

The History of the Christian Bible

by Melissa Elizabeth Cutler



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The image on the front cover is adapted from an illustration in a northern Italian compendium of canon law (c. 825). It depicts emperor Constantine and the Catholic bishops at the Council of Nicaea (325AD) overseeing the destruction of books that had been declared heretical.

Source: Jean Hubert, Jean Porcher and Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Europe in the Dark Ages* (London: Thames & Hudson, ISBN 9780500030110, 1969), p. 143.

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Introduction

Jesus and the apostles gave many warnings of false teaching and corruption in the church¹. Jesus even hinted at the possibility that authentic Christianity might cease to exist.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Luke 18:8

Jesus also gave us instructions on how to identify such false teachers:

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For **figs are not gathered from thornbushes**, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6:34-45

In this booklet I will briefly review the history of Christianity and the bible. I will examine how beliefs and the bible have developed and changed at various points in history. I will also look at, and discuss the teachings and actions of some of the key individuals involved in these changes, applying the simple test outlined by Jesus of identifying the tree by its fruit. We shall see that many of the people responsible for giving us the bible are the very thorn bushes Jesus warned us of in the verses above, and so the mainstream Christian bible should not be trusted. As well as outlining this argument, I will discuss the counter arguments to this line of reasoning that some apologists and evangelists put forward.

I will argue that, as modern Christians, we have a duty to carefully investigate the changes that have occurred in Christian beliefs and scriptures and restore the original teachings of Christianity. I do not believe that the answer is as simple as reverting to the beliefs and writings of one of the older branches of Christianity; rather I believe we should be realistic and open minded to the idea that all branches of Christianity made mistakes during their development, and that several may have carried forward some elements of the truth.

A secondary goal of this article is to provide a review of Christian history for anyone who has little background knowledge of this subject.

¹ This is perhaps one of the most strongly emphasised themes in the bible: *Matthew 7:15-19, 13:24-30, 13:36-43, 16:5-12, 24:4-5, 24:24-25, Mark 8:14-21, 13:5, 13:21-23, Luke 12:1, 18:8, 20:45-47, 21:6-8, John 10:1-13, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 11:19, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 11:3, Galatians 1:6-8, Colossians 2:4-8, 2:18-19, 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12, 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 1:19, 4:1, 6:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:16-18, 3:8, 4:3, 1 Peter 5:8, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 2:12-19, 1 John 2:18, 2:26, 4:1-3, 2 John 1:7-11, Jude 1:4, 1:11.*

This article is divided into the following sections:-

- 1) In the first section I will give a brief outline of what the main branches of modern Christianity are, and how and when they came into existence. This background information may be useful for anyone who knows relatively little about the history of Christianity.
- 2) After that I will explain the evidence that supports my argument properly in sections which examine several key eras of Christian history, examining the attitudes to scripture of people at these times. The first period of history is the early church, prior to the time of Marcion (c. 140AD).
- 3) Section three discusses the so called 'Catholic' branch of Christianity during and after time of Marcion, but before Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman empire (c. 140-312AD).
- 4) Section four discusses the period of the Christian Roman emperors who favoured Christianity and promoted it throughout the empire (312-480AD).
- 5) Section five briefly discusses developments during the middle ages.
- 6) Section six discusses the violence of the Protestant reformation and also looks at the period after it (1517 onwards).
- 7) Section seven examines and refutes counter arguments that may be put forward in response to the arguments in this article.
- 8) Section eight examines the key underlying cause of violence that has plagued both Catholic and Protestant Christianity, and how this is connected to the foundational Christian beliefs and scriptures. This section also summarises my conclusions.

Section 1 – The Branches of Christianity

There are numerous groups in the modern world which identify as Christian. The three largest are the Catholics, the Protestants and the Orthodox. The Protestant branch itself is not a unified whole, but is subdivided into numerous denominations: Anglican, Baptists, Calvinists, Lutheran, Methodists, etc., many of whom have significant points of disagreement.

The oldest of these three groups is the Catholics, dating to the second century². In the fourth century the Catholics became very powerful and influential in the Roman empire; they used that power to spread their beliefs throughout all of Europe, persecuting and killing non-Catholics (this will be discussed in detail in section 4). It was these Catholics who decided which documents should be considered scripture and included in the bible. Initially this was a subject of heated debate, but a consensus gradually emerged during the fourth and early fifth centuries.

During the eleventh century the East-West Schism, (also known as the Great Schism) divided Christianity in Europe. The Greek speaking eastern church came to be known as the Orthodox Church, while the Latin speaking western Church continued to be known as the Catholic Church. Both groups continued to read from the same collection of 27 New Testament books.

In the 15th century Constantinople (the capital city of the Greek speaking portion of the Christian world) was defeated and captured by the Ottoman Turks. Numerous Greek speaking refugees fled into Western Europe, bringing with them knowledge of the ancient Greek language and numerous Greek copies of the bible; Greek is the original language of almost all of the New Testament and up until that time almost all western Christians had been reading from Latin translations. In the Catholic areas of Europe a renewed interest in the Greek bible developed, and many Christians began to realise that the teachings of their church were not compatible with the bible; there was a great deal of discontent because members of the church hierarchy were using Christianity to amass wealth whilst ignoring its moral teachings. This discontent led to the Protestant reformation. This was another period of horrific violence between Christians (discussed in section 6).

The Protestant Reformation led to the creation of several new branches of Christianity most of which aimed to hold beliefs based purely on the bible. Of course the bible can be

2 The oldest recorded examples of the word “Catholic” being used as an identity can be found in Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Smyrnæans*, chapter 8, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the *Muratorian Fragment*, and the writings of Justin Martyr, all of which date to the second century. The actual doctrines that are today seen as characteristic of Catholicism (e.g. the trinity and the primacy of the bishop of Rome) developed gradually over the centuries following this.

The word “Catholic” is actually Latin for “universal”. Choosing this name for their identity served two purposes for the early “Catholic Christians”. Firstly, it semantically implies that “Catholic” church is the whole of the true church. Secondly, it semantically implies that “Catholic Christianity” is found everywhere; in contrast to the “heresies” that have separated themselves from the “Catholic” unity (i.e. been excommunicated) and which are confined to a local region. The irony of this last part is that part is that both now and in the early days of Christianity, “Catholicism” is dominant in only a minority of regions, and the only thing that is/was truly universal is the doctrinal diversity that the early Catholics so despised.

interpreted in different ways, and so despite this common underlying goal Protestantism itself has always been very fragmented. In contrast, the Catholic and Orthodox churches base their beliefs on church tradition as well as the bible, and so besides the Great Schism itself, neither of these has fragmented in the way the Protestant movement has. When the Protestants broke away from the Catholics they made changes to the bible by rejecting a number of books from the Old Testament; these books are known as the inter-testament literature, or the apocrypha. Some key Protestant figures argued for changes to the New Testament as well (Luther wanted to remove the *Epistle of James*, because he felt it contradicted the teaching of salvation by faith alone and not works) in the end however, no changes were made to the list of books included in the New Testament.

The bibles of Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians have more in common than they have differences and all include the same 27 books in the New Testament; however it would be incorrect to say that their bibles are identical. There are differences in which books are included in the Old Testament. There are also differences of opinion about which manuscripts are most reliable, resulting in differences to the text throughout the bible. In particular, the manuscripts used by the Orthodox Church for the Old Testament are significantly different to those used by Catholics and Protestants; the Orthodox version of Daniel (for example) is significantly longer than the Catholic and Protestant versions. There are also differences in how each of these groups interpret many passages.

There were once many more branches of Christianity than the ones I have mentioned above, such as the Marcionites, Gnostics, Ebionites and Manicheans. They had scriptures that were radically different from the bibles of the Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox and there is evidence that some of these ancient Christian groups are older than Catholicism³. Those ancient groups were destroyed when the Catholics gained political power in the fourth century, a period that we shall examine in detail shortly. In this article I will say only a little about these lost rival groups and their scriptures; I will focus instead on the spiritual forefathers of modern Christianity.

³ See that classic work *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, by Bauer, available online: www.jewishchristianlit.com/Resources/Bauer/

Section 2 – Christianity before Marcion: c.30AD to c.140AD

When Christian evangelists, apologists and preachers write about the history of the bible they often start by looking at what the apostles themselves said about their own and each others writing, citing verses like *2 Timothy* 3:16 and *2 Peter* 3:14-16. Such a tactic contains the implicit assumption that the bible itself is already known to be reliable, a somewhat circular argument⁴. Instead of this approach, when I study the history of Christianity my main sources are the writings of people known as the Catholic fathers (or simply “church fathers”, some of the oldest are sometimes called “apostolic fathers” because they were supposedly taught by the apostles themselves). These people were all influential early Christians whose writings have been preserved by the church. From their writings we can map out a history of the development of the bible that is not dependant upon the bible itself. We will see when the various books first came to be regarded as scripture and who was involved in making those decisions.

2A – Clement of Rome

The Catholic Church (and it's offshoots) claim that there was a succession of Christian teachers all with reasonably similar beliefs stretching right back to the apostles themselves, thus a connection is said to exist between the modern church and the apostles. If this claim were true, we should have some written record of their lives, some of their writings should have been preserved by the church, and there should be some evidence that they did indeed have beliefs and scriptures similar to those of the later church. In reality the oldest Catholic father whose writings survive is (supposedly) Clement of Rome (traditionally said to have been the fourth pope). The vast majority of writings that bear his name are universally regarded as fraudulent. There is one epistle that might have been written by him (known as *1 Clement*) but even this is dogged by unanswered questions challenging its authenticity and integrity⁵. *1 Clement*, typically dated c. 94-96AD, though if it is fraudulent it probably dates to the early mid second century.

In spite of the issues and uncertainties associated with *1 Clement*, let us see what it can

4 A classic example of this can be found in the booklet *How the New Testament Came Together*, by Peter Head (ISBN 978-1-85174-714-6, 2009). On pages 5-8 he uses references to the bible (especially the gospels) to flesh out a picture of apostolic authority in the early church. Then, on page 9 he cites *2 Peter* 3:16 as “Our earliest evidence for a collection of Paul's letters”. These lines of reasoning unravel rather dramatically when we realise (as I shall explain in Section 3 of this article) that:

- The concept of apostolic authority was originally developed by the Catholic father Irenaeus in the second century; coincidentally, Irenaeus was also the first Catholic father that knew the four gospels by name (see Section 3B), he was pivotal to the establishment of the four gospel canon.
- There is no evidence that *2 Peter* existed prior to the third century (see Section 3D). If this were our oldest reference to the epistles of Paul then Christianity would be in a sorry state indeed.

5 The reasons why some scholars regard even *1 Clement* as fraudulent are outlined in:

www.hermann-detering.de/clem_engl.htm

tell us about its author's views about scripture. The contents of the epistle indicate that the author's views about what should be considered scripture were substantially different to the views of the later church; the author frequently quotes the Jewish bible (also known as the "Old Testament", though that term did not exist in Clement's time), the epistles of Paul, and the statements of Jesus. The epistles of Paul and words of Jesus are clearly very influential⁶, but only the Jewish bible is referred to as scripture⁷.

Interestingly, when he quotes Jesus, the statements consistently do not match the wording of any known gospel. The author gives no indication that he was working from a written source, and asks his readers to "remember" the words of Jesus (chapter 46); it is likely that he was quoting directly from oral tradition rather than written gospels.

2B – The *Didache*

The *Didache* (full English title: *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) is another early Christian document; the identity of the author is not known, but it can still give us insights into the views of some early Christians regarding scripture.

Its author quotes from a gospel, and the wording of the quotes agrees reasonably well with the modern *Gospel of Matthew*. There is no indication of whether or not the author considered that book to be scripture. Also, the gospel that is quoted is referred to simply as "the gospel" (*Didache* 8:2 and 15:3-4) instead of "*Matthew*" implying that the writer had little regard for *Mark*, *Luke* and *John*; he may not have even been aware of the existence of those other gospels.

2C – The epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp

Ignatius and Polycarp are commonly said to have lived and written during the early second century. As with the epistles of Clement, there are numerous issues concerning the authenticity and integrity of these epistles.

In total there are fifteen epistles that have traditionally been attributed to Ignatius and one for Polycarp; though, there is universal agreement among scholars that eight of the epistles of Ignatius are fraudulent. Furthermore, the remaining seven epistles of Ignatius exist in multiple versions: the Long Recension, the Middle Recension, and the so called "Syriac

6 It is clear that the statements of Jesus were of great significance to the writer(s) of *1 Clement*:

Moreover, ye [Corinthians] were all distinguished by humility, and were in no respect puffed up with pride, but yielded obedience rather than extorted it, and were more willing to give than to receive.

Content with the provision which God had made for you, and carefully **attending to His words**, ye were inwardly filled with His doctrine, and His sufferings were before your eyes. – from chapter 2

Regarding Paul's writings, the author of *1 Clement* says that Paul the epistle to the Corinthians under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (*1 Clement* chapter 47); though, this should not be taken as an indication that Paul's writings were considered scripture; the statements of ordinary Christians can also be described as from the Holy Spirit (*Mark* 13:11, see also *Matthew* 10:19, *1 Corinthians* 14:22-33, etc).

7 For an example of the Hebrew bible being referred to as "scripture" by the author of *1 Clement* see the quotation of *Habakkuk* 2:3 and *Malachi* 53:1 at the end of *1 Clement* chapter 23; this is just one of numerous instances.

Abridgement” (three epistles only); confusingly the Middle Recension and the Syriac Abridgement are both sometimes referred to as the “Short Recension” a name that I shall avoid using.

There is unanimous agreement among scholars and historians that the epistles of the Long Recension were created by forgers interpolating and expanding the Middle Recension. A small number of scholars have argued that the “Syriac Abridgement” version is closest of the three to the original writings of Ignatius; however, the majority regard the Middle Recension as the most authentic existing version.

The text of Polycarp's epistle also contains several anomalies. Some have argued that it may be a composite of multiple letters edited together, whilst others argue that it has been greatly interpolated.

Some scholars and historians argue that none of the epistles were truly written by Ignatius or Polycarp⁸. Even if these epistles are fraudulent, or have suffered alteration, it is clear from their content that they come from a time when the first Catholics were only just establishing their beliefs and movement⁹, and so they are incredibly valuable sources of information in spite of the numerous issues surrounding them. I personally have no opinion about whether the Syriac Abridgement or the Middle Recension is the more authentic version; nor will I concern myself with the possibility that all of the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp might be fraudulent. I will proceed by examining the epistles of the Middle Recension on the basis that even if they are fraudulent or corrupt they none-the-less must date to the second century, and can thus shed light on the attitudes of second century Catholics, regardless of other considerations.

According to the Catholic fathers who came after them¹⁰, Polycarp and Ignatius were close friends and both were taught by the apostle John. Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna and Ignatius was bishop of Antioch. The letters are set in the rather tenuous scenario in which Ignatius is being taken by Roman guards to the arena in Rome, where he is to be killed¹¹. During the journey, the guards permit him to be visited by Christians from the cities along the way. Ignatius supposedly used these visits to learn about the situation that local churches are in, and wrote letters which addressed those situations.

