the old set) of Scriptures? How could it presume to *select* what books it thought it needed as Scripture?[52] I would argue that there is no reason to think that it did either of these things. If Scripture is its own interpreter, should it not also be its own delimiter? There are of course no canonical lists contained in Scripture itself (though Jesus in Luke 24 gives the three categories of the OT writings). But Scripture did provide the principle for a canon of new Scripture, and this seems to have been recognized by second-century writers.

For Justin, the same prophetic Scriptures that proclaimed beforehand the identity of the Christ, his deeds, his sufferings, his resurrection, and the founding of his church, also predicted an authoritative new word to be delivered to all nations.[53] The mighty scepter of Psalm 110:2, by which the LORD would rule in the midst of his foes, is, according to Justin, the word of Jesus' apostles, which went forth from Zion and is preached everywhere (*1 Apol.* 45.5). Perhaps the single most influential passage in this regard came from the prophet Isaiah, echoed by Micah, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3 cf. Mic. 4:2).[54] This prophecy, Justin affirms, predicted the apostolic preaching: "For from Jerusalem there went out into the world men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking: but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God" (*1 Apol.* 39.3; cf. *Dial.* 24.1, 3). Irenaeus too interprets this law which goes forth from Zion in Isaiah's prophecy as "the word of God, preached by the apostles, who went forth from Jerusalem."[55] But the appeal to Isaiah 2:3 (Mic. 4:2) did not originate in the second century. Jesus in Luke and Acts alludes

52. Or, as McDonald prefers to say, as a resource "for Christian identity and guidance" (McDonald, *Biblical Canon,* 422).

53. See C. E. Hill, "Justin and the New Testament Writings," in *Studia Patristica* 30, ed. E. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 42-48, at 46. Justin also sees the preaching ministry of the apostles predicted in Ps. 110:2 (*1 Apol.* 45.5); Exod. 28:33 (*Dial.* 42.1); and Ps. 19:2 (*Dial.* 64.8).

54. Reidar Hvalvik says that "in the early church Isa 2:3 (Mic 4:2) is the central proof-text for the apostolic mission." Reidar Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming His Law to the Apostles: The *Traditio Legis*-Motif in Early Christian Art and Literature," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune,* ed. John Fotopoulos, NovTSupp 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 419; cf. Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile,* NovTSup 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 160; cf. also 356ff. Among other instances, Hvalvik discusses Augustine, *City of God* 10.32, which directly links Isa. 2:2-3 to Jesus' words in Luke 24:44-47.

55. *AH* 4.34.4; see also *Proof of Apostolic Preaching* 86; Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha* 7.

to this passage in the founding of the apostles' mission to be his witnesses in all the world, "beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).[56]

These and other prophetic texts constituted, for Jesus and the apostles and for early church writers, the scriptural authorization for the apostolic preaching, a new law and word of the Lord; in effect, these texts also limited that new law and word of the Lord to what the apostles and their assistants would produce in the original apostolic mission.[57] The upshot of this is that the constant appeal in the church to the apostles and their authority was not the result of any church's decision to adopt "apostolicity" as one of its "criteria" for selecting its books of sacred Scripture. Apostolicity was the authorizing and delimiting principle given by Scripture itself.

The teaching authority conferred by Jesus on his apostles permeates the apostolic ministry as it is related in Acts and the New Testament epistles. Though the practice of public reading of Scripture in the synagogues was taken over in Christian meetings for worship, a new source arose immediately to take its place alongside the Hebrew Scriptures. On the day of Pentecost, after Peter had finished preaching, which preaching included exposition of Joel and the Psalms, we read, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The oral teaching of Jesus' apostles continued to center, no doubt, on the words and deeds of Jesus to which they were commissioned witnesses. In the next decades written "Gospels" containing their remembered accounts would appear, and the apostle Paul would instruct that letters containing his teaching be read out to the congregations (Col. 4:16, cf. 2 Cor. 10:10; Eph. 3:4; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:14). This of itself need not indicate a scriptural status for Paul's letters. But the authority with which he wrote as an apostle and the obedience he expected to his written word (1 Cor. 14:37-38; 2 Thess. 3:14) tell in favor of such a recognition from the first. In any case, 1 Peter seems to use phrases and concepts from some of Paul's letters, and 2 Peter 3:15-16 refers to a known collection of Paul's letters as Scripture. A collection was made either by Paul himself or, and at any rate, not long after his death.[58]

56. For more on this, see Hill, "God's Speech."

57. This conception of apostolicity was not, of course, so restricted as to apply to only what an apostle personally spoke or penned. The reference here to "assistants" is intentional and reflects the universal recognition of the legitimate apostolicity of writers like Mark and Luke, the author of Hebrews (if he was not Paul), and even the Lord's brothers (Gal. 1:18; Jude 1) James and Jude, the former of whom, at least, is known to have been visited by the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:7) and is explicitly aligned with the apostles in apostolic ministry in New Testament writings (Acts 12:17; 15:14-21; 21:18; Gal. 1:18, etc.).

58. See, among others, David Trobisch, his *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik,* NTOA 10 (Freiburg/Göttingen, 1989), summarized in his *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 100.

There is a remarkably clean continuity between the NT writings and the early non-canonical writings on the understanding of the apostles as the authoritative custodians and publishers of the gospel of Jesus. Still in the first century, Clement of Rome writes, "The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ" (*1 Clem.* 42.1-2). The same understanding is present in the thought of Ignatius (*Magn.* 6.1; 7.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1),[59] Polycarp (*Phil.* 6.3), Ps. Barnabas (5.9; 8.3) and is generally assumed among non-orthodox writers as well. From here it becomes virtually the universal Christian tradition (until modern times).

The Second Century

In the last half of the second century, church leaders in such disparate parts of the empire as Lyons, Antioch, and Alexandria would speak of the Gospels and other literature as what had been handed down to them (Irenaeus; Serapion; Clement).[60] This denotes the very tangible aspect of the reception of the scriptural writings as a process that took place in real life: church leaders knew the collections that they had inherited from their predecessors, collections they perceived as going back to the apostles.[61] The collections in these churches must indeed have developed from the actual artifacts of the original apostolic mission, particularly in the churches founded during that mission, judging from the early date by which we find some of these records in use. Echoes of Jesus' teaching, sometimes actual quotations from the written Gospels, reverberate throughout the works of the Apostolic Fathers. And just as quickly, the letters of Paul are explicitly referenced (2 Peter; *1 Clem.;* Ignatius; Polycarp), and letters of Peter, John, and "To the Hebrews" are used in the composition of early inter-ecclesial correspondence (*1 Clem.;* Polycarp).[62]

There is a recognizable continuity between the apostolic sources used in Antioch (Ignatius), Asia Minor (Polycarp), Rome (Clement), and elsewhere (Ps. Barnabas — Alexandria?) at the beginning of the second century. It was surely

59. C. E. Hill, "Ignatius and the Apostolate: The Witness of Ignatius to the Emergence of Christian Scripture," in *Studia Patristica* 36, ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 226-48.

60. Irenaeus, *AH* 3.1.1, etc.; Clement, *Strom.* 3.13.93; Serapion in Eusebius, *HE* 6.12.3-6.

61. Tertullian (*Praescr.* 36), refers to the apostolic churches, "in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read *(authenticate litterae eorum recitantur).*" These churches, he claims, held "as a sacred deposit *(sacrosanctum)*" the apostolic letters (*adv. Marc.* 4.5).

62. For recent critical evaluations see A. Gregory and C. Tuckett, eds., *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

inevitable, however, there should also be variation and imperfection in the process of preserving, collecting, and handing down what Jesus' apostles and their companions left behind. Confusion would arise as well from the appearance of other books that had no direct or indirect historical connection with apostles, but which in form or in content (some also in title) resembled those that had.

While by the end of the second century discrepancies in the collections of certain churches were coming to light, it is at least the case that, as far as we can tell, they all had collections. As we begin to hear that some doubted the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, or did not want *The Shepherd* read in church, etc., we hear of no church that regarded *no* Christian writings as Scripture or as authoritative. There are no reports of anybody protesting, "the orally-transmitted-words-of-Jesus, and the orally-transmitted-words-of-Jesus alone! If they were good enough for Peter and Paul . . ." Nor do the collections appear to be greatly at variance, as one might expect they would be, if indeed the diversity among the churches and the blurriness of lines of demarcation were as great as many current scholars allege.

