## III. Formation of the New Testament

**1. Collection.** The four oldest manuscripts, which originally contained all 27 writings of the NT, are dated to the 4th (Codex Sinaiticus ℵ 01, Vaticanus B 03) and the 5th century CE (Alexandrinus A 02, Ephraemi Rescriptus C 04). Only about 1% of all extant manuscripts contain all 27 writings of the NT, the vast majority contains only one or a subset of the four units.

The four units of the NT, which are discernable in the manuscript tradition, carry the following titles in many minuscule manuscripts: τετραεὐαγγέλιον (Four-Gospel-Book: Matthew, Mark, Luke,

John), ἐπιστολαί Παῦλου ΙΔ (14 Letters of Paul: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon), πραξἀπόστολος (Acts and general Letters: Acts, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude), and ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου (Revelation of John). It is unclear when these volume titles originated and whether these were already part of the first edition of the NT. Extant manuscripts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE are mostly fragmentary. Nevertheless, with few exceptions manuscripts of this period, which cover more than one writing, present these in the order of the later tradition, thus supporting the notion of four original collection units. The manuscripts therefore invite us to view the NT as a collection of 27 writings published in four volumes.

Melito of Sardes (ca. 180 CE) is usually cited as the oldest witness to the title "New Testament." Although he does not use the term explicitly, it is implied by his use of the title "Old Testament," which is introduced without further explanation (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.13–14). At the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century CE Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen refer to the NT as a collection, indicating its wide circulation (Trobisch: 44).

In manuscripts containing more than one volume, the order of the volumes varies. The order of the specific writings within each volume changed slightly in the Byzantine manuscript tradition, where Hebrews is moved from its place following 2 Thessalonians to the end of the Letters of Paul, following Philemon. At the same time the Letters of Paul are placed between Acts and the General Letters.

Erasmus of Rotterdam's influential printed edition of the Greek NT (1516) was based on Byzantine manuscripts. And because Eberhard Nestle (1898) collated critical printed editions against the standard text edition which had grown out of Erasmus' work, the 27th revision of the Nestle edition (1981) still reflects the order of the Byzantine manuscripts. Almost all modern Bible translations are based on the Nestle edition.

At least one collection of a subset of NT writings was published before the middle of the 2nd century CE by Marcion of Sinope. Although copies did not survive, its contents can still be reconstructed from the writings of Marcion's adversaries. It consisted of one gospel, which was similar but not identical with Luke, and of 10 letters of Paul (Hebrews, 1–2 Timothy, and Philemon were not included).

**2. Book.** A closer look at the manuscripts reveals common editorial features which cannot have originated with the authors of the individual writings. The notation of the *nomina sacra*, the codex form, the uniform arrangement and number of writings in the manuscript tradition, the formulation of the

titles, and the evidence indicating that the collec
tion was called "New Testament" from the very be
ginning demonstrate that the NT is a carefully ed
ited publication and not the product of a gradua
process which lasted for centuries. These editoria
features serve to combine disparate material into
cohesive literary unit. Furthermore, these element
cannot be credited to several, independently operat
ing editors, but must be the work of a single edito
rial entity. In other words, the uniformity of th
redactional elements in the manuscript evidence in
dicates that the NT was edited and published b
specific people at a very specific time and at a ver
specific place.

**3. Competition.** The Christian Bible faced stron
competition during the 2nd century CE.

Competing with the "Old Testament" were th
Septuagint, the edition of Theodotion of Ephesus
and the edition of Aquila. Competing with the NT
was Marcion's Bible. From 135 CE onward, Valenti
nus, a representative of the Christian gnostic move
ment, lived in Rome and is reported to have pub
lished a *Gospel of Truth*. Sometime around or afte
150 CE, Tatian, a student of Justin, produced th
*Diatessaron* by combining the four canonical gospel
into a single account. This edition competed witl
the NT for centuries in the Syriac Church.

Papias of Hierapolis' five-volume work, a collec
tion of unpublished material on Jesus was also wel
known (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39). Furthermore, th
NT itself informs its readers that it is not a com
plete edition (John 21:25) and that there wer
books on Jesus published before (Luke 1:1).

**4. Canon.** Scholars of the period concede that ther
was no established, authoritative entity during th
middle of the 2nd century CE that could have de
cided and enforced the use of a special edition o
scripture among Christian churches. Nevertheless
the NT became the authoritative collection of writ
ings for the emerging Catholic Church. No syno
or council in antiquity ever decided on the content
of the NT. The parallel publishing ventures of th
time, which tried to serve the needs of a growin
Jewish and Christian readership, suggest that th
formation of the Christian Bible with its two dis
tinct parts, the Old and the New Testaments, is bes
interpreted on the background of the book industr
of the time.