The letters indicate that everywhere Ignatius looks he is confronted by vast numbers of

8 As with the epistle *1 Clement*, the reasons why some scholars and historians regard all of the epistles of Ignatius as fraudulent can be found here: www.hermann-detering.de/clem_engl.htm

9 See for example the arguments used by Bauer in *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, chapter 3: <http://jewishchristianlit.com/Resources/Bauer/bauer03.htm>

10 Specifically Irenaeus, who is discussed in Section 3B.

11 I describe this scenario as “tenuous” because, if the authorities in Antioch wanted to dispose of a Christian they found troublesome, they would hardly need to send him all the way to Rome to make it so. Similarly if the inhabitants of Rome wanted a Christian to kill in the arena they would hardly go to the trouble of ordering one from Antioch. Remember that Roman culture was renowned for the simple and practical way that they dealt with problems. The setting is very convenient, however, for a forger – having a saintly martyr denounce disagreeable aspects of the beliefs of several Christian communities whilst on the very journey that will take him to his glorious death – thus the setting is used to great effect throughout the epistles.

Christians who's beliefs are so different to his own that he hates them and considers their faith to be an abomination¹²; such people are described as “beasts in the shape of men” (Ignatius' *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, chapter 4) and “ravenous dogs” (Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians*, chapter 7). The author of the epistles of Ignatius is possibly the first person known to use the identity “Catholic” (*Smyrnaeans* 8); thus the hatred of doctrinal diversity which would be come of typical of Catholicism can be seen here, among its earliest roots.

The epistles of Ignatius reveal another, disturbing aspect of early Christianity; many early Christians venerated martyrdom to such an extent than they actively and deliberately sought to die as martyrs. Many of them believed that having faith in Jesus meant deliberately seeking out death at the hands of the Romans. The *Epistle to the Romans*, indicates that some of the Christians in Rome are influential and might use their influence to save Ignatius' life, but he is eager to die, and begs them not to do this:

I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless ye hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather **entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb**, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. **Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body.** Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God].

Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans*, chapter 4

Similar sentiments are expressed in the other letters:

For, on hearing that I came bound from Syria for the common name and hope, trusting through your prayers to be permitted to fight with beasts at Rome, that so by martyrdom I may indeed become the disciple of Him “who gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God,” ye hastened to see me.

Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, chapter 1

For I do indeed desire to suffer, but I know not if I be worthy to do so.

Ignatius, *Trallians* 4

For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die.

Ignatius, *Romans* 7

Then we find this ironic statement:

Flee, therefore, those evil offshoots [of Satan], which produce death-bearing fruit, whereof if any one tastes, he instantly dies.

Ignatius in *Trallians* 11

¹² See for example Ignatius' *Epistle to the Trallians*, chapters 6, 7, and 11.

Like *1 Clement* and the *Didache*, the short version of the seven epistles of Ignatius also do not contain any indication that the author conceived of such a thing as Christian scripture. Obviously he considered the Jewish bible to be scripture, and quoted from it frequently. He also quoted from the gospels, and the epistles of Paul, but there is no indication that he considered them to be inspired; he does not introduce them with a formula of authority (i.e. “as it is written” or “the scripture says”), as he often does when quoting from the Jewish bible¹³. Also, we cannot take the quotations of New Testament books as an indication that there was any agreement at that time about which ones were authentic, since in Ignatius' *Epistle to the Smyrnæans*, chapter 3, there is a quotation from the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*¹⁴.

Polycarp meanwhile (if his epistle is genuine) is possibly the first person to refer to any New Testament book as scripture; in chapter 12 of his epistle he applies this term to Paul's *Ephesians*.

2D – Papias

Papias was the bishop of Hierapolis; he wrote a number of works, probably in the early second century. Few details of his life are known, and his writings have not survived; though, a few small fragments of them were quoted in other documents that have survived. According to Irenaeus, Papias was taught by the apostle John¹⁵; though Papias' own statements contradict this:

But I shall not be unwilling to put down, along with my interpretations, whatsoever instructions I received with care at any time from the elders, and stored up with care in my memory, assuring you at the same time of their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those who spoke much, but in those who taught the truth; nor in those who related strange commandments, but in those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from truth itself. If, then, any one who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings,—what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice.

Papias¹⁶

Papias makes it clear that there are two Johns; one is the apostle who travelled with

13 The Jewish scriptures are referred to in this manner in Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians*, chapter 5 and *Epistle to the Magnesians*, chapter 12. The *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, chapter 8, also explicitly refers to the Jewish bible as scripture.

14 See Ante-Nicene Fathers (ISBN 978-1565630826), volume 1, page 87.

15 Irenaeus is a Catholic father or a later period – see Section 3B. He claimed that Papias was taught by the apostle John in *Adversus Haereses* 5:33:4.

16 This fragment comes from the introduction of his work *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*, this fragment survives because it was quoted by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3:39. The English translation quoted comes from fragment 1 in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, page 153.

Jesus, whom he refers to in the past tense and has never met; the other is John the “presbyter” (or “elder” - “πρεσβύτερος”) who is in a different category and is listed (by implication ranked) after “Aristion” (whoever that is). If you wish to find out more about the authorship of some of the epistles of John I suggest you now consult 2 *John* 1:1 and 3 *John* 1:1 where the author identifies himself clearly.

Papias is the first person (who's writings survive – well, sort of) to mention the names of any of the gospels; he also says a little about their authorship:

And the presbyter said this. Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements.

Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.

Papias¹⁷

Whilst written gospels existed at this time, Papias' comments in the first quotation imply that oral tradition was held in higher regard. We have no reason to believe that Papias considered the gospels, or any other writings of the apostles, to be scripture.

Papias' statements about *Matthew* appear to be describing a sayings gospel (a list of quotes and commentary like the *Gospel of Thomas* or the hypothesised *Quelle*) rather than a narrative account of Jesus' life, as we have in the modern *Matthew*. There is also evidence that our *Matthew* was written in Greek and that it was written by adding additional material (mostly sayings of Jesus) to the *Gospel of Mark*. The simplest explanation for these discrepancies is that the document which Papias knew as “*Matthew*” was a sayings list, and that someone later combined that with *Mark* to create the gospel that we call “*Matthew*”; presumably this happened sometime in the second century. Alternatively, if the statements of Papias do not contain reliable information about the origins of *Matthew* and *Mark* then we know nothing about the authorship of those gospels.

Further evidence that Papias was not familiar with the document we call *Matthew* is found in fragment 3 in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1. Here Papias relates an account of the death of Judas Iscariot which bears little resemblance to the accounts found in the bible (*Matthew* 27:3-8 and *Acts* 1:18-19):

Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety; for his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the

¹⁷ Both of these quotations were also preserved by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3:39. The English translation quoted comes from fragment 6 in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, page 155.

chariot, so that his bowels gushed out.

It is remarkable that that the few small surviving fragments of Papias' writing which survive cause such challenges for the traditional account of the history of the bible. In later centuries some (such as Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in the 4th century) came to have a very low opinion of the writings of Papias (Eusebius describes him as “a man of exceedingly small intelligence” – *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3:39:13). I suspect that this is why Papias' works were not ultimately preserved by the church; a great lost to our knowledge of history.

2E – The *Epistle of Barnabas*

Besides Polycarp's epistle, the only Christian document of this period that refers to a New Testament book as scripture is the *Epistle of Barnabas*. In chapter 4 of that epistle there is a quotation of *Matthew* 22:14 preceded by the authoritative formula “it is written”. Many early Christians believed that the *Epistle of Barnabas* was the work St Barnabas (mentioned in *Galatians* 2:1 and frequently mentioned in *Acts*) and in the 3rd century some considered it scripture; this is no longer widely believed. There is considerable uncertainty about the date of this epistle, estimates range from 70AD to 130AD.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the *Epistle of Barnabas* is the very obvious sympathy that its author has for certain elements of Gnostic teaching. The Gnostics were one of the rival Christian groups that the Catholics considered heretics. Their teaching focused on the idea that believers must acquire hidden spiritual knowledge:

I have hastened briefly to write unto you, in order that, along with your faith, ye might have **perfect knowledge**.

(from chapter 1)

What, then, says **Knowledge**? Learn: “Trust,” she says, “in Him who is to be manifested to you in the flesh—that is, Jesus.” For man is earth in a suffering state, for the formation of Adam was from the face of the earth. What, then, meaneth this: “into the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey?” **Blessed be our Lord, who has placed in us wisdom and understanding of secret things.**

(from chapter 6)

No one has been admitted by me to a more excellent piece of knowledge than this, but I know that ye are worthy.

(from chapter 9)

Another interesting aspect of the *Epistle of Barnabas* is the author's belief that the Jews lost their covenant with God almost immediately after it was made.

And this also I further beg of you... not to be like some, adding largely to your sins, and saying, “The covenant is both theirs and ours.” But they thus finally lost it, after Moses had already received it. For the Scripture saith, “And Moses was fasting in the mount forty days

and forty nights, and received the covenant from the Lord, tables of stone written with the finger of the hand of the Lord;”[*Exodus* 31:18, 34:28] but turning away to idols, they lost it. For the Lord speaks thus to Moses: “Moses go down quickly; for the people whom thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt have transgressed.”[*Exodus* 32:7, *Deuteronomy* 9:12] And Moses understood [the meaning of God], and cast the two tables out of his hands; and their covenant was broken, in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed upon our heart, in the hope which flows from believing in Him.

Epistle of Barnabas, chapter 4

This is an idea known as replacement theology. Replacement theology comes in many forms and variations, but basically it is rooted in the following line of reasoning:

(1) Christian God is the same being as the God of the Jews and Jesus is the Jewish messiah.

Therefore: (2) The the Jewish scriptures are also Christian scripture (the “Old Testament”, though this term came later – see Section 3C on Tertullian).

But: (3) The Jews reject Jesus; they say he does not fulfil the Messianic prophesies and that Christian teachings are incompatible with their scripture.

Therefore: (4) The Jews must be evil and deluded and must no longer be the chosen people of God described in the “Old Testament”.

Therefore: (5) The Covenant between God and the Jews much have been abolished; the Jews have been rejected by God and the Christian church has replaced the Jews as God's chosen people. All of the promises given to Abraham and other Jewish fathers are now applicable to the Christian church instead of the Jews.

This line of reasoning can be seen plainly in the *Epistle of Barnabas*; its author consistently tries to undermine the legitimacy of Judaism, whilst claiming that the Jewish scriptures are Christian documents and that they reinforce the legitimacy of Christianity.

2F – Summary of Section 2

The historical record of the Catholic Christians who existed at this time is so poor (especially when we consider the possibility that the epistles of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp may be forgeries) that one can sensibly question whether the Catholic branch of Christianity truly existed at this time. There certainly were Christians; but, the writings of very few of them have been preserved, probably because the overwhelming majority of them must have had views highly incompatible with the views of the later church. The few documents available which actually might correspond to this period indicate that the concept of a set of “New Testament” writings was not widespread or popular; there was not even a consensus about which gospels were authoritative. Paradoxically, of the two

documents that do definitively recognise the concept of apostolic writings being scripture, one shows signs of being fraudulent or heavily edited, and the other is sympathetic to elements of Gnosticism (which would later be classed as heresy). This is particularly significant, because the first person to ever compile a Christian bible (Marcion of Sinope in the early/mid second century) also held views that were in many ways similar to Gnosticism; implying that the very concept of Christian scripture may originate not with “Catholicism” but with proto-Gnostic and/or proto-Marcionite Christian communities, and migrated into Catholic communities later.

Section 3 – Early Roman Catholicism: c. 140AD to 312AD

Sometime in the early to mid second century a man called Marcion of Sinope became very prominent and influential within the Christian religion. His teachings were very radically different to modern mainstream Christianity, yet were acceptable to vast numbers of Christians of that day. He became the head a group of Christians called the Marcionites; they were one one of the largest branches of Christianity at that time¹⁸.

Modern mainstream Christians (Protestants, Catholics and the Orthodox) believe that Christianity is a continuation of the ancient Jewish religion. They believe that the being which spoke to Moses and the other Jewish prophets is one and the same as the father of Jesus. The Marcionites on the other hand (though they believed that the Jewish scriptures were an accurate record of historical events) did not believe that the being described as “God” in those accounts was truly the omnipotent supreme being of the universe. They believed that the God of Judaism was separate from the father of Jesus (the true omnipotent being). They believed that the Jews had never seen or heard the father of Jesus; they believed that no-one had every known the true God until Jesus begun to reveal him to people.

Marcion was the first person to compile a Christian “bible” (though the term bible did not exist at the time). Marcion believed that only that only the writings of Paul were truly inspired; his bible consisted of one gospel (similar to *Luke* but significantly shorter and ten epistles of Paul (some of which were also significantly shorter than the modern versions). Marcion rejected *Titus*, *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy* and *Hebrews*¹⁹; there is almost unanimous agreement among professional scholars that none of these were written by Paul.

Besides having a radically different bible to the Christians that came after him, Marcion also had a radically different interpretation of it. Marcion believed that the teachings of Jesus and Paul were in opposition to the Jewish scriptures rather than supportive of them. He used contradictions between the two sets of scripture to argue his case, using passages like these:

18 It is impossible to estimate the numbers of followers of any Christian group from this period, as we do not have enough information. We cannot know which group was the largest, but there are telling hints that the Marcionites were one of the largest branches of ancient Christianity. For example, when Celsus (a second century Greek philosopher) wrote a book arguing against Christianity, his perception of the Christian faith was shaped greatly by Marcionite beliefs (See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2:6, 5:54, 6:57, and 7:25-6). For more evidence that the Marcionites were prominent at this time see Tertullian's statements in *Adversus Marcionem* 4:4. Additionally the size and influence of Marcionite Christianity can be estimated from the extent to which Catholics reacted to it; numerous Catholic fathers (e.g. Irenaeus, Origen and Epiphanius) devoted considerable time and energy to combating the Marcionite heresy. Tertullian himself devoted an entire five book treatise to this subject, and even that was re-written several times (*Adversus Marcionem* 1:1:1-2).

19 Alternatively, perhaps he simply hadn't heard of these documents. If the epistles of Clement of Rome, Ignatius and Polycarp are fraudulent and incorrectly dated then there is no indication that *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy*, *Titus* or *Hebrews* existed in Marcion's time, and Marcion himself is the first witness to the other epistles of Paul.

And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty". And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:9:10

And if a woman have issue, and if her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days; whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even... and if a woman have an issue of her blood... beyond the time of her separation,... she shall be unclean.

Leviticus 15:19, 25

Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them (*Psalms 21:12*). Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. (*Psalms 18:4*) Clouds and darkness are round about him... (*97:2a*) He sent darkness, and made it dark... (*Psalms 105a*). He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them (*Psalms 78:49*).

Quotations from Daniel Mahar's reconstruction of *Antithesis*²⁰.

Obviously the modern *Gospel of Luke* and epistles of Paul contain many passages that contradict Marcion's teaching; however, many such passages were not present in the Marcionite version the documents. The majority of Christian scholars believe that this is because Marcion removed passages that contradicted his views; however, there is evidence that in fact the Catholics added these passages to their version of the epistles²¹.

