

THE DOCTRINES OF THE SCRIPTURES
PART I: THE ANCIENT CHURCH

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I. INTRODUCTION.

Pilate's inquiry before our Lord, What is truth?, has been repeatedly asked and challenged throughout the history of the Christian church. Every great crisis, including the current one within Evangelicalism, is ultimately epistemological in nature. The most important question is that of authority. How do we know truth? And what is the final authority for truth? This was one of the first challenges to the infant church. How and why did the church recognize a need to establish a standard of authority? How was that authority conceived and interpreted? These questions, particularly the latter, have a tremendous influence on the understanding of all other branches of Systematic Theology.

A. FIVE Bases for Knowledge

- 1. Rationalism:** that knowledge begins from self-evident first principles. Plato, Descartes. Method: Independent Logic
- 2. Empiricism:** the mind is a *tabula rasa*; all knowledge comes through the five senses. Aristotle, Locke. Method: Independent Logic.
- 3. Mysticism:** the reaction to the failures of rationalism and empiricism. The mind intuitively knows truth. Thus mysticism, like rationalism, is an interior act of the mind. Mysticism is rationalism gone to seed. Method: rejection of logic.
- 4. Tradition:** this institutionalizes accept teaching and practice from the past, which may have its ultimate authority in any combination of the

other four. Tradition, though it is used selectively, is a key element in Emergent Church authority.

5. **Revelation:** information given from outside of the created universe. This is the issue of authority and canon. Method: Dependent logic
- B. The Challenge:** to prevent presuppositions from the first three from shaping our understanding of the fifth. Revelation must stand apart as the Creator stands apart from the creation. Failure to resolve the authority question is fundamental to every other problem in the history of doctrine.
- C. Summary of Pre-Modern, Modern, and Post-Modern Epistemology.**
1. **Pre-Modern Christian Epistemology**
 - a. The existence of an omniscient God was presupposed.
 - b. Human knowledge was understood to be a finite subset of divine omniscience. Thus, human knowledge was dependent on divine knowledge.
 - c. Thus, human knowledge did not begin with the self, the “I,” but with God.
 - N.B. This means that they recognized that in some sense man could not think about anything without realizing that God already knew it. Thus God defined reality. Thus human knowledge could not be separated from God’s omniscience, omnipotence, sovereign Creator, His revelation of Himself, and thus His veracity. All human knowledge was thus viewed as derivative and dependent.
 - d. Man lived in an “open” universe, a universe open to divine revelation, providence, and causation in history.
 - e. Problems occurred because the early church assimilated epistemological concepts from neo-Platonism and in the late medieval period, Aristotelianism. This led to a compromise of a consistent theocentric view of knowledge with mysticism and autonomous rationalism and empiricism.
 2. **Modern Epistemology**
 - a. Modern epistemology began with finite man, “I,” not God. “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes. Human knowledge is no longer viewed as derivative or dependent on God.
 - b. Human knowledge can be built on a foundation common with the

knowledge of the unbeliever. This is called foundationalism. Ancient Greek philosophy was also foundationalist.

- c. Human knowledge builds on this foundation through a rigorous use of logic that is independent from revelation.
- d. Modern epistemology believed that certainty in knowledge was possible and attainable. They believed there was a unifying truth, and man could know it. They disagreed on what the unifying truth was and how man could know it, but they believed it existed.
- e. The truth they arrived at they believed was universal, for all time and for all cultures.
- f. Early modernists were almost all theists, but as the presuppositions of modernism were consistently developed it led to the logical end result of philosophic naturalism, materialism, secularism, nihilism, existentialism, and atheism.
- g. The modernists universe was “closed” to God: divine revelation, providence, and causation in history are presuppositionally rejected.

3. Postmodern Epistemology

- a. Postmodernism also begins with man, “I.” However, since each person is different, there are multiple perceptions and multiple “truths.”
- b. All foundationalism is rejected. Since there are multiple truths, there is no single foundation.
- c. There is no one method. Just as there are many truths there are many equally valid methods for knowing truth.
- d. Objective knowledge is impossible and unattainable. No truth is exclusive or absolute.
- e. No knowledge is universally true for all time and cultures. All “truth” is conditioned by culture and time.
- f. Since all truth is relative and subjective, post-modernism has a trend toward and affinity with mysticism and mystical Eastern religions.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.