As early as Ignatius, writing probably in about 107/108,[63] we have a Christian using the categories of "gospel" and "apostles." When it is seen that he uses these categories of religious authority alongside the canonical categories for the OT Scriptures, "the prophecies . . . the law of Moses," etc. (*Smyrn.* 5.1, cf. *Phld.* 5.1-2; 8.2; 9.1-2; *Smyrn.* 7.2), it appears as if Ignatius may be thinking of the written collection in the church at Antioch.[64] As early as Papias elder (c. 100), we have reference to the titles of at least two of the Gospels, Matthew and Mark (Eusebius, *HE* 3.39.15-16), and very possibly to all four (*HE* 3.24.5-17).[65] The brief excerpt from Papias's work preserved by Eusebius in *HE* 3.39.15-16 shows us that churches in Asia Minor already at the dawn of the second century were interested to have information about their written apostolic sources for the words and acts of Jesus.

In Justin we see that it is not only the words of Jesus, contained in the "Memoirs of the Apostles," which are recognized as being "big with power." The words of his apostles too were recognized as the words of God (*Dial.* 119.6). Though Justin does not mention apostolic epistles, the effects of Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, and possibly others, in his writings are well known to scholars.[66] He also considers the Apocalypse of John to be the work of the

63. Some date Ignatius's writings two or more decades later.

64. C. E. Hill, "Ignatius, 'the Gospel' and the Gospels," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers,* ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 267-85, esp. 280, and the chart on 284-85, which notes other uses of the categories in the second century.

65. C. E. Hill, "What Papias Said about John (and Luke): A 'New' Papian Fragment," *JTS* 49 (1998): 582-629; " 'The Orthodox Gospel': The Reception of John in the Great Church prior to Irenaeus," in *The Legacy of John,* ed. Tuomas Rasimus (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 233-300 at 285-94.

66. See Oskar Skarsaune, "Justin and His Bible," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds,* ed. Sara

apostle (*Dial.* 81.4). Skarsaune is right that in Justin's writings, all of which were addressed to outsiders, "there is not yet any clear delimitation of exactly which documents should be considered authoritative above others, once we are outside the category of *Memoirs* or Gospels."[67] Skarsaune is also right when he continues, "On the other hand, Justin has an incipient canon in the way he refers to the Gospels, exactly as *Memoirs,* and he has a kind of implicit canon in the decisive role he accords to the apostles."[68]

Two opposing tendencies seem to be visible in the second century. There was an ideal of unity throughout the universal church. Contrary to what some have said, this was not an ideal that originated only with Eusebius or with Constantine in the fourth century. The term "catholic," in use since at least Ignatius, depicts the ideal, and a self-conception. But at the same time there was also a respect paid to individual churches and their traditions, particularly if those traditions were held to go back to the apostles. We see this in one of the most divisive debates of the second century, the quartodeciman controversy. Victor of Rome, apparently motivated by a desire for uniformity, went to the extreme of cutting off fellowship with the churches of Asia Minor who had a distinctive Easter practice (Eusebius, *HE* 5.24.9). Irenaeus's cool-headed approach would eventually prevail. He respected the antiquity of both practices, and the claim that each side made that it had received these practices from the times of the apostles. Irenaeus's judgment was that, in this case, diversity must be allowed: "the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith" (*HE* 5.24.13). It would be wrong to conclude, based on this diversity of practice, that at the time of the controversy there was no Easter observance at all in Christianity, or no concern about it, only that there was no *universally* established Easter practice. It is similar, I would suggest, with conceptions of a NT canon.

By the end of the second century, judging from the writings of Justin, Melito, the *Muratorian Fragment,* Theophilus, Irenaeus, Serapion, Clement, Tertullian, and Hippolytus in particular, a four-Gospel canon, Acts, a corpus of thirteen or fourteen of Paul's letters (with or without Hebrews), the Revelation of John and at least 1 Peter and 1 John and probably Jude must have been in collections of new covenant Scripture throughout the empire. It is hard to discern the status of the other Catholic Epistles at this time, as their attestation is infrequent. It may be that it was the Syrian church which was the main holdout against other members of this corpus. Even in the late fourth century and afterwards the churches in that region omitted the Catholic Epistles from their canon. There are in addition

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Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 53-76; 179-87, at 74, and his list of studies establishing this in n. 91. He notes the possible, though debatable, traces of James, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

67. Skarsaune, "Justin and His Bible," 76.

68. Skarsaune, "Justin and His Bible," 76.

a few other popular books that could boast some support early on, chiefly the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *The Shepherd,* and to a lesser extent Ps. Barnabas, and the *Didache* (all cited favorably or as Scripture by Clement of Alexandria). There is no support among the writers listed above for the *Gospel of Thomas* or any of the so-called gnostic Gospels.

The third century would see at least the following three developments. First, we hear less and less of the *Apocalypse of Peter, The Shepherd* (after the *MF* and Tertullian in particular), Ps. Barnabas, and the *Didache.* Second, the book of Revelation took a hit. After widespread use as Scripture for a century in both east and west, it came under suspicion due to the way it was being interpreted. The criticism evidently began in Rome, in relation especially to the Montanist controversy, but also to chiliasm.[69] The issue seems to have been quickly resolved there, however. Doubt took root in the east, after Dionysius of Alexandria rejected on critical grounds the book's apostolic authorship (though not its revelatory status, Eusebius *HE* 7.25.7). It was probably Eusebius's equivocation about the book in his widely read *Ecclesiastical History* (3.25.1-7) however, which was most responsible for several eastern sources in the fourth and fifth centuries not including Revelation in their canonical lists.[70] Third, by at least sometime in the late third century the collection of seven catholic letters existed as a corpus (Eusebius, *HE* 2.23-24-25).

That there was variation, beyond the "core" books, and at least no successful, far-reaching attempt to impose any strict limitation, accompanied by the promulgation of authoritative lists, has been widely interpreted to mean that there were was no conception at all of Scripture as a definite or closed set of books.[71] The evidence shows, however, not the absence of a notion of delimitation but rather a level of disagreement or simply uncertainty about what belonged in that delimited body of writings. First of all, it does not seem to be the case that no attempts were made to achieve agreement, even by the beginning of the third century. Tertullian mentions church councils that had deliberated on canon issues at least far

69. It is possible that the attack of Gaius, which alleged that Revelation had been authored by the heretic Cerinthus, also pertained to the Gospel of John. But the evidence for this is quite debatable. For more see Hill, *Johannine Corpus,* 172-204.

70. Cyril of Jerusalem, ca. 350, *Catech. Lect.* 4.33; Synod of Laodicea, 363; first Council of Carthage, 397.

71. Cf. Sundberg, "Revised History"; Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment;* McDonald, *Biblical Canon;* Dungan, *Constantine's Bible;* Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). Allert, 144-45, states, "No matter how one looks at the history, it is difficult to maintain that the church had a closed New Testament canon for the first four hundred years of its existence. This means that an appeal to the 'Bible' as the early church's sole rule for faith and life is anachronistic." One will find an ancient writer, Hippolytus, caught in a display of "anachronism" in his *Contra Noetum* 9, cited early in this chapter.

enough to reject *The Shepherd* (*De Pudicitia* 10).[72] Despite the lack of treatment it has received, this reference will not disappear simply through neglect, or by a flippant attribution to Tertullian's "rhetoric."[73] In my opinion, the *Muratorian Fragment* shows signs of being related to one of these councils; it speaks more prescriptively for the church, as a council would, than does Origen or Eusebius.[74]

Elsewhere I have shown several other indications that churches and individuals well before the fourth century did assume that even the NT Scriptures were a closed body of writings.[75] Another such indication is contained in the records of the quartodeciman controversy just mentioned (probably in the early 190s). Eusebius preserves portions of a letter written by Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, who at one point protested, "I have studied all holy Scripture (*pasan hagian graphēn dielēlythōs*), I am not afraid of threats." If, as Dungan says, "*scripture* is a boundless living mass of heterogenous sacred texts,"[76] how did Polycrates know when to stop studying?