²⁰ Available online: www.marcionite-scripture.info/antithesis.html

²¹ Though the majority of scholars (particularly Christian scholars) believe that Marcion removed material from his scriptures, there are also many scholars and historians that have studied this field and concluded that the Marcionite version of the gospel and epistles of Paul are closer to the originals than the Catholic version of the same documents. See for example:-

- the work of Paul-Louis Couchoud (www.hermann-detering.de/couch_engl.htm),
- the work of Charles Waite (www.marcionite-scripture.info/Charles_Waite.htm),
- the work of Hermann Detering (www.hermann-detering.de/FabricatedJHC.pdf),
- *A Lost Edition of the Letters of Paul* by John J. Clabeaux
- *Marcion and the New Testament* by John Knox (published 1942).

[Jesus' disciples] : "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" *Luke 9:54:55*

And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living on physicians, neither could be healed of any, came up behind [Jesus], and touched the border of His garment: and immediately her issue of blood ceased.

Luke 8:43,44

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand the evil one...taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery arrows of the wicked (*Ephesians 6:16*). For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this Aeon, against spiritual wickedness in high places (*Ephesians 6:12*)

I have chosen to use this event as transition point between sections 2 and 3 of this article because of the profound effect this had on Christianity as a whole. The surviving Christian writings prior to Marcion are few and far between and we can determine little of the history of Catholicism from them. There is no evidence of any consensus among them regarding the concept of Christian scripture. After Marcion's time we find numerous long and well preserved texts written by Christians who identified as "Catholic", and mostly agreed that the writings of the apostles were scripture.

3A – Justin Martyr (c.114-165AD)

The first Christian to leave a substantial body of writings was Justin Martyr; he lived (c.114-165AD), and is considered a saint by Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and several Protestant groups. There are fourteen surviving documents that have traditionally been attributed to Justin, according to nearly universal opinion among scholars three of these are genuine and six are fraudulent; opinion is divided on the remaining five. The three authentic documents are long and developed treaties that provide a wealth of information far more substantial than the handful of epistles written by Christians prior to this time.

The writings of Justin Martyr contain quotations that appear to have come from gospels, but Justin never refers to them by their modern names. Instead he refers to them as the "memoirs of the apostles" for example:

...when [Jesus] went up from the river Jordan, at the time when the voice spake to Him, 'Thou art my Son: **this day have I begotten Thee,**'²² **is recorded in the memoirs of the apostles...**

For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them, [it is recorded] that His sweat fell down like drops of blood while He was praying, and saying, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass:'

Both quotations are from *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 103, written in c. 142AD.

Justin Martyr is the second person to mention the name of one of the books that would later be included in the New Testament; the book of *Revelations* is mentioned in *Dialogue with Trypho* 81:4.

Justin Martyr's views were very anti-Semitic; in many ways he laid the foundation of Christian anti-Semitism that would develop over the following millennia:

For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you [Jews] may be separated from other nations, and from us [Christians]; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and

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- My own analysis of a small cross-section of the evidence can be found in section 5 of another of my articles: www.Original-Bible.com/Introduction-to-Marcionite-Bible.pdf

22 This is widely regarded as quotation of *Matthew* 3:17, though notice the profound difference between the modern text and Justin Martyr's version of this passage. Modern English translations of *Matthew* are based mainly on manuscripts that date 3rd and 4th centuries; whilst this quotation preserves the form that the passage took in approximately 142AD. See also *Psalms* 2:7, which supposedly contains a prophecy of the words of God in *Matthew* 3:17.

your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem.' For you are not recognised among the rest of men by any other mark than your fleshly circumcision. For none of you, I suppose, will venture to say that God neither did nor does foresee the events, which are future, nor foreordained his deserts for each one. Accordingly, these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One [Jesus], and His prophets before Him...

Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 14

In Justin Martyr's writings we find a great deal of the development of the idea of Replacement Theology; this is the idea that the God of the Jews has abolished his covenant with them, and that the Christian church is their replacement – the new Israel, inheriting the promises that were previously made to the Jews (e.g. *Genesis* 13:14-15, 17:8). The very first Christian document to touch upon this idea was the *Epistle of Barnabas*, mentioned in Section 2E. Justin Martyr developed this idea substantially, and the Catholic fathers after him would embrace it and develop it further. Throughout history this line of reasoning has been closely linked to extreme anti-Semitism, culminating in the Nazi holocaust. We will return to the topic of Replacement Theology as we encounter it elsewhere in the writings of the Catholic fathers.

Nor do we think that there is one God for us [Christians], another for you [Jews], but that He alone is God who led your fathers out from Egypt with a strong hand and a high arm. Nor have we trusted in any other (for there is no other), but in Him in whom you also have trusted, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.... Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and **a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one**; and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us [Christians], and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance.... **the true spiritual Israel**, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham..., **are we [Christians] who have been led to God through this crucified Christ...**

Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 11

3B – Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202AD)

Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons, and is considered a saint by the Catholic church, Orthodox church and several Protestant groups. He was a very significant figure in the development of Catholicism; he wrote several works, but the only one that has survived complete to the present day is *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)* which was probably written between 182 and 188AD. In it Irenaeus indicates that the church of his time was swamped by the “false teachings” of Marcion and various Gnostics. The work is divided into five books; in the first Irenaeus describes the beliefs of these rival forms of Christianity; in the second he sets out to refute them; in the remaining three he explains Christian teachings that he considers “true”. In the process of doing this Irenaeus did a great deal to define the Catholic perspective of orthodoxy and heresy. He introduces numerous ideas intended to bolster the authority of “Catholic” Christianity and de-legitimise all other forms of Christianity. He argues:

- 1) That there has been an unbroken chain of Catholic bishops and teachers stretching right back to the apostles themselves, all with compatible and similar beliefs²³; this concept is known as apostolic succession because the bishops are said to be the successors of the apostles.
- 2) That the Catholics preserve scriptures written by the apostles and their associates²⁴.
- 3) That beliefs and practices of Catholic Christians thus pre-date those of heretics, and so are the original and legitimate form of Christianity²⁵.

The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome despatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians [the (probably fraudulent) epistle *1 Clement*, mentioned in Section 2A], exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God, omnipotent, the Maker of heaven and earth,... whosoever chooses to do so, may learn that He, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was preached by the Churches, and may also understand the apostolical tradition of the Church, since this Epistle is of older date than these men who are now propagating falsehood,...

Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 3, paragraph 3.

There are three problems with Irenaeus' argument.

Firstly, as discussed in Section 2, the historical record of Catholic Christianity prior to the mid second century is patchy at best. Even among the writings attributed to Justin Martyr (the last Catholic father before Irenaeus) the forgeries outnumber the authentic documents; the situation gets worse the further back we look. It is particularly interesting that Irenaeus quotes older "Catholic" documents to support his case, namely *1 Clement* and the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp; these epistles in particular show signs of forgery and fraudulent alterations.

Secondly, the few documents that we do have, contain statements that are radically out of

²³ *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, chapter 3, paragraph 3. Irenaeus also argues that there has been a chain of "heretics" each taking ideas from one another and adapting them; this chain is said to stretch back to Simon Magus, the magician mentioned in *Acts*.

²⁴ E.g. *Adversus Haereses* 3:11:8

²⁵ The truth is to be found nowhere else but in the Catholic Church, the sole depository of apostolic doctrine. Heresies are of recent formation, and cannot trace their origin up to the apostles. *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 4, chapter heading.

sync with modern beliefs, and show no agreement at all on what should be considered Christian scripture²⁶.

Thirdly, those early documents also indicate that the church then was just as permeated by widespread “heresy” then as it was in Irenaeus' time, undermining the idea that the “heresies” are younger than “orthodox” belief – the entire point of Irenaeus' argument. In spite of these flaws the arguments of Irenaeus became foundational to the identity of “Catholic” (and later Orthodox) Christianity. Irenaeus also laid the foundation for the development of the Christian bible.

Since Irenaeus views are arguments are particularly significant to the development of Christianity and the Bible I will look at two aspects of his reasoning in more detail.

Apostolic Scriptures

Irenaeus is the first person (who's writings survive) to advocate a four gospel canon of scripture. He talks about the authorship of the four gospels he accepts in *Against Heresies* book 3, chapter 1, verse 1:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

Irenaeus argued against the legitimacy of any other gospels by saying that number of legitimate gospels had to be four, corresponding to the four zones of the earth and the four winds²⁷; a somewhat fuzzy line of reasoning. The majority of Catholic fathers who came after Irenaeus accepted his conclusion that their had to be four legitimate gospels; but, to my knowledge they never re-addressed the matter of why this must be so.

Irenaeus' key point regarding scripture is that these documents derive their authority from close connection to an apostle²⁸; the question of who wrote them is therefore a critical issue. But how can Irenaeus' (writing in the late second century) know who wrote the gospels? For *Matthew* and *Mark*, Irenaeus is repeating the statements of Papias; though adding a tiny bit of extra detail about *Mark*, and saying slightly less about *Matthew*. We have already seen (in Section 2D) that either Papias was wrong about *Matthew*, or the contents of that gospel have changed since Papias' time.

²⁶ No one is known to have even endorsed the four gospel canon prior to Irenaeus; nor is anyone prior to Irenaeus known to have referred to “*Luke*” or “*John*” by their modern names.

²⁷ *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 11, paragraph 8.

²⁸ This is in contrast the the views of Gnostics, who believed that any spiritually mature Christian could receive inspiration from God and write scripture.

Irenaeus' argument is severely undermined by the fact that up until his time there is been no agreement at all among Christians about which documents should be considered scripture. To illustrate this, the table below outlines the attitude various early Christians had towards the apostle Paul:

Documents that do not mention the apostle Paul even once; their authors probably either rejected him, or had not heard of him:	Writers who knew of Paul and respected him as a teacher; they quoted his letters but there is no indication that they considered them scripture:	Early Christians who respected Paul as a Christian teacher and considered his writings to be scripture:
<p>The <i>Didache</i></p> <p>The <i>Epistle to Diognetus</i></p> <p>The <i>Epistle of Barnabas</i> (fraudulent but old)</p> <p>The surviving portions of the writings of Papias</p> <p>The surviving portions of the writings of Hegesippus</p> <p><i>2 Clement</i> (fraudulent but old)</p> <p>The authentic writings of Justin Martyr</p>	<p>The epistles of Ignatius (suspected forgeries)</p> <p><i>1 Clement</i> (suspected forgery)</p>	<p>Polycarp's epistle (suspected forgery)</p> <p>Marcion of Sinope (a "heretic")</p> <p>Basilides, Valentinus and numerous other Gnostic leaders ("heretics")</p>

Irenaeus' writings were extremely influential. The majority of Catholic fathers who came after Irenaeus accepted his idea of a four gospel canon and even accepted Paul's writings as scripture (despite the fact that Paul's writings were extremely popular among Gnostics and Marcionites). Advocates of traditional Christianity often argue that from this point on there was a good consensus about which books should be considered scripture; this is somewhat exaggerated, as we shall see, but it is fair to say that after the time of Irenaeus the scriptures recognized by Christians moved a significant step closer to the New Testament that was eventually chosen.

Irenaeus quotes from many of the books that would later be included in the New Testament in a way that implies he regarded them as authoritative; however, he states that he also regards *1 Clement* as authoritative (*Adversus Haereses* 3:3:3), and he refers to *The Shepherd of Hermas* as "scripture" (*Adversus Haereses* 4:20:2); both of these books would later be rejected from the New Testament. There is no evidence that Irenaeus had even heard of *Philemon*, *2 Peter*, *3 John* or *Jude*.

Apostolic succession

Irenaeus names a number of early Catholics who supposedly learned directly from the apostles, in particular: Clement of Rome (*Against Heresies* 3:3:3, quoted above), and also Papias and his companion Polycarp (see quotations below). Irenaeus also tells us that he himself was a disciple of Polycarp.

And these things are bone witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled by him. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 5:33:4.

For, while I was yet a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp.... For I have a more **vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events...** so that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse... together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how **he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John**, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how **he would call their words to remembrance**. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures. These things, through, God's mercy which was upon me, **I then listened to attentively, and treasured them up not on paper, but in my heart; and I am continually, by God's grace, revolving these things accurately in my mind.**

Irenaeus in his *Epistle to Florinus*²⁹

In Section 2D I discussed Papias; Papias himself stated clearly that his information came from John "**the Elder**", and that John **the Apostle** was already dead in Papias' day. Between Irenaeus' fuzzy childhood memories and his desperation to build an argument, he has confused John the Elder with John the Apostle; his claims about Papias and Polycarp learning directly from apostles also disintegrate; they were part of the same generation as Papias.

In reality the Christians prior to Irenaeus did not believe in a succession of bishops, all chosen by their predecessors stretching back to the apostles. If they did believe in such a thing, why didn't they ever mention it? The author of the Didache certainly wasn't familiar with this concept:

choose for yourselves bishops and deacons

Didache 15

Elsewhere in *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus gives us yet more evidence that the apostolic succession of teachings is unreliable. He reveals that his beliefs about the life and

²⁹ This is a lost document, but this extract comes from a quotation of it that was preserved by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5:20. In particular notice that Irenaeus' information about these relationships comes from memory and oral tradition, not a written source. Irenaeus makes similar statements about learning from Polycarp who, in turn, supposedly learned from the Apostle John in *Adversus Haereses* 2:22:5 and 3:3:4.

ministry of Jesus were dramatically at odds with the modern gospels; yet Irenaeus cites transmitted apostolic teachings and the gospels as his source:

Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but **from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information.** And he remained among them up to the times of [emperor] Trajan [98-117AD]. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:22:4³⁰

Modern Christians believe that Jesus was 30 years old at the time of his baptism; Irenaeus also believed this, and says so in a neighbouring passage. However, the *Gospel of John* indicates that Jesus' ministry lasted for only three years³¹; this fixes Jesus' age of crucifixion at 33, give or take a year or so. It is worth noting that this is not just an insignificant detail of Jesus' life story; in Irenaeus' mind, Jesus had to live to old age as part of the process of redeeming old men³².

Why then is the apostolic tradition and scripture cited by Irenaeus so out of sync with the modern *Gospel of John*? There are several possibilities:

- Perhaps the contents of the gospels has changed since Irenaeus' time.

30 See also *Against Heresies*, book 2:22:6 :

But, besides this, those very Jews who then disputed with the Lord Jesus Christ have most clearly indicated the same thing. For when the Lord said to them, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad," they answered Him, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" [John 8:56-57] Now, **such language is fittingly applied to one who has already passed the age of forty**, without having as yet reached his fiftieth year, yet is not far from this latter period. But to one who is only thirty years old it would unquestionably be said, "Thou art not yet forty years old." ...

31 One of the themes of the *Gospel of John* is a careful record of the chronology of Jesus' ministry by mentioning the various Jewish feasts and religious days as they occur. First passover: *John* 2:13; an unnamed festival: *John* 5:1; second passover: *John* 6:4; Feast of Tabernacles: *John* 7:2; feast of dedication: *John* 10:22, final-passover: *John* 11:55, 13:1. The three year time scale also has symbolic significance; it corresponds to the cycle of scripture readings in a Jewish synagogue.