When one views the Church Fathers (Apostolic Fathers or Subapostolic Fathers), it readily becomes apparent that they manifest vagueness in their theological understanding. Klotsch referred to “theological retrogression (*The History of Doctrines*, 22)” while Seeburg stated (*The History of Christian Thought*, 81), “A lack of comprehensive understanding and profound apprehension of the gospel itself where undeniable.” It must be realized at the outset of each of our studies in the branches of Systematic Theology that the Fathers evidenced vagueness and misconception when compared with our more developed and clarified perspective. This has been rationalized as follows:

1. Since the non-Jewish branch of the church had only the Old Testament Scriptures to enlighten their understanding, they (i.e., Gentile Christians) erected what to us often appears as a legalistic understanding of the new faith.
2. The moralism of the heathen world view was read into the O.T. and certain other books (Tobit).
3. Perhaps a better perspective is that the early second century church did not have raging battles emerging from its teachings (this would come later) that would have forced the church out of its noncritical naivete.

A. The Fathers and the Old Testament

The Church Fathers looked upon the Old Testament as the absolutely authoritative revelation from God. The Fathers prefaced their O.T. quotations with such phrases as:

“For He (the Creator) saith” (Ps. 27:7) in *To the Corinthians*, 26.
 “For the Holy Writing saith”
 “For thus it is written”
 “For thus saith God”
 “For the Scripture saith”

Heick commented (*A History of Christian Thought*, I, 52): “Wherever ‘the Scriptures’ are mentioned or quotations are introduced with ‘it is written,’ we may be sure the Fathers were thinking of the Old Testament. It was regarded as the revelation of the past, present, and future.”

Justin Martyr states that the writings of the Apostles were used alongside of the OT Prophets with equal authority. (I, Apology, 67)

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits;

B. The Fathers and the Sayings of Jesus and Paul

While the words of Jesus and Paul occupied a high position of acceptability, they were seldom quoted precisely or prefaced as with O.T. citations. It appears that the Fathers elevated the circular writings yet without distinction (i.e., no concept of a canon, just wise books). Clement of Rome spoke of an elevated regard for Paul (I Clement 47), "Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle." The Fathers made allusions to all the N.T. books with the exception of Philemon, II John and III John, which were limited in circulation.

N.B. Along with apostolic writings various writings soon came to be regarded with equal veneration (i.e., Hermas, Barnabas, Didaché, I and II Clement). Hermas spoke of his letter as a "revelation" that was to be read in other cities (Vision 2, 4). Ignatius called his words those of God ("I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice, with my own voice..." (Philadelphia 7:2)).

N.N.B.B. The Fathers simply were not technical and, given an absence of threatening issues, did not respond to systematize their thought. The relation of Paul to the O.T. was simply not considered. Paul was elevated, but not to the degree of the O.T.

The Fathers were not thinking analytically or critically. They simply accepted, without questions, therefore there are little answers. They are not denying canonicity, they haven't yet realized it.

C. Authority was deposited in the bishop's office and apostolic succession.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE APOLOGISTS AND THEOLOGIANS.

In the second and third centuries the church was forced by external and internal forces to systematize its standards of authority. The heresies that threatened the life of the church had the positive effect of forcing the church to clarify its teachings on this issue. A few of the catalytic forces are as follows:

1. **Ebionitism**, a Jewish-Christian perversion, in its more extreme forms strictly humanized Jesus, rejected Paul as an apostate from the Mosaic law, and accepted only Matthew and Hebrews.
2. **Elkesaitism** rejected the O.T. and built its perverted religion on another supposedly sacred book, the Book of Elkesai.
3. **Gnosticism** was a syncretistic religion that blended and amalgamated oriental theosophy, Hellenistic philosophy, and Christianity to establish a universal religion. The Gnostics became "the first exegetes" and altered

sources to prove their position. Heick commented (*A History of Christian Thought*, I, 74): “A great deal was made of unwritten apostolic tradition and teachings. In addition, a voluminous literature of apocryphal and pseudonymous books was published for the dissemination of Gnostic doctrines.”