More evidence that Christians had a notion of a limited collection of authoritative, new covenant books by the end of the second century has come to light recently.[77] At some point in the early history of Christian scribal culture, some Christian scribes began to place a *siglum* in the left-hand margins of books they were copying to mark quotations from Scripture. This *siglum,* an arrow or wedge-shaped sign known as a *diplē* (pl. *diplai*), had been adapted from Greek scholarship where it had served for some time as a multipurpose marginal marking to indicate some textual or paratextual feature. The sign is used (though not consistently) in the great fourth- and fifth-century uncial manuscripts of the Bible, a, A, B, C, and D^e, to mark where NT writers quote the OT. But our earliest evidence so far for this practice occurs in Christian, non-Biblical manuscripts where an author quotes Scripture (I have not yet found the marking used by Christian scribes for any citations not presumed to be scriptural).[78] Clearly, the scribes who used this *siglum* (and not all did) had to know in advance which quotations to mark and which ones not to mark; that is, they must have had some notion of

72. Perhaps what Tertullian says about the book of Hebrews (which he ascribes to Barnabas, accepting the denial of Pauline authorship) reflects the concerns of one or more of these councils.

73. *Pace* Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment,* 63, followed by several others.

74. See Hill, *Johannine Corpus,* 132-34.

75. C. E. Hill, "The Debate over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 437-52; *"Deconstructio ad Absurdum."*

76. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible,* 132-33.

77. For a full presentation of the evidence, see Charles E. Hill, "Irenaeus, the Scribes, and the Scriptures. Papyrological and Theological Observations from P.Oxy 3.405," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy,* ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 119-30.

78. The only explicit statement I have found concerning the use of this sign in antiquity comes from Isidore of Seville (560-636) in his *Etymologies* 1.21.13: "Our scribes place this in books of churchmen to separate or to make clear the citations of Sacred Scriptures."

a limited corpus of Scripture. For instance, the scribe of Codex Alexandrinus (5th c.) does *not* use *diplai* for Paul's citations of two pagan authors at Acts 17:28, nor for the citation of Enoch in Jude 14–15, nor for the citation of Epimenides in Titus 1:12. When did Christian scribes begin using this sign to mark scriptural quotations? We do not know, but we have two instances that may date from the end of the second century or the early third century. One is a fragment of Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* (P.Oxy. 3.405, from book 3), which papyrologist Colin Roberts confidently dated to the end of the second century.[79] In the fragment Irenaeus quotes Matthew 3:16. The other early example is a fragment from an unidentified Christian theological work, P.Mich. xviii.764, dated by its editor to the second or third century.[80] The left margin of the right-hand column of the fragment contains *diplai* marking citations of Jeremiah 18:3-6 and 1 Corinthians 3:13.

What is most significant for our purposes is that each of these early examples uses the *diplai* to mark quotations not simply from an OT book but from a NT book (Matthew and 1 Corinthians). The occurrence of this scribal convention as early as the late second or early third century is one more indication that Christians had a conception of Scripture as a distinct set of sacred texts, so much so that they could mark them out visually in their writings.

The Twenty-Seven Book Canon

In his *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.13 Augustine gave a list of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. The OT books are the traditional Protestant Canon plus six others: Tobias, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus (this corresponds to the contents of Codex Sinaiticus).[81] The NT books are exactly the twenty-seven books that make up the NT now accepted by the three major branches of Christianity. Before naming the books, Augustine notes that the skillful interpreter of the sacred writings will know all of these books and in regard to the canonical Scriptures will follow the judgment of the majority of churches, and those in particular that had apostolic foundations.

> Accordingly, among the canonical Scriptures he will judge according to the following standard: to prefer those that are received by all the catholic churches to those which some do not receive. Among those, again, which are not received

79. C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt,* The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1977 (London, 1979), 23.

80. Cornelia Eva Römer, "7.64. Gemeinderbrief, Predict oder Homilie über den Menschen im Angesicht des Jüngsten Gerichts," in *P. Michigan Koenen (= P. Mich. Xviii): Michigan Texts Published in Honor of Ludwig Koenen,* ed. Cornelia E. Römer and Traianos Gagos (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), 35-43.

81. See Stephen Dempster's chapter in this volume.

> by all, he will prefer such as have the sanction of the greater number and those of greater authority, to such as are held by the smaller number and those of less authority. If, however, he shall find that some books are held by the greater number of churches, and others by the churches of greater authority (though this is not a very likely thing to happen), I think that in such a case the authority on the two sides is to be looked upon as equal. (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.12)[82]

By those books "not received by all," he may have had in mind the OT books outside the list acknowledged by the Jews. It at least seems that virtually all the canon lists from the fourth and fifth centuries agree on that smaller canon, beyond which there is variation in the lists. When Augustine says to *prefer*[83] the books received by all, he might mean that the extra six might not be used with the same level of authority as the rest in the construction of Christian doctrine, and this would form an analogy with the way these (and other) books are termed "deuterocanonical" even by contemporary Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

It is possible that Augustine might also have had some NT books in mind as "not received by all." We know that at this time there were churches which did not receive one or more of the books 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude,[84] James, Hebrews, Revelation. Yet in the decade of the 390s these same twenty-seven books would be acknowledged by Augustine (here) and by a council in Hippo, by a synod in Carthage, by Rufinus in Rome, by Jerome in Bethlehem (*Ep.* 53.9; 394), and by Amphilocius of Iconium in Asia Minor *(Iambi ad Seleucum)*. These are the books Jerome translated for his new Latin edition, and this would have a decisive effect on Western Christianity. As is well known, this same list had been claimed by Athanasius thirty years earlier in Alexandria in his Easter letter of 367 (the same list minus Revelation had been promulgated by the Council of Laodicea in 363). It is often stated that Athanasius's letter in 367 signifies the first time a definite NT canon with exactly these twenty-seven books appears. But on the contrary, it seems that by the time Athanasius identified it, this twenty-seven-book New Testament had already had a long history of acceptance in the church.

These same twenty-seven books are the ones which Eusebius, fifty or more years earlier, noted were either "recognized" (*homologoumenoi*) by all or "dis-

82. See Anne-Marie la Bonnardière, "Le canon des divines Ecritures," in *Saint Augustin et la Bible,* ed. Anne-Marie la Bonnardière (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), 287-301.

83. I take it he does not mean "preferring" them in the sense of including them in the canon, as he indicates that they are canonical, but preferring them in the sense of building Christian doctrine from them.

84. At least by the time of Jerome, Jude was questioned because of its citation of 1 Enoch: "Jude the brother of James, left a short epistle which is reckoned among the seven catholic epistles, and because in it he quotes from the apocryphal book of Enoch it is rejected by many. Nevertheless by age and use it has gained authority and is reckoned among the Holy Scriptures." See Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 4. Cf. Eusebius, *HE* 2.23.25.

puted (*antilegoumenoi*)" but known to most (*HE* 3.25).[85] It is true that Eusebius only regards the books in the first category as "covenanted," which appears to be his terminology for "in the New Testament" or what we might call "canonical." In the second category are the five books, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2-3 John. It is the "disputed" label that has drawn most of the critical attention, while not so much attention has been paid to the rest of Eusebius's description: "disputed but nevertheless known to most."[86] In another passage he says these books are "disputed yet nevertheless used publicly by many in most churches" (*HE* 3.31.6).[87] And when he elsewhere mentions James and Jude as belonging to the group of "the so-called Catholic Epistles," he notes, "we know that these have been read publicly along with the remaining epistles in most churches" (2.23.24-25). Besides these five, he places no other books in the same category. Consequently, no matter where we judge Eusebius's own preferences to lie in the matter of these five,[88] according to his researches it would appear that all twenty-seven books (with the possible exception of Revelation) *were* the New Testament Scriptures for *most* of the churches when he wrote, early in the fourth century.

Just how long this might have been the case is impossible to tell. The same twenty-seven books, however, do appear in an even earlier but usually neglected list given by Origen in about 240 in his *Homilies on Joshua* 7.1.

