

# THE EARLIEST NEW TESTAMENT <sup>1</sup>

By KENNETH L. CARROLL, B.D., PH.D.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN RELIGION, SOUTHERN METHODIST  
UNIVERSITY, DALLAS, TEXAS

## I

THE earliest New Testament appeared some time between the years 170 and 180. Any date before 170 can be ruled out for a number of reasons. Just as Harnack says that Justin and the Montanist movement offer the "strongest testimony that in the sixth decade of the second century there was no such thing as a New Testament",<sup>2</sup> so are there other witnesses which attest to the fact that in the seventh decade of the second century there was still no such thing as a New Testament. First, and perhaps the most important, is the witness of Tatian who composed his *Diatessaron* in Rome about A.D. 170.<sup>3</sup> Had the Church at Rome already possessed a collection of "books of the New Covenant" containing only apostolic writings, such a move would have been

<sup>1</sup> Much of this material appeared in the writer's doctoral dissertation, which was completed in May 1952, at Duke University.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation* (Convent Garden, 1925), p. 94. This book, translated by J. R. Wilkinson, is hereafter referred to as *Origin of the New Testament*.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (New York, 1920), p. 169, and Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings* (New York, 1938), p. 502, hold that the *Diatessaron* was written in Rome c. A.D. 170. Edward Caldwell Moore, *The New Testament in the Christian Church* (New York, 1904), p. 91, says that it was produced in Syria, after Tatian left Rome in 172. In the overall meaning of his act, it really is not too important whether it was done in Rome in 170 or after his departure from Rome in 172. In either case, as a member of the Roman Church for twenty years and as a former student of Justin, it seems impossible that he would have taken four books from a sacred canon and combined them in such a way that they would lose their apostolic authorship. The New Testament, when it did appear, had its "apostolic" character just as did the rule of faith and the episcopal office. If Tatian had dared to rob the gospels of their "apostolic" recommendations (which inclusion in the New Testament gave them), there would have been a great outcry. See also Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Formation of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1926), p. 58; this work is hereafter referred to as *Formation*.

impossible. At the time that Tatian composed his *Diatessaron* the four gospels were circulating in the form of the fourfold gospel and not as a part of the New Testament. The fourfold gospel itself was of recent enough creation for Tatian to remember what its purpose had been—to express the unity of the gospel. That, in reality, was what Tatian's *Diatessaron* attempted to do. Enslin sees clearly Tatian's witness to this status of the four gospels. He writes,

Tatian's selection of the four gospels evidences their dominance in Rome; on the other hand, his freedom in recasting the material, his use of John as the framework, with his arrangement of such incidents as the interview with Nicodemus which he placed in the last winter of Jesus' life, his recognition of the fact that divergent accounts (as the Cleansing of the Temple or the Healing of the Blind at Jericho) do not mean separate incidents—all this indicates that the gospels had not achieved a sacrosanctness which precluded change or rearrangement.<sup>1</sup>

Theophilus' Harmony of the four gospels, produced in Antioch about A.D. 175-180,<sup>2</sup> supports the evidence of Tatian. If a New Testament had been produced in Rome before 170 neither of these two literary works would have been possible on the part of orthodox Christians.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the testimony of Tatian's *Diatessaron* and of the harmony produced some five or ten years later by Theophilus, there is also the evidence furnished by the Alogi and the Martyrs of Scilli. If a New Testament had been in existence by 170, the Alogi could not have rejected the logos doctrine and the writings of John and still have considered themselves to be orthodox Christians.<sup>4</sup> In like manner, the existence of a New Testament before 170 in Rome would probably have ruled out the view of the Martyrs of Scilli, in 180, that the letters of Paul were on a

<sup>1</sup> Enslin, *op. cit.* pp. 467-8.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *Origin of the New Testament*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> Tatian was later proclaimed a heretic, but there was no mention of his *Diatessaron* as heretical. When he was adjudged heretical it was on other grounds. See Enslin, *op. cit.* p. 467, and B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Church to A.D. 461*, i (Oxford, 1922), 199-201. The fact that Tatian was a member of the Roman Church for twenty years, was closely associated with Justin, and was also a teacher after Justin's death, suggests that if he had known the New Testament his understanding of it would have kept him from composing this work.

<sup>4</sup> See Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *Early Church History, to A.D. 313*, ii. (London, 1927), 185-6, and William Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York, 1918), p. 72.

somewhat lower plane than the Jewish scriptures and the gospels.<sup>1</sup> The prestige and influence of the Roman Church was felt, toward the end of the third quarter of the second century, throughout the central area of the Roman world,<sup>2</sup> so that the appearance of a New Testament in Rome before 170 undoubtedly would have been felt in North African Scilli no later than 180. What Harnack has written about Carthage in 200 also holds true of Scilli in 180 : “ . . . people only knew that while the Roman Church had an apostolic origin, their own had not ; consequently the ‘ auctoritas ’ of the former church must be recognized ”.<sup>3</sup>

Just as a lower limit of A.D. 170 can be set for the emergence of the New Testament so can an upper limit of 180 be accepted. The writings of Irenaeus, c. 182-7, reflect the existence of the New Testament although Irenaeus himself does not use this phrase. If such a collection, whether formally made or only generally recognized, had not existed at this time, then Irenaeus’ “ arguments against the falsification of the Scriptures by subtractions and additions would have had no point ”.<sup>4</sup> Harnack is right in saying that such a collection is regarded by Irenaeus and Tertullian as completed. The Bibles of the heretics are “ tested by the Church compilation as the older one, and the latter itself is already used exactly like the Old Testament ”.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This appears to be the universal interpretation of the statement in *The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs*. See Enslin, op. cit. p. 464 ; Moore, op. cit. p. 97 ; Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the primacy of Rome at this early date, see B. J. Kidd, *The Roman Primacy to A.D. 461* (London, 1936), pp. 11-22, and Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, i. (New York, 1908), 485-6. Harnack’s work, translated by James Moffatt, is hereafter cited as *Expansion of Christianity*.