4. **Marcionism**, unlike the systems above, came expressly from within the church and caused the first church schism (140 A.D.). Marcion, influenced by Gnostic dualism, and a strong anti-semitism, felt that Paul’s Christ and the O.T. were irreconcilable. He believed the God of the OT was distinct from the Father of Jesus and a lesser deity. Hence in his *Antitheses* he rejected the O.T. while elevating Paul’s writings (10 epistles) accompanied with a critically revised Luke (removes OT references and anything pro-Jewish). Marcion limited the canon, not unlike modern, rationalistic scholars.
 5. **Montanism**, also, from within the church’s ranks, founded authority in the existential utterances of Montanus, the recognized voice of the Paraclete (later, the Paraclete himself). Montanus spoke of “new prophecy.” Authority went outside the O.T. and apostolic writings. Montanus is adding to the canon.
- N.B.** Marcionism and Montanism represent the two opposing assaults on the Scripture, the former takes away from the canon and the latter adds to the canon. Marcionism is parallel to modern religious liberalism which removes the books of Scripture from a place of authority. Montanism is represented by both Roman Catholic views which add the teachings of the Church fathers and Pentecostal-Charismatic theology which adds from mystical revelations.
6. Persecutions of the Church and the confiscation of sacred writings.
- N.B.** In response to these forces from within and without, the church was forced to speak out, but in order to do this it had to develop standards. Reuss wrote, for example (*History of the Canon of Holy Scripture in the Christian Church*, 83): “By rejecting Montanism not only in its errors but also in the evangelical part of its principles, the Church drew a line of demarcation round apostolic times, and expressed its opinion that these were distinguished from later times, not only by exceptional historical facts but also by religious and psychological facts peculiar to that period. The Gospel had not intended to restrict these facts to the first century, but sentiment, which does not permit of such distinctions, had gradually given place to reflection, and some external circumstance alone was needed to give the latter an occasion for formulating its categories and defining its laws.

Finally, there was still another and more direct way in which the methods adopted by the Gnostic philosophers increased the estimate of the writings of the apostles even within the pale of the Church. If the heretics claimed to found their doctrines on these writings, there was all the greater reason that the Catholics should study them from the same point of view, whereas up to this time, they had been content to found their teaching on a tradition still pure and living. When the books were put forward to contradict or modify this tradition, and there was no room for doubting their authenticity, it was natural that the fact should be examined and the pretended difference verified. On the other hand, as the dissenting schools were also producing unknown or suspected books in support of their systems, the orthodox found it necessary to distinguish more clearly the two classes of works and assure themselves of their respective value.”

A. **The Concept of the Canon.**

The term “canon” (*kanon*) is used in the N.T. (Galatians 6:16, Philippians 3:16 [TR], I Clement 7:2), but in a strictly non-technical sense of a standard, a measuring device. The word was not used for a list of authoritative Scripture until Athanasius used it in his Festal Letters of the fourth century. In the second and third centuries a nucleus of N.T. writings gradually were recognized. The initial step in the development of standards for self-preservation was the “Rule of Faith,” then the embellishment of the bishop’s office, and, finally, the canon of books itself.

1. **The Rule of Faith (Old Roman Symbol)** was essentially a baptismal formula by which the confessor stated his/her belief in the faith of the church. The “Apostle’s Creed” which can be traced to the close of the fifth century is built on the Old Roman Symbol which “can be traced back with certainty to the middle of the third century (Seeburg, *The History of Doctrines*, 84).”

I believe in God the Father Almighty, *maker of heaven and earth*.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was *conceived* by
the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, who *suffered* under
Pontius Pilate, was crucified, *dead*, and buried; *He descended into*
Hades, the third day He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of *God* the Father *Almighty*; from
thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And *I believe*
in the Holy Ghost; the holy *catholic* Church; *the communion of*
saints; the forgiveness of sins The resurrection of the body: *and*
the life everlasting. [italics are the later additions]

The Apostles Creed, Rome, ca. 340.

2. **Apostolic Succession and the Rise of the Monarchial Bishop** were also looked upon as a legitimate source for preventing heresy and stabilizing

the faith of the church. Gonzalez wrote (*A History of Christian Thought*. I, 150), “Soon the impact of heresies led Christians to join the ideas of apostolic succession and of monarchical episcopacy, and thus began the emphasis on the uninterrupted chain of bishops who unite the present church with apostolic times.” Again, he wrote (*A History of Christian Thought*. I, 181): “What we have just summarized is that which may be found in early antiheretical writers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. But one must point out that at this time the understanding of apostolic succession was still not such that succession is required to confer validity to the episcopal office. On the contrary, some bishops had that succession and others did not have it; but all their churches were apostolic because their faith agreed with the faith of the apostles as it had been preserved in churches whose bishops were in their succession. Later, and through a development that would take several centuries, this doctrine of apostolic succession would be developed to a point that would never be recognized by those who first advocated it.”

3. The Canon

a) The Early Attempts to formulate the Canon. In a non-technical sense the concept of a collection of sacred writings emerged in the middle of the second century.