> But when our Lord Jesus Christ comes, whose arrival that prior son of Nun designated, he sends priests, his apostles, bearing "trumpets hammered thin," the magnificent and heavenly instruction of proclamation. Matthew first sounded the priestly trumpet in his Gospel; Mark also; Luke and John each played their own priestly trumpets. Even Peter cries out with trumpets in two of his epistles; also James and Jude. In addition, John also sounds the trumpet through his epistles [and Apocalypse],[89] and Luke, as he describes the Acts of the Apostles. And now that last one comes, the one who said, "I think God displays us

85. This is noted by Dungan, *Constantine's Bible,* 78. Of the books in the disputed-but-known-to-most category, he says Eusebius "like a good philosopher reporting the state of the question, is content to leave them perched squarely on the fence, neither in or out." On the contrary, what Eusebius reports shows that they were in for most, and out for some.

86. There were, of course, several other books that were disputed, but which Eusebius knows had not been used by the majority.

87. *tōn antilegomenōn men, homōs d' en pleistais ekklēsiais para pollois dedēmosieumenōn*. Cf. also 2.23.25, where he mentions that the authenticity of James and Jude is denied by some, since few of the ancients quote them. At this point he mentions no doubts about 2-3 John, but in 3.25.3 he lists them among the disputed and mentions the possibility that they were written by another John.

88. Everett R. Kalin, "The New Testament Canon of Eusebius," in *The Canon Debate,* ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 386-404, believes that he did not wish to include them; others believe that he did.

89. Some of the manuscripts omit the Apocalypse, though there is copious evidence that Origen considered this book both inspired and Scripture.

> apostles last," and in fourteen of his epistles, thundering with trumpets, he casts down the walls of Jericho and all the devices of idolatry and dogmas of philosophers, all the way to the foundations.

Unfortunately, suspicion exists here because, first, we do not have these homilies in Greek but only in the Latin translation of Rufinus, who has been known to "correct" Origen at some points, and second, Origen elsewhere notes that some of these books were disputed.[90] It is hardly likely, however, that Rufinus fabricated the entire analogy between the trumpets and the NT books. And even if we should allow for the most generous emendation, Origen's original list could not have been much different. What is most significant, in the light of current attempts to maintain that the church had no conception of a limited canon until well into the fourth century, is that Origen would give a list of the NT "trumpets" at all. And despite his reporting elsewhere that the authenticity of 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John was doubted *(Comm. John),* and that the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was disputed (Eus. *HE* 6.25.3-14), Origen himself appears to have accepted and used all these books. He routinely used Hebrews as Paul's,[91] and where he acknowledges that "God only knows" who wrote it, he says it is "not inferior" to Paul. In his *Homilies on Leviticus* 4.4.2 he used 2 Peter and attributed it without qualification to the apostle. He used James and Jude in his *Commentary on Matthew.* As Metzger has observed, it is entirely credible that Origen would give his own view (probably too the view of his church in Caesarea) in a sermon in an unqualified way while qualifying a report in his more scholarly writings.[92]

Scripture, Tradition, and Authority

In a recent book, Craig Allert writes at length on the relationship of tradition and Scripture.[93] There are a few points that surface in his interpretation of the

90. D. Kalin's article, "Re-examining New Testament Canon History: 1. The Canon of Origen," *CTM* 17 (1990): 274-82, denies the authenticity of the list. But Everett Ferguson, "Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon: A Survey of Some Recent Studies," in *The Canon Debate,* ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 295-320, at 319 n. 104, says Kalin's position "depends on discrediting Rufinus's translation . . . and not considering the sequence of Origen's writings and the possibility that Origen changed his views." Ferguson cites Otto Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur* (Freiburg: Herder, 1914), 2:152-56, "who defends the reliability of Rufinus's translation of Origen's passages on the canon."

91. Barbara J. Bruce, trans., Cynthia White, ed., *Origen: Homilies on Joshua,* Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 75 n. 5.

92. So Metzger, *Canon,* 140.

93. Allert, *High View.*

important witness of Irenaeus in particular which, because they resemble the views of other scholars as well, might be profitably considered here.

Irenaeus's advocacy of a four-Gospel canon is well known, but Allert seeks to show that Irenaeus's support for these Gospels as Scripture is not as absolute as one might think. Allert points, first, to the fact that Irenaeus does not always cite these Gospels accurately, and second, to Irenaeus's advocacy also of the rule of truth or rule of faith, a somewhat flexible creed-like summary of Christian doctrine (*AH* 1.10.1; 1.221. 5.20.1).[94] The first objection, however, rests on a mistaken assumption about citations in antiquity. Full or consistent accuracy in citation is simply not a reliable measure of the respect a writer has for a text, and cannot provide a refutation of a writer's explicit statements about that text.[95] Allert's second reason calls for more attention.

He cites a passage from the third book of *Against Heresies* in which Irenaeus says that if the apostles had not left us writings, we would have to have recourse to the churches they founded in order to ascertain the truth. Irenaeus even asserts that there are illiterate Christians who are saved (without Scripture) through their knowledge of the truth as symbolized in the church's rule of faith. Allert deduces from this that "[t]he true doctrine of the church has been faithfully passed on and is sufficient to lead people to salvation. Irenaeus confirms that the church of the second century really had no need of a written canon because it already had a canon of truth. It was this Rule of Faith against which everything was measured in the second century — even the writings of the developing New Testament."[96] He says we cannot push this so far as to say that "Christian writings were relatively unimportant in the early church." But he cites with approval two other scholars who seem nearly to push this far: Hans von Campenhausen, who writes that Scripture "never suppresses or replaces the living, public proclamation of the church, which holds the original 'canon of truth";[97] and Annette Yoshiko Reed, who says that for Irenaeus the canon functions as an "extra-textual criterion for

94. Allert, *High View,* 121-26.

95. See, e.g., John Whittaker, "The Value of Indirect Tradition in the Establishment of Greek Philosophical Texts or the Art of Misquotation," in *Editing Greek and Latin Texts: Papers given at the Twenty-Third Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto 6-7 November 1987,* ed. John Grant (New York, 1989), 63-95; Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature,* SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context,* AJEC 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); C. E. Hill, " 'In These Very Words': Methods and Standards of Literary Borrowing in the Second Century," in *The Early Text of the New Testament,* ed. C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 261-81.

96. Allert, *High View,* 125.

97. Allert, *High View,* 125, citing Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible,* trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 329.

distinguishing true doctrine from heretical speculations, authentic texts from spurious compositions, and proper Scriptural interpretation from 'evil exegesis.' "[98] Allert's conclusion, which he believes is consonant with that of other scholars, is that the rule of faith "tempers the exclusivity of the four Gospels as canon in Irenaeus."[99] On this basis he writes at an earlier point in the book that "even the Christian writings eventually included in the New Testament canon were subjected to this Rule of Faith."[100]

The rule of faith was a summary of apostolic teaching based on the Trinitarian baptismal statement enjoined by Jesus (Matt. 28:19), with elaborations under "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The baptismal injunction (given in Scripture) was a natural framework on which to base catechetical teaching and to formulate creedal statements. As elaborated in the church, informed by the rest of the New Testament revelation, it also became a hermeneutic for the proper interpretation of Scripture.

Reading the entire context of the opening chapters of Book 3, however, shows that Irenaeus's first appeal is not to "tradition" or the rule of faith but in fact to Scripture. It is only the heretics who posit a hierarchy that subordinates Scripture to their tradition. At the beginning of 3.1.1, Irenaeus writes, "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith." The apostles, invested with the Holy Spirit and with perfect knowledge, proclaimed, and then they published. Their writings declare the truth about God the Creator and Christ his Son. Irenaeus is here constructing an apologetic for the authority of the apostles and their writings, against the heretics. The apostles represent Jesus: "For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: 'He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and Him that sent Me' " (*AH* 3.praef.). Thus if any gnostic, Marcionite, or Valentinian does not agree to the truths taught by the apostles "he despises the companions of the Lord; nay more, he despises Christ Himself the Lord; yea, he despises the Father also, and stands self-condemned" (3.1.2).