32 Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master, not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but **sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself.** For He came to save all through means of Himself—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and **old men. He therefore passed through every age**, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So **likewise He was an old man for old men**, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:22:4

- Perhaps Irenaeus is wrong yet again about apostolic succession.
- Perhaps he was twisting the facts to strengthen his argument against the Gnostics; this particular group had beliefs that hinged upon Jesus being about 31 at the time of the crucifixion.

The statements of Irenaeus are the only link between connecting the apostles with two of the four gospels and the early Catholic church. However, Irenaeus has demonstrated repeatedly that he is not a reliable source of information.

Conclusions about Irenaeus'

Irenaeus makes great claims about knowing the lineage of Catholic leaders right back to the apostles, about knowing the details of all of their teachings, and about knowing who authored the gospels. Given that Irenaeus entire argument hang on exactly these points we should be wary of bias in his statements. Another issue is how Irenaeus (writing in the late second century) could possibly know such things with the absolute certainty that he claims. We have seen that his main sources of information were oral traditions, his memory was poor, he contradicts more reliable sources of information (the writings of Papias) and his integrity is questionable. In spite of his bold claims, he is not a trustworthy source of information. This means that:-

- Our only source of information about the authorship of *Matthew* and *Mark* is a fragment of the writings of Papias; see Section 2D.
- We know nothing at all about the writers of the gospels commonly called “*Luke*” and “*John*”.
- We know nothing about the first Catholic teachers except, perhaps, their names; surviving fragments of Papias' works are our only source on this subject too.

In spite of the dramatic flaws in Irenaeus' arguments, his formula for legitimising Catholicism and de-legitimising other forms of Christianity became foundational to Catholic (and Orthodox) identity. His arguments and basic strategy have been repeated by Catholics, and members of the off-shoots of Catholicism (the Orthodox and various Protestant churches).

Like Justin Martyr and the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Irenaeus believed in Replacement Theology:

they who boast themselves as being the house of Jacob and the people of Israel, are disinherited from the grace of God.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3:21:1

3C – Tertullian (c.145 AD to c.220 AD)

Tertullian was the first Catholic known to conceive of Christian scripture being divided into a “New Testament” and an “Old Testament”³³. “Testament” and “covenant” are old terms for a contract; these words (or rather their Greek and Hebrew counterparts) are used in the bible to describe agreements between God and humans (e.g. *Exodus* 19:1-8, *Jeremiah* 31:31, *2 Corinthians* 3:14-15³⁴ etc.), but prior to the time of Tertullian, Christians did not categorise scripture on this basis.

This change of terminology is more significant than it may at first appear. Tertullian was reacting against the teachings of Marcionite Christianity which were still one of the most widespread forms of Christianity at that time³⁵. Marcionite Christianity is a form of Christianity that rejects the Jewish scriptures and is not attached to, or intertwined with, Judaism in the way that Protestant / Catholic / Orthodox Christianity is. In the work *Adversus Marcionem* (*Against Marcion*), Tertullian sought to argue that the Jewish Scriptures were from the same God that sent Jesus; he was in part responding to arguments laid down by Marcion in the previous century. Marcion had argued that the teachings of Jesus and Paul were fundamentally incompatible with the petty and jealous character of the Jewish God. Tertullian could not deny that the teachings of Jesus and Paul directly contradicted those of the Jewish prophets; instead, he opposed Marcionite beliefs by arguing that the incompatibilities arose because these two sets of scriptures were given at different times and for different purposes³⁶. Tertullian argued that the Jewish God had first given the law, and then at the time of Jesus, overturned it. Hence Tertullian's distinction between the “new” scripture and “old” (outdated and overruled) scripture.

And indeed I do allow that one order did run its course in the old dispensation under the Creator, and that another is on its way in the new under Christ. **I do not deny that there is a difference in the language of their documents, in their precepts of virtue, and in their**

33 In *Adversus Marcionem* book 3, chapter 14, verse 3 Tertullian described the divine word as being doubly edged with “duobus testamentis legis et evangelii” (“two testaments, the law and the gospel”).

34 Some may object here and claim that *2 Corinthians* 3:14-15 refers to the “Old Testament” with the statement “αχρι ναρ της σημερον το αυτο καλυμμα επι τη ανανωσει της παλαιας διαθηκης μενει” (“for to this day, the same veil remains over the reading of the Old Covenant” – both Greek and English quotations are from the Emphatic Diaglott) this is however only one possible interpretation; the passage may just as easily be a specific reference to the words by which the Sinai Covenant was sealed (*Exodus* 19:1-8). The former interpretation is based on an understanding of the phases as they were used since the time of Tertullian (early 3rd century), while the later is based only on the pre-Tertullian use of the words.

35 It is impossible to estimate the numbers of followers of any Christian group from this period, as we do not have enough information. We cannot know which group was the largest, but there are telling hints that the Marcionites were one of the largest branches of ancient Christianity. For example, when Celsus (a second century Greek philosopher) wrote a book arguing against Christianity, his perception of the Christian faith was shaped greatly by Marcionite beliefs (See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2:6, 5:54, 6:57, 7:25-6). For more evidence that the Marcionites were prominent at this time see Tertullian's statements in *Adversus Marcionem* 4:4. Additionally the size and influence of Marcionite Christianity can be estimated from the extent to which Catholics reacted to it; numerous Catholic fathers (e.g. Irenaeus, Origen and Epiphanius) devoted considerable time and energy to combating the Marcionite heresy. Tertullian himself devoted an entire five book treatise to this subject, and even that was written and re-written several times (*Adversus Marcionem* 1:1:1-2).

36 See for example Tertullian's discussion of *Exodus* 21:24 and *Luke* 6:29, in *Adversus Marcionem* 4:16.

teachings of the law; but yet all this diversity is consistent with one and the same God, even Him by whom it was arranged and also foretold.

Tertullian in *Adversus Marcionem*, book 4, chapter 1, verse 3.

Tertullian is commonly referred to as the “father of Latin Christianity”, and his ideas were pivotal to the development of Christianity and the bible; it can be argued that no Catholic father was more influential until Augustine in the 4th and 5th centuries, and Augustine himself was greatly influenced by Tertullian. It is therefore rather awkward to note that in his later days Tertullian openly advocated the views and attitudes of a radical Christian sect called the Montanists, and came to openly revile the teaching and attitudes of the more orthodox Christians of his day. The Catholic church denounced the Montanists as heretics, but Tertullian's writings were far too important to Catholicism to be cast aside, and so paradoxically he remains one of the most influential Christians of all time.

The Catholic church had good reason to reject many of the teachings of the Montanists; like Ignatius of Antioch, Tertullian was so zealous for martyrdom that his teachings encourage deliberately self-destructive behaviour. In *De Fuga in Persecutione (On Running Away From Persecution)* Tertullian addresses the question of whether or not it is permissible for a Christian to try to avoid persecution by fleeing to another place (something that the gospels actively encourage – *Matthew 10:23*).

Rutilius, a saintly martyr, after having oftentimes fled from persecution from place to place, nay, having bought security from danger, as he thought, by [bribing officials with] money, was, notwithstanding the complete security he had, as he thought, provided for himself, at last unexpectedly seized, and being brought before the magistrate, was put to the torture and cruelly mangled,----a punishment [from God], I believe, for his fleeing,----and thereafter he was consigned to the flames, and thus paid to the mercy of God the suffering which he had shunned. What else did the Lord mean to show us by this example, but that we ought not to flee from persecution because it avails us nothing if God disapproves?

Tertullian, *On Running Away From Persecution*, chapter 5, verse 5 (Thelwall translation).

"Him who will confess Me, I also will confess before My Father." [*Matthew 10:32-33*] How will he confess, fleeing? How flee, confessing? "Of him who shall be ashamed of Me, will I also be ashamed before My Father." [*Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26*] If I avoid suffering, I am ashamed to confess. "Happy they who suffer persecution for My name's sake." [*Matthew 5:11*] Unhappy, therefore, they who, by running away, will not suffer according to the divine command. "He who shall endure to the end shall be saved." [*Matthew 10:22*] How then, when you bid me flee, do you wish me to endure to the end? If views so opposed to each other do not comport with the divine dignity, they clearly prove that the command to flee had, at the time it was given, a reason of its own, which we have pointed out. But it is said, the Lord, providing for the weakness of some of His people, nevertheless, in His kindness, suggested also the haven of flight to them. For He was not able even without flight----a protection so base, and unworthy, and servile----to preserve in persecution such as He knew to be weak! Whereas in fact **He [God] does not cherish, but ever rejects the weak**, teaching first, not that we are to fly from our persecutors, but rather that we are not to fear them. "Fear not them

who are able to kill the body, but are unable to do ought against the soul; but **fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.**"[*Matthew* 10:28]

Tertullian, *On Running Away From Persecution*, chapter 7, verse 2-3 (Thelwall translation)

In this way Tertullian goaded his readers to embrace a horrific fate, using threats torture in this life and the fire of hell in the next. His reasoning throughout the entire book is highly disturbing³⁷. It is worth noting that in spite of these views, Tertullian lived to an old age; if he had died a martyr then his many admirers would no-doubt have recorded the event and we would know of it; yet his name does not feature in any of the lists of martyrs; there is no recorded account of his death as there is for so many noteworthy Christians of this period.

Tertullian also hated the Jews, and endorsed Replacement Theology; just like the Catholic fathers before and after him. Tertullian said that all Jews were guilty of the death of Jesus (*An Answer to the Jews*, 8:18), and that they were "divorced" from "the grace of divine favour" (*An Answer to the Jews*, 1:8; see also 13:13, 15, 26).

Accordingly, **all the synagogue of Israel did slay Him**, saying to Pilate, when he was desirous to dismiss Him, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children;" and, "If thou dismiss him, thou art not a friend of Cæsar;" in order that all things might be fulfilled which had been written of Him.

Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 8:18.

The Jew's at that time had recently suffered terribly at the hands of the Romans; the Jewish temple was destroyed in 70AD, and then at the time of emperor Hadrian they were driven from their land and forbidden from returning to it. Hadrian even ordered that the Jewish "promised land" be renamed "Palestine"; naming it after the Jew's ancient enemy the Philistines³⁸ this was a strategy to mock and humiliate the Jews using their history and beliefs. Tertullian discusses the Jewish suffering without a trace of compassion anywhere in the book, and says that it is a punishment from God, because of their rejection of Jesus.

Therefore, since the Jews still contend that the Christ is not yet come, whom we have in so many ways approved to be come, let the Jews recognise their own fate,—a fate which they were constantly foretold as destined to incur after the advent of the Christ, on account of the impiety with which they despised and slew Him.

Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 13:24.

And because they had committed these crimes, and had failed to understand that Christ "was to be found"[*Isaiah* 4:6-7] in "the time of their visitation," [Luke 19:41-44] their land has been made "desert, and their cities utterly burnt with fire, while strangers devour their region in their sight: the daughter of Sion is derelict, as a watch-tower in a vineyard, or as a shed in a cucumber garden,"—ever since the time, to wit, when "Israel knew not" the Lord, and "the People understood Him not;" but rather "quite forsook, and provoked unto indignation, the

³⁷ Here are a few examples of such passages, though you'll need to read the entire thing if you want to really get into Tertullian's mindset: *De Fuga in Persecutione* 6:1-5, 8:4 and 12:5

³⁸ The ancient Jewish conflicts with the Philistines are mentioned in *1 Samuel* 4:1-10, 7:3-14, also, chapters 14 and 17.

Holy One of Israel.” [Isaiah 1:7, 8, 4]

Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 13:26, see also 13:28

3D – Other Catholic fathers of this period

Christian apologists often try to claim that there was a broad consensus about Christian scripture agreement among Christians of the second century. I do not have time to review the writings of all of the significant Christians of this era, but suffice it to say that though most of them agreed on some basic points like the authenticity of the gospels and epistles of Paul³⁹, there was still left room for substantial areas of disagreement. There were Catholic fathers of this period who held in high regard many books that were later rejected from the canon. For example Clement of Alexandria (150 to 215AD) regarded the following books as authoritative: the *Gospel of the Hebrews*⁴⁰, *The Traditions of Matthias*⁴¹, *The Preaching of Peter*⁴², *1 Clement*⁴³, *The Epistle of Barnabas*⁴⁴ and *The Shepherd of Hermas*⁴⁵. *The Shepherd of Hermas* in particular received widespread acceptance during this period⁴⁶, but was rejected from the bible in later centuries.

There are a few books which were neither accepted nor debated by the early Church Fathers, there is no evidence for example that *2 Peter* existed at all until 248, when it was mentioned by Origen, who said that its authenticity was doubted⁴⁷. There are some

39 There were exceptions even to this; Tatian is known to have rejected some of the epistles of Paul.

40 *The Stromata*, book 2, chapter 9, 45:

As it is written in the Gospel of the Hebrews: He that marvels shall reign, and he that has reigned shall rest.

41 *The Stromata*, book 2, chapter 9.

42 *The Stromata*, 1:29, 2:15, 6:6 and 6:15. Clement of Alexandria considered *The Preaching of Peter* to be an authentic work by that apostle, he must therefore also have classed it as scripture. *The Stromata*, book 6, chapter 5: Peter says in the Preaching:...

43 *The Stromata*, book 1, chapter 7

44 Clement regarded the *Epistle of Barnabas* as an authentic writing of an Apostle, it follows that he considered it to be scripture. *The Stromata*, book 2, chapter 6:

Rightly, therefore, the Apostle Barnabas says, “From the portion I have received I have done my diligence to send by little and little to you; that along with your faith you may also have perfect knowledge... [quoting Epistle of Barnabas]

45 See *The Stromata*, 1:17, 1:29, 2:1, 6:6, 6:15. *The Stromata*, book 1, chapter 29:

Divinely, therefore, the power which spoke to Hermas by revelation said, “The visions and revelations are for those who are of double mind, who doubt in their hearts if these things are or are not.” [quoting The Shepherd Hermas]

46 Some have speculated that *The Shepherd of Hermas* was written by the same Hermas that we find mentioned in *Romans* 16:14, though several ancient writers claim that it was written by the brother of Pope Pius I. It was perhaps written 140-155AD, though some estimates put it significantly earlier than this. Besides Clement of Alexandria, it was referred to as “scripture” by Irenaeus in 160 AD (*Against All Heresies* 4:20:2), Tertullian speaks favourably of it in *De Oratione (On Prayer)* chapter 16 – though his opinion later changed when he became a Montanist; it was also described as “divinely inspired” by Origen in c. 244-6 A.D in his *Commentary on Romans* 10:31.

47 Not all of Origen’s writings have survived, however this particular statement was quoted by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica (Church History)* book 6, chapter 25, verse 8:

phases in the writings of the Church fathers with a similar wording to statements in 2 *Peter*; some claim that these are allusions to 2 *Peter*, and use them as evidence for its existence before the 3rd century. On closer examination their case is weak; the phrasing is not identical and, given the huge volume of Christian writings from this period it can be explained by chance, and the existence of common phrases within the Christian communities that would have been used by Catholic fathers and forgers alike. Suggesting that an epistle could be well accepted for several centuries but not once mentioned by name or quoted explicitly is a somewhat desperate position.