(1) **The Muratorian Canon** dates from the late second century (160–180 A.D.) and represents the first known collection of N.T. books. By this time the writings of the apostles were elevated to the level of the O.T. The list did not include 1 John, 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews and James (the later two, perhaps, because of Marcionism). It also rejects the ‘Shepherd’ of Hermas, the Marcionite Epistles of Paul to Laodicea and Alexandria, and a several other Gnostic and Montanist writings.

N.B. This “canon” takes its name from its founder, the Italian archaeologist L. A. Muratori in 1740. He found it in the Ambrosian Library in Milan and dated his copy from the 8th century.

(2) **Irenaeus** in his writings as the bishop of Lyon (West) alluded to all the N.T. books with the exception of Jude and 2 Peter, James, Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation.

N.B. In only two instances does he refer to any other works as authoritative (*kanon*). Once to I Clement and once to Hermas, the most revered books among the Church Fathers.

- (3) The **Syriac Version** dates from the third century from the distant east (interior of Syria). The only deletion was Revelation.

N.B. At this period there is no debate as to the fact of a canon, but merely its extent.

- (4) **Origen**, the most influential and widely traveled scholar in the early church, made a list of disputed books which were Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, Jude, Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Didaché, and the Gospel of Hebrews.

- (5) **Clement of Alexandria** disputed James, 2 Peter, and 3 John.

N.B. By the beginning of the fourth century two things emerge.

- (1) The rejected books were unacceptable largely because they were increasingly unknown or unavailable.

- (2) The apocryphal writings were increasingly seen as qualitative less than other books.

- (6) **Eusebius of Caesarea**, the ecclesiastical historian, disputed James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John.

b) The attempt to codify the Canon

In the fourth century churchmen in the East and the West sought to establish the authoritative collection of books.

- (1) In the East

- (a) **Athanasius** of Alexandria was the outstanding figure in the Eastern Church in this regard. In the bishop's Easter [Festal] letter of 365/66, a letter to fix the date of Easter for that year after which the other festive dates would be arranged, he listed twenty-seven books as the "only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel." However, in the Old Testament list Baruch followed Jeremiah. With this he made a list

of inferior books that included Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Esther, Tobit, Judith, the Pastor, and the Apostolic Constitutions.

N.B. This did not settle the issue in the East for Gregory of Nazianus and Cyril of Jerusalem doubted Revelation. Didymus of Alexandria, director of a school there in 390, doubted 2 Peter. Like Athanasius, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, accepted the N.T. in today's form and rejected Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. To Athanasius' opinion came Theodore of Mopsuestia, the "exegete," John Chrysostom, and Theodoret.

- (b) **The Council of Laodicea (363)** was a provincial, not a universal, gathering of the church. The sixteenth canon from the council recognized all the N.T. books with the exception of Revelation and added Baruch and 'the Letter' to the O.T. list. The fifty-ninth canon forbids the use of any other books in the liturgy of the church. The sixteenth canon specifically listed the received books.

"These are all the books of the Old Testament which may be read aloud: (1) Genesis, (2) Exodus, (3) Leviticus, (4) Numbers, (5) Deuteronomy, (6) Joshua, (7) Judges, Ruth, (8) Esther, (9) First and Second Book of Kings, (10) Third and Fourth Book of Kings, (11) First and Second Book of Paraleipomena (Chronicles), (12) First and Second Book of Ezra, (13) the book of the 150 Psalms, (14) the Proverbs of Solomon, (15) Ecclesiastes (the Preacher), (16) the Song of Songs, (17) Job, (18) The twelve Prophets, (19) Isaiah, (20) Jeremiah and Baruch, the Lamentations and Letters (according to Zonaras, 'the Letter'), (21) Ezekiel, (22) Daniel. The Books of the New Testament are these: four Gospels according to S. Matthew, S. Mark, S. Luke, and S. John; the Acts of the Apostles; the seven Catholic Epistles, namely, one by S. James, two by S. Peter, three by S. John, one by S. Jude; the fourteen Epistles of S. 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, one to Philemon.”