98. Allert, *High View,* 126, citing Reed, "ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and Christian Truth in *Adversus haereses*," *VC* 65 (2002): 11-46.

99. Allert, *High View,* 121.

100. Allert, *High View,* 55. It is true of course that certain writings were judged not to be Scripture because they were deemed heretical. But this does not mean that those that were recognized had endured an ecclesiastical screening process before being used. When questions arose about books already in use, as with Hebrews or Revelation, judgments were made about their orthodoxy. But for these two books the deliberation took place after they had been received and used in church settings.

Irenaeus continues, "When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures as not being correct, nor of authority, and that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be derived from them by those who are ignorant of tradition" (*AH* 3.2.1). It is only at this point, after the heretics have made their escape from Scripture, after they have invoked their own secret and unwritten tradition, that the appeal to true, apostolic tradition preserved in the churches is made. For Irenaeus, the true tradition of faith exists plentifully, having been preserved in the churches which the apostles themselves founded. It had been faithfully passed down from presbyters like Clement in Rome and Polycarp in Smyrna, and those in Ephesus who knew the apostle John. It is this tradition, summarized in Irenaeus's rule of truth, which confirms the right interpretation of Scripture and the faith that Irenaeus is trying to give.

According to Irenaeus (and Allert agrees with this), there can be no dichotomy between Scripture and tradition, for both derive from the same source: the apostles of Jesus. Not only Scripture but "the faith" itself had been handed down from the apostles. Scripture in this sense *is* tradition, for Scripture is handed down. Yet this does not make "tradition" the more ultimate category. Tradition is authoritative not because it is tradition, but because it, like Scripture, is apostolic. As Tertullian would later say, "In the Lord's apostles we possess our authority; for even they did not of themselves choose to introduce anything, but faithfully delivered to the nations (of mankind) the doctrine which they had received from Christ" (*Praescr.* 6). And what is apostolic is authoritative because it derives from Jesus, and Jesus was sent from God (*1 Clem.* 42.1-2). John Behr provides a fitting summary:

> So, for Irenaeus, both the true apostolic tradition maintained by the churches, and the apostolic writings themselves, derive from the same apostles, and have one and the same content, the Gospel, which is itself . . . "according to the Scriptures." "Tradition" for the early Church is, as Florovsky put it, "Scripture rightly understood."[101] Irenaeus's appeal to tradition is thus fundamentally different to that of his opponents. While they appealed to tradition precisely for that which was not in Scripture, Irenaeus, in his appeal to tradition, was not appealing to anything else that was not also in Scripture. Thus Irenaeus can appeal to tradition, to establish his case, and at the same time maintain that Scripture cannot be understood except on the basis of Scripture itself, using its own hypothesis and canon.[102]

101. Citing G. Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Early Church," *GOTR* 9, no. 2 (1963): 182; repr. in Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 75.

102. Behr, *The Way to Nicaea,* 45.

When Irenaeus says that we would have to revert to the apostles' successors *if* the apostles had not left us writings, he is making a point from a contrary-to-fact hypothetical.[103] The example Irenaeus cites to prove his point is the existence of those who are "barbarians" in speech, who have not read Scripture but who believe the truth that had been preached to them. They either cannot read or do not have Scriptures in their language (or both). One imagines that Irenaeus may have had certain believers in his own communities in Gaul in mind (cf. *AH* 1.praef.3). In which case, those who preach to these people still have the Scriptures to guide their preaching. Irenaeus of course knew that one could be saved by hearing and learning the saving message without having Scripture. But this does not mean Irenaeus would agree with the statement that "the church of the second century really had no need of a written canon because it already had a canon of truth." After showing that the church did possess the true tradition from the apostles, he continues, "let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, and that no lie is in Him" (3.5.1). Thus we come full circle, back to the Scriptures, and Irenaeus goes on to fulfill the purpose of his third book, as he says in its preface, "In this, the third book, I shall adduce proofs from the Scriptures."

The appeal to tradition and the rule of faith in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and others occurs largely in the context of the clash with heretical alternatives. This aspect of the use of tradition is thus essentially hermeneutical: Where does one go to find the correct interpretation of Scripture when Scripture is interpreted in a false but "plausible" manner, or when Scripture's testimony is rejected in preference to sectarian tradition? One goes to the churches where the living faith, handed down from the same apostles who gave us the Scriptures, still flourished.

The "Inspiration" of Scripture and Non-Scripture: Of Preachers, Prophets, Pseudepigraphers, and Sibyls

No one would contest that early Christianity received the books of Scripture as "inspired." 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20 are among the *loci classici* which even in early times both reflected and guided Christian thought about the divine

103. Tertullian in his *Prescription* uses but also modifies Irenaeus's argument. To tell who had the right interpretation all one had to do was to ascertain where the true Christian faith resided, and this search must lead to the churches founded by the apostles (*Praescr.* 19). One did not and *should* not use Scripture in debate with heretics, for the heretics had no legitimate right to it. This was rhetorically brilliant, but in the end it could have the effect of inserting something in front of Scripture as representative of the divine will.

origins of Scripture.[104] It is often observed these days, however, that the early Christians had a broader view of inspired speech and writing than that which would develop later in the history of the church. It at least cannot be said that the ancients believed that Scripture and only Scripture was, in any sense, truly "inspired." The author of 1 Clement may have believed that he penned his letter for the Roman church to the Corinthian church "through the Spirit" (*1 Clem.* 63.2).[105] Ignatius of Antioch claims to have cried out "with God's own voice," at an emotional meeting in Philadelphia (*Phld.* 7.1-2). The work of the Septuagint translators was inspired, according to Irenaeus (*AH* 3.21.2). According to Clement of Alexandria, even Plato and other philosophers, when they confessed that there was only one true God, did so "through his inspiration (*kat' epipnoian autou*)" (*Protr.* 6.71.1).[106]

Since inspiration of some kind seems to pertain to a great deal more oral and written materials than are scriptural,[107] many contemporary writers have pointed out that inspiration was not a "criterion" but a "corollary" of canonicity. This may be true, as far as it goes. It is probably going too far, though, to claim, as Lee McDonald does, that "The Christian community believed that God continued to inspire individuals in their proclamation, just as God inspired the writers of the New Testament literature. They believed the Spirit was the gift of God to the whole church, not just its writers of sacred literature."[108] That the Spirit was the gift to the whole church was indeed the church's confession. But if the Spirit's

104. On *theopneustos* in 2 Tim. 3:16, a word that Paul may have coined, see the still-authoritative work of B. B. Warfield, "God-Inspired Scripture," chapter 7 in B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927, repr. Baker, 1981), 229-80, the lexicons, and the commentaries.

105. This is may well be the correct translation. If so, perhaps Clement was mindful of 1 Cor. 12:8 and regarded his letter as a word of wisdom or word of knowledge. Lindemann thinks this "does not mean that the text claims to be 'inspired'; however, it may well mean that the expressions here are not simply of personal convictions" (Andreas Lindemann, "The First Epistle of Clement," in *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction,* ed. Wilhelm Pratscher [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010], 47-69 at 63). It is possible, however, that the sentence should be translated with "through the Holy Spirit" referring not to Clement's writing but to the means by which the Corinthians are expected to root out their jealousy, as in *ANF* 10 translation: "Joy and gladness will ye afford us, if ye become obedient to the words written by us and through the Holy Spirit root out the lawless wrath of your jealousy." It may then be related to verses like Rom. 8:13, "but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Given Clement's words in 8.1; 22.1 (where the phrase *dia* [*tou*] *pneumaton hagiou*, as in 63.2, also precedes the verb it modifies) and 45.2 in particular, I am inclined to the latter alternative.

106. *epipnoia*, a word not used in the NT or the LXX, means a breathing out, or inspiration.

107. See, e.g., the collection of witnesses in Allert, *High View,* 177-88.

108. Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate,* ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 416-39 at 438.

work was, and was understood to be, "just the same" in all Christians alike, it would be incomprehensible why nearly all of the pseudepigrapha needed to claim authorship by one or another of the apostles.