When advocates of the mainstream bible search the writings of Christians of this period they are not able to find a single one who would agree completely with the “New Testament” that we have today.

There was however a consensus among the catholic fathers of this period about Replacement Theology, and high levels of anti-Semitism. I could not possibly embark upon a thorough discussion of the views of all of the Catholic fathers of this period, but here is one more quote to illustrate my point.

on account of their unbelief, and the other insults which they heaped upon Jesus, the Jews will not only suffer more than others in that judgment which is believed to impend over the world, but have even already endured such sufferings. For what nation is an exile from their own metropolis, and from the place sacred to the worship of their fathers, save the Jews alone? And these calamities they have suffered, because **they were a most wicked nation**, which, although **guilty of many other sins, yet has been punished so severely for none, as for those that were committed against our Jesus.**

Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 2, chapter 8.

And Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, ‘against which the gates of hell shall not prevail,’ has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful.
Translation from [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 1](#), page 572.

Section 4 – The Union of Church and State: 312AD to 480AD

By the mid 3rd century Christianity had become large and widespread throughout the Roman empire. Christians were still a minority, but by now there were many wealthy and influential Christians⁴⁸ and the number of Christians was still increasing. This led the political powers of the time to feel that Christianity was a growing threat to the culture and unity of the empire, and hostility towards Christians increased dramatically towards the end of the 3rd century. Next Christians experienced the most widespread and severe persecutions that had occurred so far. In 303, emperor Diocletian and his co-rulers Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius begun to issue edicts which forced Christians to sacrifice to pagan idols; the Christian groups that were unwilling to do this (e.g. the Marcionites, Catholics, Montanists, etc.) suffered considerably.

4A – Religion and politics in Roman culture

It may seem strange that the Roman political powers felt that the unity of the empire was threatened by the growth of Christianity; however this can be explained by the fact that in Roman culture, religion and political power were closely intertwined. One of the titles claimed by the Roman emperor was “Pontifex Maximus” - head of the ancient Roman religion. The Romans were very tolerant of the pagan beliefs of the people they conquered; they believed that there were many gods, and that they all had many names; this made it very easy to integrate the beliefs of conquered people into the religion of the empire, and greatly assisted the assimilation of those people. The fact that Christians (and Jews) believed in a different God was not an issue for the Romans; however, the denial of the legitimacy of all other gods was. In the Roman mind, religion was the glue that held society together. When the Christians denied the legitimacy of the Roman gods it was mistakenly taken as denial of the legitimacy of the Roman state and the Roman emperor – treason!

The teachings of Jesus and the apostles contain a bold concept that ancient Europe was not ready to receive; their writings are consistently written from a perspective that sees religious loyalty and political loyalty as two separate and unrelated things⁴⁹. The reason for the persecution of Christians in Rome is that this concept was utterly lost on the Roman political powers and Christianity was regarded as a growing faction of traitors.

48 Origen (185-254AD) records that there were Churches “everywhere” in *Against Celsus*, book 1, chapter 43. He also wrote: “At the present day, indeed, when, owing to the multitude of Christian believers, not only rich men, but persons of rank, and delicate and high-born ladies, receive the teachers of Christianity” – *Against Celsus* 3:9

49 There are numerous relevant verses (subject to interpretation): E.g. *Matthew* 22:21 & 26:52-54, *1 John* 5:19, and *Revelations* 12:1-17 & 13:1-18. *Romans* 13:4 can be interpreted as supporting a union of church and state – incidentally there are signs that this passage is fraudulent. The most relevant point however is the lack of any statements that Christians should try to impose upon society around them the rules and beliefs of Christianity. This is in dramatic opposition to the Hebrew scriptures (or “Old Testament”) which contains detailed instruction for the structuring of a religious society in which: alternative religious practices are banned on pain of death (*Numbers* 25:4-9); Gods vengeance is carried out by human soldiers, at the command of a prophet (*Numbers* 31:3). Indeed the very basis for the Jewish religion was a covenant supposedly made between God and the Jewish nation.

4B – Constantine: the first Christian emperor

In the year 312AD emperor Constantine defeated a number of opponents and came to power in the Roman Empire. This was a dramatic turning point in the history of Christianity because Constantine was sympathetic to Catholic beliefs. In 313AD he (and his co-emperor Licinius) issued an edict (the Edict of Milan) declaring Christianity to be the “most favoured” religion in the Roman Empire⁵⁰. Though the Edict of Milan declared Constantine's favouritism for Christianity, it did not force people to convert to it, and so it was a huge step forward for religious tolerance in Roman society. Sadly it was followed almost immediately by an equally dramatic step back, when Constantine issued an edict that persecution of “heretical” Christians was to be resumed. Constantine addressed the despised “heretics” directly in an open letter to inform them of their fate:

Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus, to the heretics.

Understand now, by this present statute, ye Novatians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulians, ye who are called Cataphrygians, and all ye who devise and support heresies by means of your private assemblies, with what a tissue of falsehood and vanity, with what **destructive and venomous errors**, your doctrines are inseparably interwoven; so that **through you the healthy soul is stricken with disease**, and the living becomes the prey of everlasting death. **Ye haters and enemies of truth and life, in league with destruction! All your counsels are opposed to the truth, but familiar with deeds of baseness; full of absurdities and fictions: and by these ye frame falsehoods, oppress the innocent, and withhold the light from them that believe.** Ever trespassing under the mask of godliness, **ye fill all things with defilement**: ye pierce the pure and guileless conscience with deadly wounds, while ye withdraw, one may almost say, the very light of day from the eyes of men. But why should I particularize, when to speak of your **criminality** as it deserves demands more time and leisure than I can give? For **so long and unmeasured is the catalogue of your offenses, so hateful and altogether atrocious are they, that a single day would not suffice to recount them all....**

Constantine⁵¹

The edict went on to outline that they were to be stripped of their property simply for meeting together; worse penalties were soon to follow. The pagans too suffered persecution under Constantine⁵².

Constantine did not officially convert to Christianity or receive baptism until he was dying in

50 The edict of Milan is recorded in *De Mortibus Persecutorum (On the Deaths of the Persecutors)* by Lactantius (c.240–c.320). An English translation of it, and discussion of these events can be found on pages 25-26 of *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* by Professor Pierre Chuvin (ISBN 0-674- 12970-9).

51 Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339) (also known as Eusebius Pamphilius) was a bishop and church historian of the time. He recorded Constantine's edict against the “heretics” in *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapters 64-65. He also discusses the edict, and celebrates the zeal with which Constantine persecuted heretics in chapters 63 and 66.

52 In *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 48, Eusebius records that Constantine purged Constantinople from “idolatry of every kind”. Assaults on several temples are described in chapters 53 to 56 and 58 of the same book.

337AD, but this did not stop him getting involved in Christian affairs. For example in 325AD, he initiated the Council of Nicaea to settle disputes about the divinity of Jesus. Though still unbaptised, Constantine participated in the discussions as though he was a bishop⁵³.

The Council of Nicaea established the doctrine of the trinity. Constantine immediately ordered that the books of Arius and his followers be burnt on pain of death. (Arias was a bishop who opposed the doctrine of the trinity; he believed that Jesus was born an ordinary man and that he became the son of God in an adoptive sense at his baptism.) It's worth remembering that the version of *Matthew* 3:17 quoted by Justin Martyr in the mid second century was a version that supported Arias' beliefs (see Section 3A above); presumably any similar copies of *Matthew* still in circulation were now being destroyed.

This therefore I decree, that if any one shall be detected in concealing a book compiled by Arius, and shall not instantly bring it forward and burn it, the penalty for this offense shall be death; for immediately after conviction the criminal shall suffer capital punishment. Emperor Constantine, in an epistle written immediately after the council of Nicaea. The epistle is recorded by Socrates Scholasticus (also known as Socrates of Constantinople) in *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, chapter 9.

53 Eusebius of Caesarea recorded this in *Life of Constantine*, book 1, chapter 44:

he [Constantine] exercised a peculiar care over the church of God: and whereas, in the several provinces there were some who differed from each other in judgment, he, like some general bishop constituted by God, convened synods of his ministers. Nor did he disdain to be present and sit with them in their assembly, but bore a share in their deliberations, ministering to all that pertained to the peace of God. He took his seat, too, in the midst of them, as an individual among many ...

Eusebius also tells us that Constantine was responsible for adding the controversial word “ὁμοούσιος” (“one in substance”) to the Nicene Creed. He wrote about this in a letter to his church in Caesarea; the letter is recorded by Socrates Scholasticus in *Church History* 1:8:

On this faith being publicly put forth by us, no room for contradiction appeared; but our most pious Emperor, before any one else, testified that it comprised most orthodox statements. He confessed, moreover, that such were his own sentiments; and he advised all present to agree to it, and to subscribe its articles and to assent to them, with the insertion of the single word, ‘One in substance’ (ὁμοούσιος), which, moreover, he interpreted as not in the sense of the affections of bodies, nor as if the Son subsisted from the Father, in the way of division, or any severance; for that the immaterial and intellectual and incorporeal nature could not be the subject of any corporeal affection, but that it became us to conceive of such things in a divine and ineffable manner. And such were the theological remarks of our most wise and most religious Emperor;...

4C – The emperors after Constantine

Constantine began the process of converting the empire to Christianity, but died in 337, before this was complete. After his death the throne was inherited by his sons Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans; they initially ruled together, and then started fighting. Constantine's son's attempted improve the unity of the Catholic church by making the Catholic bishops accept the Arianists back into the fold; this bought the emperors into conflict with the church and they came to be despised by the Catholics. Constantine II died in 340AD, Constans died in 350 and Constantius II died in 361.

After the deaths of Constantine's sons, his nephew Julian became emperor. Julian was the last pagan emperor. He attempted to restore paganism to its original place as the main religion of the empire; he prevented Christians from occupying senior positions in his administration, but did not persecute Christians violently. Julian's reign was extremely short, a mere 19 months.

There followed a succession of Christian emperors who ruled for short periods of time : Jovian (8 months), Valentinian I (about a year).... The details of their lives are not particularly relevant to the history of the bible; though, it is worth mentioning that the persecution of Paganism was scaled up significantly after the death of Julian. It was at this time, over the course of a couple of decades that the number of Pagans (and there levels of wealth and influence) plummeted. Rather than focus on the laws passed against pagans⁵⁴ however, I wish to focus on the attitudes and teachings of Catholics at this time. We will see that they encouraged and approved of the violence carried out on their behalf; this is far more relevant to the development of the bible, since these were the very same people who made the decisions about what should be considered scripture.

4D – The utter corruption of the 4th century Catholic church

I commented at the beginning of this section that the Romans before Constantine believed that only members of the state religion could be considered loyal citizens; when the Catholics gained political influence they themselves continued to propagate this basic miss-understanding. Violence and brute force continued to be used to suppress rival religious groups and force conversions to the official religion, starting with the “heretics” and then extending to Pagan's also a little later.

Of-course some will object here, and claim that the Church was not guilty of the crimes committed in their name by the political authorities. However the writings of the bishops of the time reveal that Constantine was a very popular figure⁵⁵. The Catholic Church

⁵⁴ One emperor who is worth mentioning is emperor Theodosius who reigned 379 to 395. He passed several laws against non-Catholics. The most significant of these is recorded in the *Codex Theodosianus*, book 16, 1:2; it dictated that all people must convert to Catholicism or be put to death. Pagans and non-Catholic Christians had already suffered considerably from imperial laws and Catholic mobs prior to this ruling, and would continue to exist for sometime afterwards in spite of the laws against them.

⁵⁵ Bishops referred to Constantine as the “Lord’s angel” and described his throne as “a picture of Christ’s

approved of his violent actions⁵⁶. Sadly there are many passages in the writings of the Catholics of this time where we find them encouraging even more violence.

But on you also, Most Holy Emperors, devolves the imperative necessity to **castigate and punish this evil, and the law of the Supreme Deity enjoins on you that your severity should be visited in every way on the crime of idolatry**. Hear and store up in your sacred intelligence what is God's commandment regarding this crime.

In *Deuteronomy* this law is written, for it says: "But if thy brother, or thy son, or thy wife that is in thy bosom or thy friend who is equal to thy own soul, should ask thee, secretly saying: Let us go and serve other gods, the gods of the Gentiles; thou shalt not consent to him nor hear him, neither shall thy eye spare him, and thou shalt not conceal him. Announcing thou shalt announce about him; **thy hand shall be first upon him to kill him**, and afterwards the hands of all the people; and **they shall stone him and he shall die**, because he sought to withdraw thee from thy Lord." [*Deuteronomy* 13:6-10] 2. He bids spare neither son nor brother, and thrusts the avenging sword through the body of a beloved wife. A friend too **He persecutes with lofty severity, and the whole populace takes up arms to rend the bodies of sacrilegious men**.

Even for whole cities, if they are caught in this crime, destruction is decreed; and that your providence may more plainly learn this, I shall quote the sentence of the established law.... [He then quotes *Deuteronomy* 13:12-18]

Firmicus Maternus in *De errore Profanarum Religionum*⁵⁷ (346AD); this quotation is from chapter 29, entitled: "Let the Emperors Stamp Out Paganism and Be Rewarded by God"

In 408 Augustine of Hippo wrote an epistle to Vincentius, a Rogatist. (The Rogatists were a non-Catholic Christian group; they were a small offshoot of the Donatists with very similar views to that sect.) In this epistle (known as *Epistle 93*) Augustine discusses the key issues that Catholics and Donatists disagree on; the issue of persecution and forced conversion being foremost among these. Throughout the first 12 chapters Augustine repeatedly endorses the persecution of non-Catholics; he even praises the effectiveness of those methods for propagating Catholicism, and explains why he and his fellow

kingship" Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 15. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 1 chapter 1:

Already have all mankind united in celebrating with joyous festivities the completion of the second and third decennial period of this **great emperor's** reign; already have **we ourselves received him as a triumphant conqueror in the assembly of God's ministers**, and **greeted him with the due meed of praise** on the twentieth anniversary of his reign: and still more recently we have woven, as it were, garlands of words, wherewith we encircled his **sacred head** in his own palace on his thirtieth anniversary. Socrates (the Catholic writer who recorded the epistle of Constantine) made no critical comment about this use of violence transform Christian beliefs. In other passages of the same book he demonstrates that he had a very high opinion of Constantine; in chapter 9 we find him described as "our most religious emperor Constantine", Socrates also complements Constantine's diligence at the beginning of Chapter 10.

⁵⁶ Eusebius' discusses the edict against heretics, and celebrates the zeal with which Constantine persecuted heretics in *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapters 63 and 66.

⁵⁷ Translated by Clarence A. Forbes as *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, Newman Press, 1970, ISBN 0809100398

Catholics endorse such cruel tactics when it serves the purpose of their religion. An English translation of this epistle can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, volume 1, p382-401. Here are a couple of quotes from the epistle:

Nay verily; let the kings of the earth serve Christ by making laws for Him and for His cause.