N.B. Reuss concluded his discussion of the issue in the East (*History*, 183-84) “My readers will demand no other proofs before accepting this fact which I have advanced—viz., until after the fourth century, the Eastern Church, though speaking of a scriptural canon, though feeling the need of it both for science and popular instruction, though making efforts to establish it by means of its theologians, legists, and synods, did not succeed in producing absolute uniformity on this point among the doctors and the dioceses, or in fixing a sure and invariable line to separate the inspired canonical books from those of a quite different value. If all the attempts I have recorded fell short of their end, and it, after all, there was agreement towards the end of the second century only regarding what had been already sanctioned by usage, it is because the canon, whether in the earliest times or later, was formed only by this ecclesiastical usage, in part local and accidental, and was not formed according to scientific principles and methods, nor by the ascendancy of one primordial and pre-eminent authority. Hence, the greater the distance from the point of departure, the less possible it was to efface the divergences of opinion.”

(2) In the West

- (a) **Jerome** (331–419) has given several lists of authoritative books demonstrating the current extent of the canon. In a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola, in 394 he specifically and only lists thirty-nine O.T. books and twenty-seven N.T. He is aware of other books, but does not place them in the canon.

“Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord’s team of four, the true cherubim (which means ‘abundance of knowledge’), endowed with eyes throughout their whole body; they glitter like sparks, they flash to and fro like lightning, their legs are straight and directed upward, their backs are winged, to fly in all directions. They are interlocked and hold on to one another, they roll along like wheels within wheels, they go to whatever point the breath of the Holy Spirit guides them.

The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth such letter, that to the Hebrews, is placed outside the number by most); he instructs Timothy and Titus; he intercedes with Philemon for his runaway slave. Regarding Paul I prefer to remain silent than to write only a few things.

The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a bare history and to describe the childhood of the infant church; but if we know that their writer was Luke the physician, ‘whose praise is in the gospel, we shall observe likewise that all their words are medicine for the sick soul. The apostles James, Peter, John and Jude produced seven epistles both mystical and concise, both short and long—that is, short in words but long in thought—so that there are few who are not deeply impressed by reading them.

The Apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as it has words. I have said too little in comparison with what the book deserves; all praise of it is inadequate for in every one of its words manifold meanings lie hidden.”

The Vulgate (Jerome’s great translation) has non-canonical books after the sixty-six and are not to be read in the churches.

N.B. In 382 Bishop Damascus asked Jerome to undertake a revision of the Latin text to standardize the Scriptures for the churches. The result was the Vulgate (i.e., the “common” or to-be-used text).

Augustine renders the same testimony to twenty-seven books.

- (b) **The Synod of Carthage (397)**, actually the first in that city, under the direction of the famous bishop of Hippo and Aurelius of Carthage, determined that in the assemblies of the Church, only canonical books should be read under the name “divine writings.” Canon thirty-six reads as follows:

“Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read, in the church, under the title of “divine writings.” The canonical books are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, the two books of *Paraleipomena* (Chronicles), Job, the Psalms of David, the five books of Solomon, the twelve books of the (Minor) Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Tobias, Judith, Esther,

two books of Esdras, two books of the Maccabees. The books of the New Testament are:—the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of S. Paul, one Epistle of S. Paul to the Hebrews, two Epistles of S. Peter, three Epistles of S. John, the Epistle of S. James, the Epistle of S. Jude, the Revelation of S. John.”

- (c) **The Fourth Synod of Carthage (418/9)** reaffirmed the results of the previous council and appealed to the bishop of Rome (Innocent I) for his approval (an interesting tradition that was developing in the church).

N.B. The councils at Carthage in the West under Augustine and the Easter Letter of Athanasius in the East are generally viewed as closing the canon issue. This technically is not true for these were regional, not ecumenical events. Innocent I, for example, did not put his approval upon the Synod of Carthage in 393.

**By 400 the issue is virtually settled by consensus rather than council or creed, since no significant controversy surrounds the canon. For the New Testament no other books than our 27 are seriously considered after this. The only issue is the apocrypha in the OT.

N.N.B.B. The criteria for determining the worth of books.

1. Generally—internal witness of the Holy Spirit.
2. Specifically
 - a) Apostolic origin or sanction
 - b) Ecclesiastical usage or acceptance
 - c) Intrinsic content
 - d) Spiritual and moral effect
 - e) Attitude of the early church

N.N.N.B.B.B. No other gospels than our four *ever* competed for inclusion in the canon. The Gnostic gospels were written too late. The only “possible” gospel written earlier was the Gospel of Thomas. No evidence exists that it was ever considered or that it was forbidden. It disappeared because it was not accepted and its use was restricted to a minor sect that died out early.