Was there anything that distinguished Scripture from other speech and literature said to be inspired? This is a subject much too large for full treatment here, but it might be profitable nevertheless to ask how Christian writers spoke about Scripture in ways that set it apart from other forms of "inspired" speech or writing. A few preliminary points: first, this is not a subject on which there was a common, agreed-upon, technical vocabulary among Christians in the early centuries. The vocabulary of inspiration, deriving partly from the sacred writings themselves, partly from the larger Greco-Roman culture,[109] encompassed a number of different words, each with a history and with its own set of associations. Second, many of the examples cited by Allert in particular of the attribution of inspiration or scriptural status to works that are not in Scripture concern books of the so-called OT Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical writings. There are well-known debates from the early centuries about these books and their place among or alongside the sacred Scriptures. We cannot enter into these here (though see section II above), only to observe that this is a special category, due to the fluctuating judgments about them in the early church. Third, I strongly suspect that in some cases inspiration words are used in laudatory and hyperbolic ways (as when one of the Cappadocians praises another as "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*) or as "a second Moses" or the like.[110] I do not think such statements were meant or were taken as straightforward, prosaic speech. Finally, some of the distinctions I will broach below occur together in various places, so segregating them is for convenience.

Inspiration and the Holy Spirit

A number of references to inspiration in people or non-scriptural writings arguably involve an inspiration of a different order. Whereas the inspiration of Scripture is consistently attributed to the Holy Spirit, to God, or to Christ (sometimes as Logos or Wisdom), this is not always true of other "inspired" literature. It was, of course, culturally speaking, much more natural for people in antiquity to acknowledge the occurrence of inspired speech. Most of Greco-Roman society

109. Robert J. Hauck, *The More Divine Proof: Prophecy and Inspiration in Celsus and Origen,* AAR Academy Series 69 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 138: "Pagan understandings of prophecy, inspiration ad revelation provided the theory and language for the discussion of the experience of prophecy, visions, dreams, and the knowledge of God."

110. See Basil, *On the Spirit* 74; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 21.33; Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in Hexaemeron* (PG 44, 61-62). This might apply to certain other instances as well.

in general regarded reality as punctuated through and through with elements of the supernatural. The second-century anti-Christian critic Celsus despairs of recounting "all the oracular responses, which have been delivered with a divine voice by priests and priestesses, as well as by others . . . who were under a divine influence (*entheō phōnē*)"; indeed "the world is full of such instances" (*CCels.* 8.45). Of course, Christians often regarded such things as the effects of evil demons. But even New Testament writers speak not strictly of the work of the Holy Spirit but presume the involvement of plural "spirits" in forms of non-scriptural, divine-human interaction (1 Cor. 12:10;[111] 14:22; 1 John 4:2; Rev. 22:6).

An instructive test case is the Sibyl. The collection of Sibylline oracles that has survived from antiquity is a fictitious and apologetically motivated Jewish production, which has been further interpolated and supplemented by one or more Christian hands. This seems plain to modern students, but was not so plain to all early Christian writers. Nor, for that matter, was it clear to many Christians living much later, such as Michelangelo, who depicted the four main Sibyls on the Sistine Chapel ceiling along with the Hebrew prophets. Clearly, some Christian writers did not know quite what to do with the Sibyl. For who could, or would want to, deny that she spoke beforehand of the coming of Christ, much like the Hebrew prophets? As perplexing as her "inspiration" might be to us, we note that she did present early Christians an undeniable apologetic opportunity.

In his *Protreptikos,* Clement calls the Sibyl a prophetess (*prophētis*).[112] This already reminds us that for early Christians, not every "true" prophet or prophetess gave revelations that were scriptural, and this may provide some insight into, among other texts,[113] Jude 14, where the author regards Enoch as a prophet. The Sibyl, Clement says, speaks "very much in an inspired way" (*entheōn sphodra*), using a word (*entheōs*, full of God, inspired, or possessed) not used in the LXX or the NT but used, as we saw above, by Celsus for pagan oracles of various kinds.[114] He then begins quoting from the prophets of Scripture, whose words he attributes in a conspicuous way to the Holy Spirit, "Now Jeremiah, the all-wise prophet, or rather the Holy Spirit in Jeremiah, shows what God is." "Once again, the same Spirit says through Isaiah. . . . What says the Holy Spirit to them through Hosea?" (*Protr.* 8). Clement never ascribes the Sibyl's words to the Holy Spirit, nor, I believe, do any Christian writers do so.

The treatise *Cohortatio ad Graecos,* at one time attributed to Justin but now ascribed to a third-century writer,[115] acknowledges that the Sibyl spoke "by some

111. Here it is the one Spirit who gives the gift of distinguishing spirits.

112. 2 Peter 1:20, on the other hand, speaks of "prophecy of Scripture."

113. Such as *Ps-Barn.* 11.10 and 12.1, which attribute to a "prophet" words from *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* respectively.

114. Josephus speaks of himself as *entheos* in *Wars* 3.353.

115. Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature,* 1:202-3. The translation used is from *ANF* 1; the Greek text is from Miroslav Marcovich, ed. *Pseudo-Iustinus* Co-

kind of potent inspiration (*ek tinos dynatēs epipnoias*) . . . truths which seem to be much akin to the teaching of the prophets" (37.1; 38.2). She even predicted "in a clear and patent manner, the advent of our Saviour Jesus Christ" (38.1). Yet the author never attributes her inspiration to the Holy Spirit or equates her writings with Scripture. Instead, he tells his pagan readers that her prophecies "will constitute your necessary preparatory training (*progymnasma*) for the study of the prophecies of the sacred writers (*tēs tōn hierōn andrōn prophēteias*)" (*Cohort.* 38.2; so also Clement, *Protr.* 8.1). This author concludes, "From every point of view, therefore, it must be seen that in no other way than only from the prophets who teach us by divine inspiration (*dia tēs theias epipnoias*), is it at all possible to learn anything concerning God and the true religion" (*Cohort.* 38.2). Whatever was the source of the Sibyl's "potent inspiration," it was not divine in the sense that the scriptural prophets' inspiration was.

In sum, many early Christians held notions of inspiration that accommodated the interaction of a variety of supernatural or otherworldly influences on a human subject, for ends that might be good or evil or mixed (see below). For these phenomena they made use of a "religious" vocabulary that was shared with the larger culture. But when it comes to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, we are met with an unparalleled clarity and consistency in the Christian confession of these books as "inspired" or "breathed out" by God, or specifically by the Holy Spirit (*De Principiis* 4.1.9).

Full or Partial Inspiration

The attribution of Scripture to the Holy Spirit entailed something else that apparently separated Scripture from other forms of inspired speech, and that was its plenary nature. "All Scripture," wrote Paul, "is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Clement of Rome told the Corinthians, "You have studied the Holy Scriptures which are true, and given by the Holy Spirit (*dia tou pneumatos tou hagiou*). You know that nothing unjust or counterfeit (*ouden adikon ouden parapeipoiēmenon*) is written in them" (45.2-3). Irenaeus is assured that "the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit" (*AH* 2.28.2). But other speakers or writings could apparently be unevenly inspired. Justin could say that the Logos spoke through Socrates when he exposed the daemons (*1 Apol.* 5) and Clement of Alexandria could say that Plato and other philosophers spoke through God's inspiration (*kat' epipnoian autou*) when they confessed that there was only one true God (*Protr.* 6.71.1). But clearly, little if anything else these Greeks said or wrote could be so described.

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hortatio ad Graecos, De Monarchia, Oratio ad Graecos, PTS 32 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990).

Augustine in the *City of God* also evinces a similar understanding of certain apocryphal Jewish writings:

> There is indeed some truth to be found in these Apocrypha; but they have no canonical authority *(nulla est canonica auctoritas)* on account of the many falsehoods they contain. Certainly, we cannot deny that Enoch (the seventh in descent from Adam) wrote a number of things by divine inspiration,[116] since the apostle Jude says as much in a canonical epistle. But there was good reason for the exclusion of these writings from the canon of the Scriptures. (*CivDei* 15.23.4)

He goes on to observe that, unlike the scriptural books, Enoch and other writings were not preserved by the priests in the temple, and then cites Enoch's story of angels mating with women as indicative of its falsehoods.