**5. Literature.** The perception that the NT consti
tutes a literary unit encourages an interpretation o
the macro level. The beginnings and endings o
each of the four volumes connect the units. Th
first two words of the Four-Gospel-Book, βίβλο
γενέσεως (Matt 1:1), with their references to Gene
sis, create a link to the editorial title of the firs
book of the HB/OT. The last sentence of the Four
Gospel-Book (John 21:25) refers to books in plura
about Jesus, nicely bringing the volume to a close
"But there are also many other things that Jesu

did; if *every one of them* were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." The first sentence of the πραξἀπόστολος has a literal reference to the last sentence of the Four-Gospel-Book: "In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about *all that Jesus did* and taught from the beginning" (Acts 1:1). The doxology at the end of the πραξἀπόστολος, Jude 23–24, nicely rounds off this volume. The first sentence of the Letters of Paul refers to the royal lineage of Jesus and his resurrection (Son of David according to the flesh, Son of God through his resurrection; Rom 1:3–4) addressing an obvious difference between Mark, which includes neither an explanation of the royal origins of Jesus nor a resurrection appearance of Jesus, and the other three gospels. At the same time, this sentence reaffirms the reader's sentiment that Luke's gospel is Paul's gospel as it insists on both the royal origin of Jesus and gives an account of his resurrection. The last sentences of the Letters of Paul pick up this theme again. By mentioning Luke and Mark in the same sentence (Phlm 24) readers are reminded that Luke knew Mark and that on a literary level Luke's gospel is to be seen as an improved edition of Mark (cf. Luke's reference to previous, badly organized books on Jesus in Luke 1:1–3). The introduction to the Revelation of John finally answers the question who this John is, who was mentioned in the title of the anonymous fourth gospel and identified as the beloved disciple in John 21:24, and who the author of the three letters are, where the name John is given only in the titles but not in the text. The first sentence states that Revelation was written by John "who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:2), a phrase that readers of the NT will understand as a reference to the Gospel according to John. This sentence effectively links the Revelation of John to the Four-Gospel-Book, the πραξἀπόστολος, and the Letters of Paul (John is one of the three pillars of the Jerusalem church, Gal 2:9). Finally, the ending of Revelation, with its warning neither to add nor to remove any of the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev 22:18–19), forms an excellent conclusion and encourages readers to apply this warning not only to the Revelation of John but to the entire Christian Bible.

The NT as a publication is nicely organized. Some titles span the whole collection and assume that readers are familiar with the other volumes. The title "Gospel according to Luke" links to the other three gospels through the unusual but similar construction "Gospel according to" (εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ). By referencing Theophilus and the ascension of Jesus, Acts is firmly linked to the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1–2; Luke 1:3; 24:51) and establishes a connection between the Four-Gospel-Book and the πραξἀπόστολος. The last we-passage of Acts informs readers that the author is with Paul in Rome

(Acts 28:11–16). Read together with 2 Timothy, "Luke is the only one with me" (2 Tim 4:11) in Rome (2 Tim 1:17), readers of the NT are able to identify Luke, who was mentioned in the title of the gospel, as the same person who accompanied Paul on his last trip to Rome (Acts 28) and was a companion of Paul at the side of Mark (Phlm 24) as well as Paul's beloved physician (Col 4:14).

Similarly, the name Mark in the title of the second gospel links to the companion of Peter and Paul mentioned in the πραξἀπόστολος (Acts 12:12, 25; 1 Pet 5:13) and the Letters of Paul (2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24). As was pointed out above, another obvious connection between all four volumes is supplied by the name John in the title of the gospel, as a character in Acts, as the author of three general Letters, and in the title of the book of Revelation.

The selection of eight authors seems to point to the conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem-based leadership of the early church, the disciples (Matthew, John, Peter) and the brothers of Jesus of Nazareth (James, Jude). Mark and Luke both seem to represent the second-generation followers of Jesus and display a harmonizing function. On the narrative level, both can be associated with Jerusalem as well as with Paul. The conflict which may have informed the selection of these eight authors is most explicitly addressed in the account of the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), which indicates to the readers that the council finally resolved the differences.

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## IV. Christianity

■ Patristics, Orthodox Churches, and Early Medieval Times ■ Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America ■ New Churches and Movements

### A. Patristics, Orthodox Churches, and Early Medieval Times

***1. The Christian Old Testament.*** The formation of a Christian biblical canon – composed of Old and New Testaments – begins in the 2nd century CE. The reception of the OT, i.e., the Bible of Israel, occurred at first without any reflection. That is, as "the scriptures" of the Jews, it was also "the scriptures" of the first Christians and significant for them in the interpretation of the Christ event.

The first fundamental question was raised by Marcion, who rejected the Jewish Bible with its strange God. In discussions in the 2nd and 3rd century CE, the arguments clearly were in favor of the