B. The Concept of Inspiration (intrinsic nature of the holy books).

By way of an introductory summary Klotsch wrote (*The History of Christian Doctrine*, 44-45): “The Fathers of the ancient church...were all agreed that the Scriptures were inspired, but differed in their views as to the ‘how.’ Some maintained that the state of inspiration is the state of ecstasy, or at least a state

from which all human agency is to be excluded. Others recognized the human element in the biblical writings though they never questioned the divine origin nor the inerrancy of the Scriptures.”

1. The Church Fathers speak of inspiration in very general terms, but they did not give any more definite explanation regarding the manner of this expression. They employ the phrase “leyei pneuma ayion.”
2. Justin Martyr is the first writer to more specifically delineate the manner of inspiration. He maintained that the writers were passive, though not unconscious instruments in control of God; his pens rather than his penman.

N.B. Hagenbach (*A Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 88) questioned the extent of this passiveness when he stated, “Whether Justin here maintains a pure passivity on the part of the writer, or whether the peculiar structure of the instrument, determining the tone, is to be taken into consideration.”

Justin did refer to the extent of inspiration as verbal and plenary (*Apology*, 36). “But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them. For sometimes He declares things that are to come to pass, in the manner of one who foretells the future; sometimes He speaks as from the person of God the Lord and Father of all; sometimes as from the person of Christ; sometimes as from the person of the people answering the Lord or His Father, just as you can see even in your own writers, one man being the writer of the whole, but introducing the persons who converse. And thus the Jew who possessed the books of the prophets did not understand, and therefore did not recognize Christ even when He came, but even hate us who say that He has come, and who prove that, as was predicted, He was crucified by them.”

The soul of the inspired writer is likened to a musical instrument and the Spirit to the musician (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, 8). “Since therefore it is impossible to learn anything true concerning religion from your teachers, who by their mutual disagreement have furnished you with sufficient proof of their own ignorance, I consider it reasonable to recur to our progenitors, who both in point of time have by a great way the precedence of your teachers, and who have taught us nothing from their own private fancy, nor differed with one another, nor attempted to overturn one another’s positions, but without wrangling and contention received from God the knowledge which also they taught to us. For neither by nature nor by human conception is it possible for men to know things so great and divine, but by the gift which then descended from

above upon the holy men, who had no need of rhetorical art, nor of uttering anything in a contentious or quarrelsome manner, but to present themselves pure to the energy of the Divine Spirit, in order that the divine plectrum (fullness) itself, descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly.”

- N.B.** Hagenbach, Klotsch, and others noted that this came perilously close to Montanus’ view of inspiration—a state of ecstasy in which sensation and self-consciousness are lost.
3. Athenagoras (*Apology*, 7, 9) maintained the same passivity and verbal plenary view which he felt was crucial to inerrancy and infallibility (*Apology*, 9). “If we satisfied ourselves with advancing such considerations as these, our doctrines might by some be looked upon as human. But, since the voices of the prophets confirm our arguments—for I think that you also, with your great zeal for knowledge, and your great attainments in learning, cannot be ignorant of the writings either of Moses or Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets, who, lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute;—what, then, do these men say? ‘The Lord is our God; no other can be compared with Him.’ And again: ‘I am God, the first and the last, and besides Me there is no God.’ In like manner: ‘Before Me there was no other God, and after Me there shall be none; I am God, and there is none besides Me.’ And as to His greatness: ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is the footstool of My feet: what house will ye build for Me, or what is the place of My rest?’ But I leave it to you, when you meet with the books themselves, to examine carefully the prophecies contained in them, that you may on fitting grounds defend us from the abuse cast upon us.”
 4. “Clement of Alexandria,” wrote Gonzalez (*Story*, I, 199): “never doubts that the Scriptures are inspired of God. His assurance on this point is such that he never develops a theory of inspiration. God speaks in the Scriptures, and the manner in which this fact is related to the men who actually wrote the sacred text is not a problem of primary importance.”
 5. Irenaeus stressed plenary inspiration but argued also for a human factor in the production of the Scriptures (*Against Heresies*, IV, 9).
 6. Augustine, though not blind to the human side of Scripture, stressed inerrancy so emphatically that he seemed to exclude any human factor in composition (*Epistle*, 82). A. D. R. Polman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine* (53-54), has made this very point.