Inspiration and Frenzy

One important way in which the Sibyl's inspiration distinguished itself from that of the scriptural prophets had to do with her psychological state. The very first literary reference to the Sibyl has her prophesying "with raging mouth" (Heraclitus, fr. 75),[117] and depictions of her speaking in mantic frenzy are common, in non-Christian and Christian sources. The Sibyl, says the author of the *Cohortatio,* "was filled indeed with prophecy at the time of the inspiration (*epipnoias*), but as soon as the inspiration ceased, there ceased also the remembrance of all she had said" (37.2).[118]

Though one might find an occasional representation of the OT prophets in similar terms, the state of mental ecstasy was generally not understood to be the genuine mode of true prophecy by church writers.[119] The common view of mantic speech is seen in an offhand remark by Justin, *Dial.* 9.1, who chides Trypho for speaking nonsense when he condemned Christians, "For you know not what you say . . . and you speak, like a diviner (*apomanteuomenos*) whatever comes into your mind." Irenaeus describes the process by which Marcus the Valentinian deluded his disciples/victims:

116. There is no separate word for "inspiration" here, simply *divine,* "divinely."

117. See J. L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

118. See also Origen, *CCels.* 7.3.

119. It is sometimes held that Justin is an exception, for he speaks in *Dial.* 115 of Zechariah prophesying "in a trance." I am not convinced that this is an exception, for Justin's point here is simply that Zechariah was not describing what he was seeing with his eyes but was reporting what he saw in a vision. The key seems to be that he was in possession of his senses as he wrote or dictated.

> He says to her, "Open thy mouth, speak whatsoever occurs to thee, and thou shalt prophesy." She then, vainly puffed up and elated by these words, and greatly excited in soul by the expectation that it is herself who is to prophesy, her heart beating violently [from emotion], reaches the requisite pitch of audacity, and idly as well as impudently utters some nonsense as it happens to occur to her, such as might be expected from one heated by an empty spirit. . . . Henceforth she reckons herself a prophetess.

The general recognition that the true prophet spoke while in control of his/her own senses, would become important in the evaluations of Montanist prophecy.[120] The New Prophets were disqualified in the eyes of many not only because some of their prophecies proved false, but also because they came through mantic or ecstatic speech (the Anonymous, Eusebius, *HE* 5.17.1-4; Epiphanius, *Panar.* 48). Origen was one who offered several reflections on the "mechanics" of true, prophetic inspiration. Distancing himself from the views of Philo[121] and of the Montanists, including Tertullian,[122] Origen took up and explicitly refuted the opinion that the Hebrew prophets spoke in ecstasy.

> For it is not the case, as some people surmise, that the prophets were out of their minds and spoke by the Spirit's compulsion. The Apostle says: "If a revelation is made to another who is sitting there, let the first one be silent" (1 Cor 14:30). That shows that the one who speaks has control over when he wants to speak and when he wants to be silent. Also, to Balaam it is said: "But there is a word that I am sending into your mouth, take care to speak this" (Num 23:5, 16).[123] This implies that he has the power, once he has received the word of God, to speak or to be silent. (*Hom. Ezek.* 6.1.1)

He then cites Jonah as an example of a prophet who was told what to say by God and did not want to say it (*Hom. Ezek.* 6.1.2). Origen saw the Holy Spirit's work as effecting a clarity of mind, rather than ecstasy (*CCels.* 7.4) and that this constituted a "new way which had nothing in common with the divination inspired by daemons" (*CCels.* 7.7). The inspired prophet Moses, in fact, wrote his five books "like a distinguished orator who pays attention to outward form" (*CCels.* 1.18). As

120. See, e.g., Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86-95.

121. Nardoni, "Origen's Concept," 11, citing Philo, *Quis rer. div. her.* 259 (LCL 261, 416-17); Hauck, *More Divine Proof,* 120.

122. Tertullian defends ecstasy or rapture *(amentia)* of the New Prophecy in *Adv. Marc.* 4.22 (cf. the ecstasy of dreams in *De Anima* 45 and note that he wrote a now lost work *On Ecstasy*).

123. *Origen: Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel,* ACW 62, translation and introduction by Thomas P. Scheck (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 2010).

to the Sibyl, the ambiguity as to the source of her inspiration in earlier Christian writers is removed by Origen, it is "of the race of daemons" (*CCels.* 7.4).[124]

Authority and Apostolicity

Ignatius believed that he spoke an exhortation at Philadelphia in an oracular way, with the voice of God. But when he wrote his letters, he recognized a categorical difference between his words and those of an apostle: "I do not order you like Peter and Paul. They were apostles: I am a convict" (Rom. 4:3; cf. *Trall.* 3.3). An extemporaneous burst of what he deemed divine insight might produce an utterance fit for the moment. But as we have seen, it was apostolicity that was the defining human characteristic of the new Scriptures to be passed down in the church. For apostolicity denoted, indeed, an investment by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8, etc.), but also an authority bestowed by Christ and predicted in the prophets, an authority to pass down authoritative teaching that is permanently relevant for the church (Irenaeus, *AH* 3.1.1).

It is no surprise, then, that another reason for the church's rejection of Montanist claims to inspiration by the promised Paraclete was that their prophecies were portrayed as something equal to, or greater than, the apostolic revelation. Whereas one may find early Christian writers who countenanced the possibility of the episodic appearance of the prophetic charism, the New Prophets crossed a line and so brought forth further reflections on the limits of legitimate prophecy. A Montanist named Themiso, we are told, impudently "composed a general epistle in imitation of the apostle" (Eusebius, *HE* 5.18.5); Eusebius reports that the Roman controversialist Gaius, in his *Dialogue with Proclus,* curbed the recklessness and audacity of his Montanist opponents who composed new "Scriptures" (*HE* 6.20). The comment of an anonymous anti-Montanist critic has the same import. With a touch of sarcasm, he says that he had refrained from writing a response earlier "from fear and concern lest in any way I appear to some to add a new writing or add to the word of the new covenant of the gospel to which one who has chosen to live according to the gospel itself can neither add nor subtract" (Eusebius, *HE* 5.16.3).[125] Clearly it was perceived that some were presuming to add something. I have a hard time reading these statements in any other way than as indicating that these church leaders at the end of the second century held that the new covenant was represented by a known body of writings that could not be added to or subtracted from.

Even the rightful use of the prophetic gift was determined, by some at least,

124. See Hauck, *More Divine Proof,* 121.

125. Translation from Heine, ed., *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989).

to have ceased with apostolic times, for true prophecy is only that which was approved by apostles.[126] This forms a kind of parallel to what Josephus and the rabbis considered to be a "prophetic epoch" that had ended with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in the time of Artaxerxes.[127] "From Artaxerxes up to our own time every event has been recorded but this is not judged worthy of the same trust, since the exact line of succession of the prophets did not continue" (*CApion* 1.8.41). Even an occasional prophetic utterance could be acknowledged, but whatever it produced was not considered to be on the same level as Scripture, because the succession of the prophets had come to an end. For Christians it was the time of the apostles which was the epoch of "canonical" revelation. This is seen also in the *Muratorian Fragment* when it prohibits *The Shepherd* from being read in church, not because it was not "inspired" but because it was after the apostles' time (lines 79-80).

Augustine in *Contra Faustum* 11.5 (usually dated between 397 and 400), offers some reflection on the divide that separates scriptural and non-scriptural books:

> [T]here is a distinct boundary line separating all productions subsequent to apostolic times from the authoritative canonical books of the Old and New Testaments *(libris . . . canonicae auctoritatis Veteris et Novi Testamenti).* The authority of these books has come down to us from the apostles through the successions of bishops and the extension of the Church, and, from a position of lofty supremacy, claims the submission of every faithful and pious mind.

Even if innumerable books should be written containing the same truths as Scripture, "there is not the same authority *(auctoritas),"* says Augustine, for "Scripture has a sacredness peculiar to itself" (*CFaustum* 11.5). We are free to agree or disagree with portions of any other book, depending on whether that portion can be clearly demonstrated, or shown to agree with a canonical book. But because of "the distinctive peculiarity of the sacred writings *(in illa vero canonica eminentia sacrarum Litterarum),* we are bound to receive as true whatever the canon shows to have been said by even one prophet, or apostle, or evangelist. Otherwise, not a single page will be left for the guidance of human fallibility" (*CFaustum* 11.5).