(from chapter 5 / section 19)

Augustine also indicates that his fellow Catholics were in agreement with him on the issue of forcing people into the church:

For originally my opinion was, that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ, that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments, and prevail by force of reason, lest we should have those whom we knew as avowed heretics feigning themselves to be Catholics. But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instances to which they could point.

(from chapter 5 / section 17)

It seems that although the Donatists and Rogatists objected to the use of violence against non-Catholic Christians, even they saw nothing wrong with violence against Pagans:

For which of us [Catholics], yea, which of you [Rogatists & Donatists], does not speak well of the laws issued by the emperors against heathen sacrifices?

(from chapter 3 / section 10)

What is perhaps most disturbing of all is that Augustine seems to have believe that persecution and forced conversion is an act of love:

Who can love us more than God does? And yet He not only give us sweet instruction, but also quickens us by salutary fear, and this unceasingly. Often adding to the soothing remedies by which He comforts men the sharp medicine of tribulation, He afflicts with famine even the pious and devout patriarchs, disquiets a rebellious people by more severe chastisements, and refuses, though thrice besought, to take away the thorn in the flesh of the apostle, that He may make His strength perfect in weakness. **Let us by all means love even our enemies**, for this is right, and God commands us so to do, in order that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven, "who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." But as we praise these His gifts, **lets us in like manner ponder His correction of those whom He loves.**

From chapter 2 / section 4 of the same epistle.

There are many Catholics of this period who's writings confirm that the Church encouraged and endorsed the violence. I have chosen to focus mainly on the writings of Augustine because he is one of the most influential people in the history of Christianity. Augustine was a bishop and patriarch, he lived 354 to 430AD; he is also regarded as a saint and is deeply revered to this day by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, and several branches of Protestantism. Catholics also consider him a doctor of the church. Augustine

is one of the most influential Christians of all time. His writings and teachings shaped the beliefs of the Catholic church as Europe went through a transition from Roman times to Medieval times.

those who have understanding may perceive that it is rather the Catholic Church which suffers persecution through the pride and impiety of those carnal men whom it endeavours to correct by afflictions and terrors of a temporal kind.

(Augustine – quote from chapter 2 / section 6 of *Epistle 93*)

Augustine also discusses his views on this subject in his book *De Correctione Donatistarum* (*The Correction of the Donatists*, written in 416AD), especially chapters 6 and 7; an English translation of which can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, volume 4, page 629. See also Augustine's Sermon 62, *On the words of the Gospel, Luke 14:16*; an English translation can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, volume 6, page 447-449.

It was in response to the teachings of Christians like these that the Christian Roman emperors passed laws that non-Catholic Christians should be persecuted, forcibly converted and killed.

4E – Catholics who opposed violence

The Catholic church was frequently rent by petty disputes, and so even a few of its most senior figures found themselves on the receiving end of violence. Although Constantine made Arianist beliefs illegal, his sons would later favour Arianism over Trinitarianism – yet another source of violence and bloodshed within “Catholicism”. The result of all this is that, though Catholicism wielded great political power and frequently persecuted other faiths, some Catholic bishops also found themselves victims of violence. Several Catholic bishops were banished, and on occasion their congregations were violently assaulted. It is in these situations, and the aftermath of them, that such persecuted Catholics occasionally wrote statements against the use of violence to change peoples beliefs. Such statements are rare in the writings of the church fathers; the few that I know of (e.g. Hilary of Poitiers and John Chrysostom) were themselves victims of persecution⁵⁸. Perhaps they were just trying to dissuade their enemies from persecuting them, or perhaps in their moment of suffering they did gain some genuine sympathy for the “heretics” who were routinely persecuted much more severely. At any rate I am not aware of any Catholic who argued against the use of violence strongly, consistently or when they themselves were in a position of strength; even though many of them had the courage to openly oppose the emperors on doctrinal issues. One of the Catholic fathers sometimes quoted as objecting to violence is John Chrysostom, and he yet he was one of the Catholics fathers most inclined towards violence and hatred.

But since our discourse has now turned to the subject of blasphemy, I desire to ask one favor of you all, in return for this my address, and speaking with you; which is, that you will correct on my behalf the blasphemers of this city. And should you hear any one in the public

⁵⁸ Hilary of Poitiers was exiled in 356AD for his criticism of an Arianist bishop; John Chrysostom was also exiled, in about 403AD, due to the actions of a number of his enemies (other Catholic bishops).

thoroughfare, or in the midst of the forum, blaspheming God; **go up to him and rebuke him; and should it be necessary to inflict blows, spare not to do so. Smite him on the face; strike his mouth; sanctify thy hand with the blow**, and if any should accuse thee, and drag thee to the place of justice, follow them thither; and when the judge on the bench calls thee to account, say boldly that the man blasphemed the King of angels! **For if it be necessary to punish those who blaspheme an earthly king, much more so those who insult God. It is a common crime, a public injury;** and it is lawful for every one who is willing, to bring forward an accusation. Let the Jews and Greeks learn, that the Christians are the saviours of the city; that they are its guardians, its patrons, and its teachers. Let the dissolute and the perverse also learn this; that **they must fear the servants of God** too; that if at any time they are inclined to utter such a thing, **they may look round every way at each other, and tremble even at their own shadows, anxious lest perchance a Christian, having heard what they said, should spring upon them and sharply chastise them.**

Part of a homily delivered in c. 387 AD by Saint John Chrysostom, who would later become the Patriarch of Constantinople. This quotation is from *Concerning the Statues*, first homily, verse 32.

John Chrysostom also wrote a series of homilies about Judaism; these are a classic exposition of Replacement Theology⁵⁹, and the most shockingly anti-Semitic material I have ever read. He described Jews as "fit for killing"⁶⁰ and described the synagogue as a

59 Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, they fell to kinship with dogs; we who were dogs received the strength, through God's grace, to put aside the irrational nature which was ours and to rise to the honor of sons. How do I prove this? Christ said: "It is no fair to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs" [*Matthew* 15:26]. Christ was speaking to the Canaanite woman when He called the Jews children and the Gentiles dogs. (2) But see how thereafter the order was changed about: they became dogs, and we became the children. Paul said of the Jews: "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation. For we are the circumcision" [*Philippians* 3:2-3]. Do you see how those who at first were children became dogs? Do you wish to find out how we, who at first were dogs, became children? "But to as many as received him, he gave the power of becoming sons of God" [*John* 1:12].

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, homily 1, part 2, 1-2

60 (5) But what is the source of this hardness? It come from gluttony and drunkenness. Who say so? Moses himself. "Israel ate and was filled and the darling grew fat and frisky". When brute animals feed from a full manger, they grow plump and become more obstinate and hard to hold in check; they endure neither the yoke, the reins, nor the hand of the charioteer. Just so the Jewish people were driven by their drunkenness and plumpness to the ultimate evil; they kicked about, they failed to accept the yoke of Christ, nor did they pull the plow of his teaching. Another prophet hinted at this when he said: "Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer". And still another called the Jews "an untamed calf". (6) Although such beasts are unfit for work, they are fit for killing. And this is what happened to the Jews: while they were making themselves unfit for work, they grew fit for slaughter. This is why Christ said: "But as for these my enemies, who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slay them". You Jews should have fasted then, when drunkenness was doing those terrible things to you, when your gluttony was giving birth to your ungodliness-not now. Now your fasting is untimely and an abomination. Who said so? Isaiah himself when he called out in a loud voice: "I did not choose this fast, say the Lord". Why? "You quarrel and squabble when you fast and strike those subject to you with your fists". But if you fasting was an abomination when you were striking your fellow slaves, does it become acceptable now that you have slain your Master? How could that be right?

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, homily 1, part 2, 5-6

brothel⁶¹; he accused Jewish parents of eating their children⁶²; in another place he accuses them of sacrificing their children to demons⁶³. His homilies on the Jews were later used as propaganda by the Nazis.

4F – The compilation of the Catholic bible

This period, in which the church embraced horrific levels violence, anti-Semitism and hate, is the very same period in which decisions were made about which books should be included in the bible.

Eusebius of Caesarea was a bishop and church historian who lived c. 260 to c. 340AD. He discusses the issue of which documents are Christian scripture in several places in his surviving writings. Eusebius not only gives his own opinions on the matter, but also records the opinions of his 4th century peers. Eusebius even studied the writings of the Catholic fathers before him to assess their views and try to judge the age of the documents being considered for inclusion in the canon of scripture; something that, to my knowledge, sets him apart from all other ancient Catholics. Some of his conclusions are surprisingly⁶⁴ astute; he realised that none of the early Catholics know of the existence of 2

61 I said that the synagogue is no better than a theater and I bring forward a prophet as my witness. Surely the Jews are not more deserving of belief than their prophets. "You had a harlot's brow; you became shameless before all". Where a harlot has set herself up, that place is a brothel. But the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it also is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts. Jeremiah said: "Your house has become for me the den of a hyena". He does not simply say "of wild beast", but "of a filthy wild beast", and again: "I have abandoned my house, I have cast off my inheritance". But when God forsakes a people, what hope of salvation is left? When God forsakes a place, that place becomes the dwelling of demons.

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, homily 1, part 3, 5-6

62 (2) This is the very thing which Daniel was hinting at when he said: "There came upon us evils such as never occurred under heaven according to what happened in Israel." What evils were these? Mothers ate their own children. Moses foretold this, but Jeremiah shows that it came true. For Moses said: "The refined and delicate woman, so delicate and refined that she would not venture to put her foot upon the step, shall put her hand to the unholy table and eat her own children." But Jeremiah shows that this came true when he said: "The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children."

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, homily 5, part 6, 2

63 (7) Do you see that **demons dwell in their souls** and that these demons are more dangerous than the ones of old? And this is very reasonable. In the old days the Jews acted impiously toward the prophets; now they outrage the Master of the prophets. Tell me this. Do you not shudder to come into the same place with men possessed, who have so many unclean spirits, who have been reared amid slaughter and bloodshed? **Must you share a greeting with them and exchange a bare word?** Must you not turn away from them since **they are the common disgrace and infection of the whole world?** Have they not come to every form of wickedness? Have not all the prophets spent themselves making many and long speeches of accusation against them? **What tragedy, what manner of lawlessness have they not eclipsed by their blood-guiltiness? They sacrificed their own sons and daughters to demons.** They refused to recognize nature, they forgot the pangs, of birth, they trod underfoot the rearing of their children, they overturned from their foundations the laws of kingship, **they became more savage than any wild beast.**

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, homily 1, part 6, 7

64 "Surprising" because because like most bishops of that time Eusebius was not renowned for critical thinking or for his skills a critical historian. He passes on some absurdly unbelievable stories that he

Peter, and he concluded that it did not belong in the bible:

One epistle of Peter, that called the first, is acknowledged as genuine. And this the ancient elders used freely in their own writings as an undisputed work. But we have learned that **his extant second Epistle does not belong to the canon**; yet, [more recently,] as it has appeared profitable to many, it has been used with the other Scriptures.

Eusebius, in *Church History*, book 3, chapter 3, verse 1.

Such are the writings that bear the name of Peter, only one of which I know to be genuine and acknowledged by the ancient elders.

Eusebius, in *Church History* 3:3:4.

He also talks about other writings attributed to Peter that he rejects:

The so-called Acts of Peter, however, and the Gospel which bears his name, and the Preaching and the Apocalypse, as they are called, we know have not been universally accepted, because no ecclesiastical writer, ancient or modern, has made use of testimonies drawn from them.

Eusebius, in *Church History*, book 3, chapter 3, verse 2.

It might seem like Eusebius is here making an argument based on whether or not these books have received widespread acceptance. In a way he is, but remember that in Latin “Catholic” and “universal” are the same thing. To Eusebius, the opinions of his “Catholic” peers are the opinions of the whole (or “universal”) church. The “heretics” may well have still outnumbered the “universal” church at this point in spite of the imperial persecution and promotion of Catholicism; But the views of “heretics” count for nothing to Eusebius; they are not part of the “Catholic” / “universal” church. So in reality then, he is rejecting these other books because other Catholics (past and present) rejected them; they in-turn based their opinions partly on tradition and partly on whether or not the various books suited their beliefs. By similar lines of reasoning any group could argue that their version of the scriptures was authentic, and so we must see through Eusebius' pretence at balanced scholarship.

He states his biased methodology slightly more clearly in *Church History* 3:25:6-7:

...we have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which **no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical [i.e. Catholic] writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings.**

7. And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and **both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy [i.e. the beliefs of Eusebius and his peers]** that they

has heard; see for example *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book 2, chapter 2.

clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected [but non-heretical] writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious.

Not only do Eusebius' skills as a balanced historian fall short of the mark; his spiritual discernment was even more dramatically lacking. Eusebius is the the historian who wrote much of our surviving information about emperor Constantine, including the biography *Life of Constantine*. Through out the work Eusebius reveals that he is a doting fan of the man who corrupted and persecuted Christianity; he gleefully celebrated the emperors violence against "heretics" and pagans.

Already have all mankind united in celebrating with joyous festivities the completion of the second and third decennial period of this **great emperor's** reign; already have **we ourselves received him as a triumphant conqueror in the assembly of God's ministers**, and greeted him with the due meed of praise on the twentieth anniversary of his reign: and still more recently we have woven, as it were, garlands of words, wherewith we encircled his **sacred head** in his own palace on his thirtieth anniversary.

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 1 chapter 1.

Eusebius' discusses the edict against heretics, and celebrates the zeal with which Constantine persecuted heretics, in *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapters 63 and 66 (the chapters either side of his record of the edict itself).

Such actions as I have described may well be reckoned among the emperor's noblest achievements, as also the wise arrangements which he made respecting each particular province.

Eusebius, referring to the military assaults on Pagan temples ordered by Constantine. The quotation is from *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 58.

The first person to endorse a set of New Testament scripture that closely matches the modern New Testament was Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 318-386), he was the arch-bishop of Jerusalem, and later came to be regarded as a saint by the Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches; Catholics also regard him as a doctor of the church. The New Testament cannon proclaimed by Cyril is identical to the set that was eventually settled upon, except that Cyril excluded the book of *Revelations*⁶⁵.

Cyril's writings show us that he was steeped in hatred just as much as the other Catholics of his day; in *Catechetical Lectures* (the only work of his that has survived) we find him encouraging his congregations to passionately hate and abhor "heretics":

19. But hear whom they say Christ Jesus to be, that **thou mayest detest them yet more**. For they say that after Wisdom had been cast down, in order that the number of the thirty might

65 Cyril's statements about Christian scripture are in *Catechetical Lectures*, lecture 4, section 37, written in about 350AD. An English translation can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, volume 7, pages 27-28.

not be incomplete, the nine and twenty Æons contributed each a little part, and formed the Christ: and they say that He also is both male and female. Can anything be more impious than this? Anything more wretched? **I am describing their delusion to thee, in order that thou mayest hate them the more.** Shun, therefore, their impiety, and **do not even give greeting to a man of this kind**, lest thou have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness: neither make curious inquiries, nor be willing to enter into conversation with them.