“St. Augustine was fully convinced that the Scriptures were entirely God’s work. Everything in the Old and New Testaments was written by one Spirit and must hence be believed beyond all doubt. Any suggestion of partial inspiration was rejected out of hand. Divine inspiration of partial inspiration was rejected out of hand. Divine inspiration provided not only the religious and moral tone of the Scriptures, but contained quite literally everything that God has revealed to man. In the Scriptures, even historical events are related by divine authority, and must therefore be believed absolutely. What the Scriptures tell of history must be believed firmly and whatever disagrees with the Scriptural accounts must be rejected as utterly false. This is true also of the account of the Creation. ‘That God made the world we can believe from no one more safely than from God Himself. But where have we heard Him? Nowhere more distinctly than in the Holy Scriptures, where his prophet said: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Was the prophet present? No, but the wisdom of God, by whom all things were made, was there and wisdom insinuates itself into holy souls and makes them the friends of God and his prophets and noiselessly informs them of his works’. True, the Bible does not describe the Creation in detail, but merely tells us what the Holy Ghost in the Biblical author saw needful to report. What the Scriptures say on this subject is completely reliable, and even when they tell us that a single source watered the whole earth we have no reason for disbelief. Our interpretation may be false, and we must do our utmost to look for an explanation which is in agreement with the Scriptures, for they are undoubtedly truthful even when their truth cannot be demonstrated.”

When the Bible tells us that there were waters above the firmament, waters, there must have been. In any case, the authority of the Scriptures surpasses the capacity of all our reason.

This is equally true of the purely historical accounts. Whatever times, St. Augustine stated expressly that this prohibition was a prediction of the Holy Spirit.

In a sermon, he claimed that the Psalms were dictated by the Holy Spirit. His sermon on Psalm 33 began with the words: ‘Let us then hear what the Holy Spirit by the mouth of his holy prophet says in the words of the Psalm.’ In his sermons on Psalm 118 he repeatedly referred to a given text as spoken by the Spirit or else as being a divine saying. Psalm 105 gives a number of details from the life of Joseph and tells us, interalia, that Joseph’s feet were hurt with fetters and that he was placed in irons. St. Augustine then claims that we ought no ways to doubt that it was so. For some things might be passed over in that (Scriptural) history, which nevertheless would not escape the Holy Spirit, Who speaks in these Psalms. When Psalm 96:5 tells us that all the gods of the nations are idols, this is a judgment of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, then, St. Augustine held that

all Scripture was divinely inspired.”

7. John Chrysostom (Matthew, homily I) and Jerome (Galatians. III, 5) recognized differences in style and diction, but never questioned plenary inspiration.
8. Even Gregory the Great maintained the strictest theory of inspiration (*Moralia*. I, 1.2).

C. The Concept of Interpretation.

In the conflict with Gnosticism the Christian scholars reacted first by organizing the canon of Scriptures. To a canon both Gnostics and non-Gnostics appealed in order to prove their views—the matter then became hermeneutical. It is not correct to say that a literal hermeneutic was employed in the church until the Alexandrian School emerged, but a literal hermeneutic was more normative. Orr seems more correct when he wrote (*Progress of Dogma*, 66), “The Fathers themselves are far from free from the vice of allegorical interpretation; but as any one will see on comparison, their use of Scripture was sobriety itself compared with that of the Gnostics whom they debated.”

1. Irenaeus, when confronting the Gnostics, complained of the dangers of allegorization (*Against Heresies*. I, 3.6) although he uses the method [three spies at Jericho = Trinity]).
2. The Alexandrian Tradition so deeply imbibed Philo’s thought that allegorical interpretation became a main level of interpretation so as to defend the accuracy of the Bible.

N.B. The eastern church was heavily influenced by philosophy so that they tended to view Christianity in that framework.

- a) The Epistle of Barnabas is heavily allegorical.
- b) Clement of Alexandria developed his hermeneutic within Philo dualistic framework. He proposed the doctrine of various senses of Scriptures. Gonzalez wrote (*A History of Christian Thought*. I, 201-202): “This primary meaning of a biblical text is certainly not the highest, and the Christian who hopes to achieve a profound understanding of his faith must not be content with it; but this does not imply that the ‘first meaning’ is unimportant, or that it can be left aside without forsaking biblical truth. On the contrary, the ‘first meaning’ is the point of departure of every other meaning of the text. Especially in the case of historical and prophetic texts, to deny this first and literal sense of Scripture would imply a denial of

God's action and promises. There is only one reason that can be adduced in order to deny the literal meaning of a particular text: that it says something that is unworthy of God. Thus, for example, the texts that refer to God in anthropomorphic terms must be interpreted in such a way that it is clearly seen that their anthropomorphism is an allegory that points to more profound truths."