In these reflections we see multiple ways in which Scripture distinguishes itself from all other books. Its properties of sacredness and authority are internal properties by which Scripture manifests itself to be what it is: the word of God. Originating with prophet, apostle, or evangelist, the writings of Scripture have come down from the apostles as from a fountainhead, flowing through the hands of successive generations of church leaders. All these things form a distinct boundary line for Augustine.

126. Epiphanius's anonymous source, *Panarion* 48.2.1-3. See Heine, *Montanist Oracles,* 29.
127. See Stephen Dempster's chapter in this volume.

Inspiration, Inscripturation, and Copying

The Sibyl's words were often thought to have been inspired by some sort of spiritual power. But the taking down of her words was another matter. Their written form sometimes lack proper meter, says the author of the *Cohortatio,* because those who took them down were illiterate (an interesting use of the word "illiterate") and often went astray. The Sibyl could not later correct the meter for she could not remember what she had spoken in ecstasy (37.3). By contrast, Origen speaks of the scriptural prophets' inspiration as pertaining not only to their experience and to their speech, but also to the writing process. "It was by a more divine spirit not only that they (the prophetic visions) were seen by the prophet, but also that they were described verbally and in writing" (*CCels.* 1.43).[128] Thus even the writing down of Scripture is due to the divine Spirit.

This understanding of the inscripturation process, as also attributable to the working of the Holy Spirit, was probably assumed by Christians in general. The same did not extend, of course, to the discrete copying process by scribes after the original, for Irenaeus, Origen, Jerome, and others complain from time to time about the faults of scribes.[129] For ancient readers, the need to inspect and correct handwritten manuscripts was a fact of life. Well aware of the imperfections inherent in the process of transcription, early Christian users of these manuscripts did not despair of their access to the word of God (unlike some modern counterparts). They seemed to have confidence that in doubtful cases the original text was there to be found, if sought for.

In conclusion, it is certainly the case that "inspiration" had a broader meaning and a somewhat expanded vocabulary in the patristic period than would later be the case in Christian theology. Yet there were several ways in which the inspiration of the sacred texts by the Holy Spirit was perceived to be distinctive, such that the Spirit's activity in producing Scripture was not "just the same" in the speech and writing of individual believers.

The Private Use of Scripture

In Deuteronomy 17:18-19 the future king, assumed to have the ability to read, is instructed to "write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all

128. *hypo theioterou pneumatos ou monon heōramenois tō prophētē alla kai eirēmenois kai anagegrammenois*. Greek from *Origène. Contre Celse,* vol. 1, *Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et notes,* by Marcel Borret, SC 132 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967). Translation modified from Henry Chadwick, *Origen,* Contra Celsum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 40.

129. E.g., Irenaeus, *AH* 5.30.1; Origen, *In Matth.* 15.14.

the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them." We live like kings today, with the ability to read daily from even several translations of the Bible, in copies we did not have to write out for ourselves. In antiquity, however, both books and people who could read them were much less readily available. Yet Christians were very much given to the reading and the study of their books, more so, it seems to me, than they are sometimes given credit for,[130] and it apparently did not take long for the demand for Christian books to grow.

Throughout the period under review, the codex form is developing, enabling the binding together of (progressively larger) groups of scriptural books. One effect of the transition from the roll to the codex was the relatively greater affordability and portability of scriptural texts, thus making private possession and use of them an increasing possibility. Irenaeus must have thought there were many who could heed his advice when he advocated "daily study" *(diuturno studio)* of the things God has revealed in the sacred Scriptures (*AH* 2.27.1). Only a little later Clement of Alexandria could assume that many Christians not only could read but also had their own copies of at least some of the Scriptures. He wrote of the true, "gnostic" Christian, "His sacrifices are prayers, and praises, and readings in the Scriptures before meals, and psalms and hymns during meals and before bed, and prayers also again during night" (*Strom.* 7.7.49). For others, the churches often provided daily public reading and exposition of the Scriptures. The practice of daily Bible reading, whether public or private, is mentioned in *Apostolic Tradition* 36 (traditionally assigned to Hippolytus) in the early third century: "And if there is a day on which there is no instruction let each one at home take a holy book and read in it sufficiently what seems profitable."[131]

For three years in the 240s, Origen preached almost every day in Caesarea. In some of the homilies that survive (mostly in Latin translation), we find Origen exhorting catechumens to devote themselves to daily hearing of the Law read publicly (*Hom. Josh.* 4.1). While preaching on Genesis 24:15-16, he urges his hearers, "come daily to the wells," that is, to the wells of Scripture (*Hom. Gen* 10.3). Origen reproaches those who come to church and hear Scripture read but do

130. *Pace* Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21: "[W]e have little evidence for the private lay ownership of biblical texts at any early date, and even later, ownership of Christian books by individuals may not have been extensive," and 23, "There is no reason to suppose that Christians were disproportionately more likely than other people to own books."

131. Gamble rightly cautions that "it can hardly be supposed that every Christian had personal copies of scripture" (*Books and Readers,* 232; see also Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Hippolytus: On the Apostolic Tradition* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001], 166). Yet he concedes that this reflects an ideal, and the injunction means that at least some people had their own copies and could read. The words of Clement and Origen (see below) may indicate that personal ownership of at least some Scriptural texts by laypeople was becoming more common.

not pay close attention, complaining, "There is no mutual investigation of these words which have been read, no comparison" (*Hom. Exod.* 12.2). He exhorts the faithful to "read the text again and inquire into it" and mentions those who are "neither occupied at home in the word of God nor frequently enter the church to hear the word" (*Hom. Gen.* 11.3). These last excerpts assume that many laypeople had their own copies of scriptural books and could read them at home and bring them to church. The growing availability of scriptural texts for a burgeoning reading laity is corroborated by the discovery of several early NT and OT papyri, including miniature codices and opisthographs, which show signs of having been copied for private, not public, use.[132]

The line between the recognition of Scripture's spiritual power, and a superstitious regard for it, may, however, have been too fine for many lay believers. As a sacred object, Scripture was sometimes treated as possessing magical powers, as manifested in the amulets,[133] incantations, examples of bibliomancy, and hermeneia, which have survived from antiquity.[134] Gamble cites Augustine's words about one magical practice: "Regarding those who draw lots from the pages of the Gospel, although it could be wished that they would do this rather than run about consulting demons, I do not like this custom of wishing to turn to the divine oracles to worldly business and the vanity of this life, when their object is another life" (*Ep.* 55.37).[135] Gamble concludes his treatment of this subject by saying, "But behind the sundry magical uses of these books lies the regular solemn reading and hearing of scripture in Christian worship, in which the power of scripture was experienced and emphasized as the source of divine revelation — a power that belonged to words, but no less to the books in which they stood."[136]

Conclusion

Churches and individual Christians today who seek to give rightful place to Scripture as God's word face multiple challenges, many of which have real precedents in the ancient world. It is not too much to hope that we may still learn from the constructive ways in which our forebears responded to the challenges they faced,

132. For instance, P45 and P72, the latter being in fact a miscellany that included 1 and 2 Peter and Jude mixed in with sundry non-biblical books. This drive for accessibility of the Scriptures is one significant reason for the entry of many errors into the manuscript tradition as copies were often made outside the direct auspices of church scriptoria.

133. Many Psalm texts have been found in amulets used apparently for magical purposes. The *incipits,* or first words, of the Gospels were also popular. The practice was prohibited in canon 36 of the Council of Laodicea of 360.

134. Gamble, *Books and Readers,* 237.

135. Gamble, *Books and Readers,* 240.

136. Gamble, *Books and Readers,* 241.

and that, like many of them, we too might persevere and contribute constructively to the ongoing ministry of the word of God in the world. In that spirit, it is fitting to conclude with the advice of Theonas of Alexandria writing to a younger colleague about the year 300:

> Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, at such convenient hour as offers, and giving some space to meditation. And never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures; for nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind so well as those sacred studies do. (*Letter to Lucianus* 9; *ANF* 6, 160-61)