20. **Hate all heretics**, but especially him who is rightly named after mania [this is a play on words; Cyril is referring to Manes, the founder of Manicheanism], who arose not long ago in the reign of Probus. For the delusion began full seventy years ago, and there are men still living who saw him with their very eyes. But hate him not for this, that he lived a short time ago; but because of his impious doctrines **hate thou the worker of wickedness, the receptacle of all filth**, who gathered up the mire of every heresy. For aspiring to become pre-eminent among wicked men, he took the doctrines of all, and having combined them into one heresy filled with blasphemies and all iniquity, he makes havoc of the Church, or rather of those outside the Church, roaming about like a lion and devouring. Heed not their fair speech, nor their supposed humility: for **they are serpents, a generation of vipers**. Judas too said Hail! Master, even while he was betraying Him. Heed not their kisses, but beware of their venom.

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, lecture 6, section 19-20. An English translation can be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, volume 7, page 39. For other examples of Cyril's hatred see section 33 (p42-43) and lecture 16, section 10 (p117).

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

1 John 3:15

In c. 363-364AD the Synod of Laodicea met and discussed a number issues, including the issue of defining Christian scripture. The judgements of the synod were recorded in a series of canons, the last two (no. 59 and 60) relate to the question of scripture, and endorse an New Testament identical to that of Cyril of Jerusalem (rejecting *Revelations* but otherwise identical to the modern New Testament):

Canon 59: No psalms composed by private individuals nor any uncanonical books may be read in the church, but only the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments.

Canon 60: These are all the books of Old Testament appointed to be read: 1, Genesis of the world; 2, The Exodus from Egypt; 3, Leviticus; 4, Numbers; 5, Deuteronomy; 6, Joshua, the son of Nun; 7, Judges, Ruth; 8, Esther; 9, Of the Kings, First and Second; 10, Of the Kings, Third and Fourth; 11, Chronicles, First and Second; 12, Esdras, First and Second; 13, The Book of Psalms; 14, The Proverbs of Solomon; 15, Ecclesiastes; 16, The Song of Songs; 17, Job; 18, The Twelve Prophets; 19, Isaiah; 20, Jeremiah, and Baruch, the Lamentations, and the Epistle; 21, Ezekiel; 22, Daniel.

And these are the books of the New Testament: Four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; The Acts of the Apostles; Seven Catholic Epistles, to wit, one of James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude; Fourteen Epistles of Paul, one to the Romans, two to the

Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, one to the Hebrews, two to Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon.

A full copy of the canons of the Synod of Laodicea is available online:

www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm

The 60th canon of the Synod of Laodicea is missing from some of the ancient manuscripts recording the details of the council, and so it is widely regarded as a fraudulent addition intended to clarify the statements of the 59th canon. Ultimately however, it makes little difference whether or not the 60th canon is genuine; I have already presented evidence that the Catholic church of this period was rotten to the core, with many of its foremost members unable to distinguish good from evil even on extreme issues of hate, violence and forced conversion. If the 60th canon is genuine then it represents nothing more than the corrupt opinion of corrupt bishops of the 4th century; if it is fraudulent then it represents the corrupt opinion of a forger of a slightly later time.

In 367AD Athanasius, (bishop and patriarch) of Alexandria wrote a letter⁶⁶ in which he listed the books that Christians within his jurisdiction should consider scripture. His list of New Testament books is identical to that of Cyril of Jerusalem, except that he included the book of *Revelations*. This, a full three centuries from the time of Christ (according to traditional dates), is the first known instance of someone endorsing the New Testament canon exactly as we now have it; though, Athanasius' statements do not mark the end of the debate about the contents of the bible.

Athanasius' spiritual attitudes were typical of the bishops of that time. He endorsed Replacement Theology⁶⁷; he considered the Jews to be "the murderers of our Lord"⁶⁸ and the children of the devil⁶⁹. He agreed that the matter of religious belief should be regulated by imperial laws, for instance he described Atheists and members of the Sadducee sect as criminals⁷⁰; indeed, he considered merely disagreeing with, or criticizing, an ecumenical council to be "committing a crime"⁷¹. His contribution to the debate about Paganism consisted of demeaning and dehumanizing them as "more irrational than the brutes, and more soul-less than inanimate things"⁷².

A council is believed to have been held in Rome in 382 under Pope Damasus I. This is

66 The Feast Letter of 369AD; number 39.

67 *De Decretis (Defence of the Nicene Definition)* 1:2

68 *Circular Letter*, section 3

69 but ye, O modern Jews and disciples of Caiaphas, how many fathers can ye assign to your phrases? Not one of the understanding and wise; for **all abhor you, but the devil alone; none but he is your father in this apostasy**, who both in the beginning sowed you with the seed of this irreligion, and now persuades you to slander the Ecumenical Council,...

Athanasius, *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 6:27

70 *Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*, part 3, 35

71 *De Decretis* 2:4

72 *Contra Gentes (Against the Heathen)*, part 1, section 26

said to have drawn up the “Damasian List”; a list of books considered scripture. The New Testament described in this list is identical to the New Testament that came to be accepted. This list survives as part of the *Decretum Gelasianum* (*Gelasian Decree*); a fraudulent document that was composed in the 6th century. It is impossible to say for certain whether the “Damasian List” included by the forger was a real and unaltered 4th century document, or whether it was composed or altered in the 6th century by the forger of the document it was attached to.

In North Africa a number of synods were held, chaired by Augustine of Hippo (yes, this is the same Augustine whom I quoted extensively in Section 4D – the patriarch who laid the theological foundation of the inquisition and all medieval church barbarity). The synods were in Hippo (393), Carthage (397) and Carthage again (419). At these Augustine persuaded the African bishops to accept the book of *Hebrews*; they had been reluctant to do so, but Augustine achieved his objective. The 419 synod of Carthage also canonized the book of *Revelations*; it was possibly the first synod to do so (given the uncertainty of the Damasian List); the rulings of the North African synods, though influential, did not have absolute authority outside of Africa, and so it is likely that many churches at this time still considered *Revelations* to be suspect and certainly the debates on this subject were not over. Augustine himself on the other hand now considered the question of the biblical canon to be closed⁷³.

⁷³ *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*) book 22, chapter 8. An English translation is available online:

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120122.htm>

Section 5 – Medieval Times

In medieval times the question of which books counted as Christian scripture was still not considered fixed or settled. Debates about the legitimacy of *Revelations* continued; in 692AD the Trullan Synod ruled that *Revelations* should be considered scripture.

The violence and barbarity of the church during medieval times is legendary. I see no need to dwell on it, or present evidence that the medieval church was cruel and stepped in hatred. Obviously the judgements of the church hierarchy of this period cannot be trusted.

Even after the Trullan Synod the matter of the New Testament canon was not considered settled, and disputes about some books continued. An epistle called the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*⁷⁴ became popular and is included in many Latin Bible manuscripts that date between the 6th and the 12th century. The epistle was also included in John Wycliffe's bible, and was included in all German bibles up until Martin Luther. It is now widely considered to be a forgery attempting to replace the lost epistle mentioned in *Colossians* 4:16, though some (such as some Quakers) still ask for it to be re-included in the bible.

The chapter divisions in the bible were developed and added during the middle ages. This was done in the 13th century by Stephen Langton⁷⁵ (a cardinal, and the archbishop of Canterbury). The various books in the bible had been divided up into sections and paragraphs long before this, but Stephen Langton composed the system that is now universally used. The modern system of verse divisions were also added to the biblical texts during medieval times.

74 The ancient Marcionites also read from an epistle called *Laodiceans*, but despite having the same title that is a different document.

75 The *Original Catholic Encyclopedia* has an article on Stephen Langton; online at:

oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Stephen_Langton

Section 6 – The Protestant Reformation 1517

In 1517 a Catholic monk called Martin Luther set in motion a German movement reforming the church. His views spread fast and were accepted by many, resulting in a schism. Almost immediately a similar movement begun in Switzerland, led by Ulrich Zwingli. This was the beginnings of the Protestant reformation. Many modern Protestants see this as a return by the church to its less corrupt (pre-Constantine) state. Sadly the Protestant reformers left unchanged the root of the corruption – the violent union of church and state. The new Protestant churches were soon intertwined with local political powers just as the Catholics had been before them.

6A – The corruption of the Protestant reformers

During the first few years of the movement the Protestant leaders seem to have been opposed to the use of force to control or spread Christianity. However as events unfolded all of the Protestant leaders came to fully endorse the notion that political powers had a duty to impose “correct” beliefs upon those who believed differently. Soon Catholics and Anabaptists were dying for their faith in vast numbers, often dying horribly. The Catholics of the period also horribly persecuted Protestants and Anabaptists in areas where Catholicism was still in control. The following quotes demonstrate that the Protestant religious leaders were well aware of the situation and unanimously supported the violence.

Every person is duty-bound to prevent and suppress blasphemy, each according to his status.

By virtue of this commandment princes and civil authorities have the power and the duty to abolish unlawful cults and to establish orthodox teaching and worship. Concerning this point

Leviticus applies: “He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, let him be put to death.”

Luther, in his *Commentary on Genesis* 41:45⁷⁶

At the trial of Anabaptist Felix Manz, Zwingli shouted:

Let him who talks about going under [i.e. re-baptism – a reference to Anabaptist practices] go under [i.e. drowning].

⁷⁶ This quote can be found in *Luther's Works*, volume 7 lectures on *Genesis* (in chapters 28-44). (By Martin Luther, Walter A. Hansen, Jaroslav Pelikan publisher: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, ASIN: B001HCTW22) Luther revealed his blood thirsty inclinations frequently in his writings:

If we punish thieves with the yoke, highwaymen with the sword, and **heretics with fire**, why do we not rather assault these monsters of perdition, these cardinals, these popes, and the whole swarm of the Roman Sodom, who corrupt youth and the Church of God? **Why do we not rather assault them with arms and wash our hands in their blood?**

Martin Luther, *On the Pope as an Infallible Teacher*, 25 June 1520 His hared hatred of the Jews and desire to see them killed is expressed in the work *On the Jews and Their Lies*, particularly part 11. Martin Luther's views on the appropriate treatment of heretics changed somewhat over the course of his ministry, I selected the quote from his commentary on *Genesis* because it is one of the documents he wrote towards the end of his life. For another example see his statements in his commentary on the 82nd Psalm: “**Heretics of this sort must not be tolerated, but punished as open blasphemers...**”

Luther goes on to explain that civil authorities should hand unauthorised preachers over to the hangman.

The authorities later carried this out in the Limmat (a Swedish river) on the 5th January 1527. Manz's only "crime" was his disagreement with certain Church teachings, particularly his rejection of infant baptism. Anabaptists rejected christening and gave a second baptism to anyone who joined their churches; for this they were frequently drowned, which Protestants referred to as the "third baptism".

If he [Servetus – a Christian with unorthodox views] comes [to Geneva], I shall never let him go out alive if my authority has weight.

John Calvin⁷⁷

In Geneva, on the 27th October, 1553, Calvin got his way. Michael Servetus was tied to a stake and burned slowly to death, with the last known copy of his book chained to his leg. His last words before death were "Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have mercy on me".

Again, it is the duty of these [magistrates], not only to anxiously preserve civil polity, but also to give true effort that the holy ministry would be preserved, and that all idolatry and adultery of the worship of God would be removed from the public square, that the Kingdom of Antichrist would be destroyed, that the Kingdom of Christ would be truly extended. Finally, it is of their duty to bring it about that the sacred word of the Gospel would be preached from everywhere so that everyone, in turn, can freely worship purely and venerate God according to the prescription of His word.

Quotation from Article 36 of the Belgic Confession.

Whoever shall maintain that wrong is done to heretics and blasphemers in punishing them makes himself an accomplice in their crime and guilty as they are. There is no question here of man's authority; it is God who speaks, and clear it is what law he will have kept in the church, even to the end of the world. Wherefore does he demand of us a so extreme severity, if not to show us that due honor is not paid him, so long as we set not his service above every human consideration, so that we spare not kin, nor blood of any, and **forget all humanity** when the matter is to combat for His glory.

John Calvin⁷⁸

There are few things that I would like the reader to take note of. Firstly, though the Protestants of the reformation were more biblically minded than the Catholics who preceded them, they were still just as violent and so I can only conclude that like so many of the Catholic fathers before them they were spiritually blind. Secondly, the underlying cause of the fall of the Catholic Church was their willingness to unite themselves with the worldly political powers; here the reformers were no less guilty than the bishops of Constantine's time. Modern Christians are appalled at the thought of anyone being killed

77 Cottret, Bernard (2000), *Calvin: A Biography*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, ISBN 0-8028-3159-1 (Translation from the original *Calvin: Biographie*, Editions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1995) pages 216- 217.

Parker, T. H. L. (2006), *John Calvin: A Biography*, Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, ISBN 978-0-7459-5228-4, pages 147-148.

78 John Marshall, John Locke, *Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History), Cambridge University Press, 2006, ISBN 0-521-65114-X p. 325

for their beliefs, but as the last quote demonstrates, some of us were somehow transported back to Calvin's time, he would want to kill us as "heretics" simply for this tolerance. In Protestant circles the leaders of the reformation are still thought of as heroes, but they would despise modern Protestants. Jesus instructed us to judge false teachers by their actions; the Protestant reformers fail this test.

6B – The content of the modern bible is finally fixed

It was at this time that the Catholic church finally and officially fixed their canon, at the council of Trent (1545-1563); this was partly in response to the Protestant movement which had broken away and was using the uncertainty of the canon as a point of criticism of the Catholic Church. The canon that they affirmed was the same as that of the Trullan Synod in the late 7th century, only now the matter was considered closed. The various Protestant denominations and the Orthodox Church defined and closed their canons shortly afterwards⁷⁹, also adopting the Trullan Synod version of the New Testament.

6C – Modern Christianity

Though the religious leaders of the reformation firmly believed that heretics should be executed, some of the civil authorities became growing reluctant to do so. "Heretical" groups like the Anabaptists were also firmly opposed to the use of violence against them, and many in the general public were growing sick of the pointless violence. In time, church and state were separated, though this was a product of the Enlightenment period rather than the Reformation. It is a sad fact of history that the "divorce proceedings" that separated church from state were initiated by civil authorities rather than the church in almost all regions, and many in the hierarchy of the various churches resisted the cultural shift as best they could.

Secular culture became very tolerant; this shift in attitudes gradually seeped into the church and up its hierarchy. This brings us to the situation of modern Christianity. Within the various modern branches of Christianity there has been no attempt (since the Reformation) to review or challenge the church traditions that have been inherited from our corrupt past. Scripture is still considered the final and only authority in matters of Protestant doctrine, and no mainstream church organisation questions the legitimacy of the books of scripture that they have inherited from their spiritual forefathers. Figures like Augustine and Cyril are still regarded as saints by the Anglican Communion, just as they are in Catholic and Orthodox circles.