- c) Origen followed the same approach believing that every text has profound mysteries that are to be discovered through allegory. Origen, however, was an advocate of the errorlessness of Scripture. As Vawter noted (*Biblical Inspiration*, 26-27): "It seems to be clear enough that, in company with most of the other Christian commentators of the age, he most often acted on the unexpressed assumption that the Scripture is a divine composition through and through, and for this reason infallibly true in all its parts. He could say, in fact, that the Biblical texts were not the works of men but of the Holy Spirit [*De princ.*, 4.9, *PG*, 11:360], and that from this it followed that they were filled with the wisdom and truth of God down to the very least letter. He could therefore entertain a notion of verbal inspiration or of the literary authorship of God that could appear quite crass indeed, and it was this notion that he frequently carried with him when he examined the Scriptures."

R. P. C. Hanson has written (*Allegory and Event*, 187): "Origen's frank recognition that the textual tradition of the Scriptures was open to deviation and error did not in the least affect his conviction that the Scriptures were not only inspired but verbally inspired. Zollig has pointed out that the word which Origen used for 'inspired' (*Theopneustos*) does not mean 'breathing the Spirit of God' in an active sense, but always, in a passive, 'inspired by God', and that most of his expressions for inspiration indicate this too: 'Holy Scripture has a divine nature, and this not simply because it contains divine ideas, nor because the breath of the divine Spirit breathes in its lines . . . but because it has God as its author.' Origen declares that 'the holy books are not the compilations of men, but were written and have reached us as a result of the inspiration (*epinoia*) of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of all through Jesus Christ.'

That every word of the Scriptures was carefully designed by God was in Origen's day no new doctrine. It is to be found in Philo. 'Observe carefully every subtle point,' he says, 'for you will find nothing spoken superfluously' (*pareruo*). And he tells us that Moses did not write a single unnecessary word. This was no doubt

part of Philo's debt to the Rabbinic tradition of exegesis; and no doubt Philo in his turn influenced Origen in this respect. But even Hippolytus, whose ideas, as far as we know, were quite independent of Origen's, can say, 'The Holy Scriptures declare to us nothing unnecessary (*aireoun*), but only what is for our own instruction, for the enhancement of the prophets and the exposition of what was said by them.'

D. The Concept of Tradition.

The early church did not perceive a distinction between the written Scriptures and the oral tradition of the Scripture's message; that is, the tradition of the gospel (its oral repetition or telling) and Scripture were equal. In confronting heretics (principally Gnostics) the approach was two-fold—Bible and Apostolic history (Rule of Faith, Succession). It must be observed that men like Irenaeus and Tertullian did not yet know any "traditio humana" within the church which could in any way contradict the "traditio apostolica" (Hagenbach. I, 97). In the conflict with error, the Word stated and the Word held were equaled.

1. Irenaeus declared (*Against Heresies*. III, 4) that nations have been converted to Christianity not in the first instance by the Scriptures, but by means of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and faithfully preserved tradition.
2. Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*. VII, 15) referred to the Rule of Faith as authority.

IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to gain some conception into Pilate's quest for truth from the Ancient Church viewpoint. Because of the external and internal threat of heresy, the Apologists and Theologians were forced to erect a line of defense called "the Canon." The canonical books were conceived to be of both verbal and plenary integrity although the exact mode or manner of inspiration was unresolved. That is not to say that tradition was negated any more that we today negate our creedal statements. Tradition, because it faithfully mirrored the Bible, such as the Old Roman Symbol (Rule of Faith), was given equal standing with the Bible. The mode of interpreting the Bible, due to the dominate influence of Greek thought, was increasingly cast through the grid of the allegorical method which built on a historic, literal approach.

ATHANASIUS, LETTER XXXIX. EASTER, 367.

1. They have fabricated books which they call books of tables, in which they shew stars, to which they give the names of Saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach: those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science; and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in all truth and upright in the presence of God.
2. But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simple should be beguiled from their simplicity and purity, by the subtlety of certain men, and should henceforth read other books—those called apocryphal—led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books; I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church.
3. In proceeding to make mention of these things, I shall adopt, to commend my undertaking, the pattern of Luke the Evangelist, saying on my own account: ‘Forasmuch as some have taken in hand,’ to reduce into order for themselves the books termed apocryphas, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture. Concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance.
4. There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard; it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.
5. Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the

Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.

6. These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let not man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproved the Jews, saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'
7. But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.