Christianity has finally awakened to the point where the vast majority of us can see and recognise the abhorrent corruption that has swamped our past. The next step has been taken by very few; we must question the legitimacy of virtually all of the teachings handed to us by that past; we must even question the legitimacy of the bible itself, whilst remembering that figs cannot be gathered from a thornbush.

⁷⁹ For example the canon was finalised with the Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) for British Calvinism and the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) for the Greek Orthodox Church.

Section 7 – Misunderstandings and Counter Arguments

This article has looked at several complex and interrelated developments of European culture and Christian history. I have tried to deliver the information in the simplest way I could, but even so it is inevitable that some people will have found this article hard to take in and hard to follow. The purpose of this section is to review a small cross-section of the evidence that has already been presented, and put it in the context of modern debates about the authenticity of the bible. I will do this by examining a few of the arguments commonly put forward in defence of the conventional bible, and drawing the readers attention to the evidence in the previous sections that exposes the flaws in those arguments. This section of this article is divided into subsections each dealing with different arguments:

- A) The corrupt Catholic church of the middle ages went to great lengths to control the bible, and prevent the ordinary people from reading and understanding it. Some people argue that this proves its authenticity.
- B) Some argue that the fourth century Catholic church was simply a product the culture of their day and that nothing more could have been expected of them; thus they argue that decisions of the fourth century bishops regarding the bible should be trusted none-the-less.
- C) Some argue that since God can use flawed and even evil people to achieve his work, this aspect of the history of the bible is not relevant to its reliability.
- D) Some argue that the Donatists split off from the Catholics because the Catholic church was becoming corrupt, and that traces of the Donatist movement survived the persecutions of medieval times and re-emerged as the Anabaptists, who in turn became modern Baptist, Mennonite and Amish groups.
- E) Some argue that the corruption of the church occurred in the fourth century, and that the modern church can be regarded as a revival of the beliefs of the church fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This argument hinges on the idea that the Catholic fathers of the 3rd century were trustworthy and already had a broad consensus about what should be classed as scripture.

There is one final argument that is also dealt with in this article. It is the idea that any of the other ancient branches of Christianity would also have embraced violence just as the Catholics did, if they had been given the opportunity to do so. This final argument connects nicely with some of the central concepts that I wish to address in this article, and is it is dealt with separately in the Conclusion Section.

7A – The suppression of the bible the medieval church

Though the Catholic church of the fourth and fifth centuries was highly corrupt, there can be no doubt that the Catholic church of medieval times was far worse. Since religious authority was so closely tied to wealth and political influence throughout the middle ages many people joined the church and perused promotion through its ranks for the worst possible reasons; hypocrisy was rife, and many in the church were abusing their position to gain money and power (for example by telling people that their time in purgatory would be reduced if they paid their priest money).

It was in this era that new languages evolved among the ordinary people, and the church forbade translation of the bible into those languages. Church services and sermons also continued to be conducted in Latin and were incomprehensible to the ordinary people. The medieval church authorities were no-doubt afraid that widespread understanding of the Gospel message would undermine their legitimacy and so they even their own scriptures were violently kept out of the hands of the general public.

Some people agree that this suppression of the bible by the corrupt medieval church is a sign that it is reliable (and was thus able to expose their corruption). This however, does not logically follow. The corruption of the medieval Catholic church certainly exceeded the corruption of the bible, and so it was a threat to them; however, that does not indicate that the bible is entirely free of error; only that it is sufficiently pure to expose the obscene corruption of the medieval Catholic church – which isn't saying much.

I believe that the traditional bible was a threat to the medieval Catholics because in spite of the corruption it contains, it is still a source of spiritual teaching. The medieval Catholics preserved, but also tightly controlled the bible; meanwhile they (and the earlier Catholics) actively searched out and destroyed all copies of the scriptures of the Marcionites, Gnostics and other “heretics” because some of these were an even purer source of spiritual teaching, and an even greater threat to the Catholic church.

7B – The fourth century Catholics were a product their time

It is certainly very true that the intolerant attitudes of the fourth century Catholics were a product of the culture of their times. However, the fundamental role of Christianity is to promote values and attitudes that are beyond the thinking of the world and the culture of the day.

The Catholic leaders of the fourth century failed to do this; even if it their failure to understand was, in this sense “innocent”, it still disqualifies them from by being considered admirable Christian teachers. They are unworthy to be considered saints and doctors of the church; and unworthy to tell us which books should be considered scripture.

7C – God's use of evil people to achieve his plans

Some people respond to arguments such as the ones I have presented in this article by pointing to examples in the bible of God achieving his plans by manipulating people who were in opposition to his will. The Pharaoh of Egypt is an obvious example; according to *Exodus 9:16* and *Romans 9:17* God wished to demonstrate his power and so he hardened Pharaoh's heart to ensure that he would oppose his plans and provide a suitable opportunity for such a demonstration. It is unbiblical however, to extend this line of reasoning to people who are supposedly bringing Christian teaching, doctrine and scripture; such an interpretation is in conflict with verses that teach directly on this subject (e.g. *Luke 6:34-45*). To take an obscure passage that is not directly applicable to the question at hand, and on that basis ignore verses that do directly address the question at hand is absurd approach to bible study.

In *Exodus*, God manipulates Pharaoh and used him indirectly and against his will to do something. This is very different from the process where God directly uses a person who serves willingly.

Jesus warned that false teachers were coming⁸⁰; he told us we could identify them by their fruit (*Luke 6:34-45*); are we then supposed to blindly follow the teachings and scriptures given to us by such people because, in a different context, God occasionally uses bad people to achieve his ends? God may in deed use evil people against their will, but this doesn't make them trustworthy Christian teachers.

7D – Baptist, Amish and Mennonite Christians and the Donatists

Some argue that the Donatists split off from the Catholics because the Catholic church was becoming corrupt, and that traces of the Donatist movement survived the persecutions of medieval times and re-emerged as the Anabaptists, who in turn became modern Baptist, Mennonite and Amish groups.

The quick and easy counterargument to this is simply to point out that:

- 1) The Donatists objected strongly to forced conversions, which their members were frequently subjected to; however, the evidence indicates that they did not object to the laws that punished pagans (see Augustine's *Epistle 93* quoted above in Section 4C).
- 2) The Donatists and Catholics split off from one another in 316AD and both groups immediately denounced one another as "heretics"; meanwhile in Catholic circles, Cyril of Jerusalem did not begin to promote his version of the New Testament canon

⁸⁰ This is perhaps one of the most strongly emphasised themes in the bible: *Matthew 7:15-19, 13:24-30, 13:36-43, 16:5-12, 24:4-5, 24:24-25, Mark 8:14-21, 13:5, 13:21-23, Luke 12:1, 18:8, 20:45-47, 21:6-8, John 10:1-13, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 11:19, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 11:3, Galatians 1:6-8, Colossians 2:4-8, 2:18-19, 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12, 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 1:19, 4:1, 6:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:16-18, 3:8, 4:3, 1 Peter 5:8, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 2:12-19, 1 John 2:18, 2:26, 4:1-3, 2 John 1:7-11, Jude 1:4, 1:11.*

until about 350AD. It is therefore inconceivable that the Donatists would have adopted Cyril's version of the New Testament.

- 3) Some aspects of Donatist belief (and concepts from other “heresies”) may indeed have survived in a hidden subculture during the middle-ages; however, teachings and ideas from the dominant church (Catholicism) seeped into those communities, including the modern version of the bible; why else would the Anabaptists of reformation times have read the same bible as the Catholics and Protestants?

These simple points summarise a few things nicely, but somehow they don't quite address the very heart of the issue. The Donatists were in some ways a continuation of the beliefs of the pre-Constantine Catholics; these Catholics had already gone off the true Christian path, as discussed in Section 3 and 7E.

7E – The third century Catholic “consensus”

Some people argue that Catholic fathers of the third century were still faithful to the original teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and that they already had a consensus about which documents should be included in the Christian bible. The irony of this argument is that the people who use it do not really believe it themselves. If they did, they would promptly eject *2 Peter* from their bibles and include the *Shepherd of Hermas* instead (see discussion in Section 3D).

It is true that during the third century there was a widespread agreement among Catholics that some books should be regarded as scripture. The four gospels and the epistles of Paul all received widespread acceptance from the end of the second century onwards. But why should this be taken as evidence for the authenticity of those books when, the opinions of the 3rd century Catholics are so casually ignored regarding the divine origin of *2 Peter* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

There are also more serious reasons why we should be wary of basing our bibles on the opinions of the 2nd and 3rd century Catholics. The quotes in Section 3 that I have taken from pre-Constantine Catholic writings show that they were already included toward hatred for those with different beliefs – even other Christians!

These are some of the key reasons why the (post Constantine) Catholics of 4th and 5th centuries embraced violence to readily when given the opportunity do so, and attempted to eradicate from society all people who had different beliefs to their own. There are other underlying causes of the violence, such as elements of traditional Christian teaching, and this is also something which the pre-Constantine Catholics shared with the post-Constantine Catholics; this is discussed in Section 8.

Section 8 – Conclusions

In order to address the question of whether the other ancient Christian groups would also have embraced violence we must look hard at the underlying reasons why the Catholics believed this was God's will. I have already commented that the pre-Constantine Catholics were anti-Semitic and abhorred those with different beliefs to their own, and this was part of the reason. To my knowledge we have no record of the attitudes or prejudices of other Christian groups; the writings of their bishops, and their account of history was all destroyed by Catholic persecution. However, we can look at aspects of their beliefs, and compare those to the underlying doctrinal reason that Catholic church fell into corruption as it did.

I think it is fairly obvious that the writings of the “New Testament” (to use Tertullian's terminology) do not encourage or endorse the violent suppression of other faiths in any way. Indeed, the “New Testament” does not provide any guidelines at all for laws or political structures that a “Christian nation” should have. I place the very term “Christian nation” in quotes in view of this fact; the very concept is unbiblical and in my opinion unChristian⁸¹. Instead the model for the ideal society outlined in the very oldest Christian texts is one in which politics and religion are separate⁸². The Christian message is consistently addressed to individual believers and potential believers, not nations.

The “Old Testament”⁸³ on the other hand, has drastically different teaching on this subject. The books of Moses lay the foundation of the Jewish religion and it outlines society in which the religion and the state are unified. Members of other religions were regarded as enemies of the state, and those who question the faith were regarded as traitors. In bronze age Judaism religious beliefs and practices are dictated by laws and violence; apostasy was punishable by death (*Deuteronomy* 13:13-19, 17:2-7, *Numbers* 25:4-9). God's vengeance is carried out by human soldierers, at the command of a prophet (*Numbers* 31:3). Indeed the very basis of the Jewish nation was covenant made between a God and the tribe.

The Catholics of the 4th century were Judaic Christians; this means that (like modern Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians) they regarded Christianity as a continuation and a fulfilment of the Jewish religion. I have mentioned Replacement Theology several times in this article, and have explained that the (pre and post) Constantine Catholics all believed that their church was a replacement of the Jewish nation (ie Israel). They believed they were heirs of the promises God made to Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs, and heirs of the Jewish Covenant (i.e. “New Covenant” transferred to them and replaced the “Old Covenant” of the Jews). This is why, when they gained political power and

81 I'm thinking in terms of “Christian sacralism” here; for a more thorough discussion of this topic you may wish to read *The Anatomy of a Hybrid* (ISBN 0-8028-1615-0) or *The Reformers and the Stepchildren* (ISBN 978-1579789350); both are by Leonard Verduin.

82 There are numerous relevant verses (subject to interpretation): *Matthew* 22:21 & 26:52-54, *1 John* 5:19, and *Revelations* 12:1-17 & 13:1-18, though *Romans* 13:4 can be interpreted as supporting a union of church and state – part of a passage which I considerer fraudulent. Though, the most relevant point is the last of any statements that Christians should try to impose upon society around them the rules and beliefs of Christianity.

83 Once again I am using Tertullian's terminology; I am of-course referring to the Jewish scriptures.

influence, and the “New Testament” failed to provide them with any guidelines on how to structure a “Christian nation”, they immediately turned to the “Old Testament” and its political blueprint for society to suit their needs. The laws by which pagans were executed were all perfectly biblical when considered from this perspective (*Deuteronomy* 17:3-5, *2 Chronicles* 15:13) and the laws against “heretics” can be regarded as an adaptation of the same principles. As Imperial laws came to be based upon religious doctrine and the law of Judaism adultery and homosexuality also came to be regarded as capital crimes; the executions were often horrific.

The doctrinal foundation of Catholic Christianity (and its offshoots the Protestant and Orthodox Churches) is a hybridisation of the (edited) teachings of Jesus and the apostles (the “New Testament”) with a literalistic form of Judaism (the “Old Testament”). This is why it was inevitable that the Catholic church would embrace violence when given the opportunity to do so.

In the ancient world there was another, radically different version of Christian theology. The Marcionites and Gnostics believed that Christianity was distinctly separate from Judaism. They believed that Jesus came to earth in the midst of a Jewish culture, but that he preached a message that was at odds with that culture. They believed that the Jewish God was a real being, but separate from the true God, who sent Jesus. They believed that the Jewish God was the “god of this world” (to use the terminology of *2 Corinthians* 4:4).

According to traditional Christian theology Jesus died to pay a ransom for our sins; the ransoming being paid to his father. According to Marcionite theology the ransom was owed to God of the world. According to traditional Christian theology Jesus is the Jewish messiah, and the Jewish religion is guilty of rejecting it's own messiah. According to Marcionite teachings the Jewish messiah is a separate person, who has yet to come and is irrelevant for Christians. According to traditional theology the Jewish law is Christian scripture; according to Marcionite theology, the Jewish law is simply irrelevant and always has been.

In theory the doctrinal basis of modern Christianity is still the same as the doctrinal basis of 4th Century Catholicism. In practice however, many modern Christians have adopted some of the attitudes of Marcionism. The violent and cruel attitudes and values of the “Old Testament” are increasingly ignored by modern Christians and seen as irrelevant, or interpretation of the Torah is greatly distorted as Christians impose an ultra loving (Marcionite) interpretation on the God of Judaism. This is obviously a great spiritual improvement for Christians, and it opens peoples eyes to the corruption of our history; however, it introduces a great inconsistency into the Christian faith. Since so many Christians have spiritually changed direction, why should we continue to revere as saints the “church fathers” who held our predecessors in the dark? If we want to continue moving in our new spiritual direction we must cast out the legacy of corrupt teaching that remains and establish a pure faith, instead of a hybrid of sound and unsound teaching.

If we now wish to restore the original teachings and beliefs of Christianity we should look back at the different (non-“Catholic”) branches of Christianity that existed in the ancient world, and their scriptures. We must reopen questions that have been considered closed for centuries.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me:

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As the brethren desired me to write epistles, I wrote. And these epistles the apostles of the devil have filled with tares, cutting out some things and adding others. For them a woe is reserved. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at if some have attempted to adulterate the Lord's writings also, since they have formed designs even against writings which are of less account.

Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, writing in about 161-180⁸⁴.

written: 2008-2010

last updated: January 2011

⁸⁴ The writings of Dionysius are among the ancient documents that the church failed to preserve, but this statement was quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea in *Church History*, book 4, chapter 23, section 12.