<sup>3</sup> Harnack, *ibid.* i. 486.

<sup>4</sup> F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum : A Study of His Teaching* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, ii. (Boston, 1897), 44. This work was translated by Neil Buchanan from the third German edition. Harnack continues, “ The assumption of the inspiration of the books ; the harmonistic interpretation of them ; the idea of their absolute sufficiency with regard to every question which can arise and every event which they record ; the right of unlimited combination of passages ; the assumption that nothing in the Scriptures is without importance ; and finally, the allegorical interpretation : are the immediately observable result of the creation of the canon.”

It is safe, therefore, to set a top limit of A.D. 180 for the appearance of the New Testament in the Roman Church. Perhaps the concept of the New Testament had emerged several years earlier, so that Irenaeus may have become acquainted with it on his visit to Rome in 177. This, however, can only remain conjecture. We can only say with certainty that the New Testament was consciously created in Rome in the decade between A.D. 170 and 180.

## II

The date of 170 to 180, which we have arrived at for the creation of the New Testament, raises the question of why a second sacred collection was brought forth at this time. What was the motive for the production of a New Testament? There are two answers which are usually given in reply to this question. One, championed most recently by John Knox, holds that "Marcion's canon served as the decisive occasion for its creation".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there is found the school, represented by Goodspeed, which emphasizes the role of Montanism. Goodspeed says: "The extreme prophetic claims of Montanism in particular forced upon the Church the more definite fixing of its primary authorities, under the form of a covenant or Testament too original and sacred to admit of modern amplification."<sup>2</sup>

It is probable that both of these are wrong—especially in that they *overemphasize* the influence of each movement at the time that the New Testament was created. Knox, who claims that Marcion's canon was the "decisive occasion" for the creation of the New Testament, is thereby forced to date the emergence of the New Testament much earlier than Goodspeed does. Knox, therefore, claims that the "New Testament came into existence as a conscious creation between A.D. 150 and 175, which was probably the period of Marcion's most vigorous and influential activity".<sup>3</sup> Marcion's canon was a "decisive occasion" for

<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (Chicago, 1942), p. 161.      <sup>2</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Knox, *op. cit.* p. 32. Harnack's view seems to favour the creation of a New Testament between 160 and 180 (which was probably inspired by Marcion's canon), but he suggests that the "relative closed and definite form was acquired between A.D. 180 and 200"—see Harnack, *Origin of the New Testament*, p. 95.

action, it is true ; but this action was the publication of the fourfold gospel and of the expanded Pauline corpus.<sup>1</sup> This in itself was a significant development. Thus it was determined that, when it did emerge, the New Testament would possess four gospels and a rehabilitated (and expanded) Paul. We cannot, however, go so far as to regard Marcion as the creator of the Church's New Testament.

The Roman Church's answer to Marcion came in 155-160, but was not the creation of a New Testament. The Church, shortly after Justin's answer to Marcion's *Antitheses*, replied to Marcion's canon with the fourfold gospel and the expanded Pauline corpus. The New Testament, however, was not created until some twenty years after this date. If Marcion's canon had, as Knox argues, "served as the decisive occasion" for the creation of the New Testament, then the New Testament, rather than the fourfold gospel and the expanded Pauline corpus, would have appeared in 155-160. Marcion, important as he was, cannot be judged to have been the "creator" of the Christian New Testament.

The answer proposed by Goodspeed, that Montanism rather than Marcionism gave the impetus needed to bring about the creation of the New Testament, is also far from convincing. Goodspeed, it will be noted, dates the emergence of this canon of specifically Christian writings at about A.D. 185.<sup>2</sup> He, likewise, places its birth in Rome as do practically all New Testament scholars.<sup>3</sup> Although it appears that the year 180 would be a much safer date for the creation of the New Testament (bearing in mind the testimony of Irenaeus), yet a period of five years is not too important when we consider the reason which Goodspeed proposes for this action. He would have us believe that the New Testament was produced in Rome in 185 as a protest to

<sup>1</sup> See my articles, "The Expansion of the Pauline Corpus," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, lxxii (1953), 230-7, and "The Formation of the Fourfold Gospel," *BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY*, vol. 37, No. 1 (1954), pp. 68-77.

<sup>2</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 67-77. See also Harnack, *Origin of the New Testament*, pp. 104-5, and Knox, *op. cit.* p. 33, concerning Rome as the place where the idea of the New Testament first arose. There is little or no disagreement among the authorities over the place where the second canon was created.

Montanism. This would place its creation during the episcopate of Eleutherus (174/5-189), whom Irenaeus visited in 177 and who, so we are told, was in sympathy with the Montanists.<sup>1</sup> Is it conceivable that the Church at Rome could have produced the New Testament in reaction to the "extreme prophetic claims of Montanism"<sup>2</sup> at the very time that its bishop was himself favourably inclined toward Montanism? To ask us to believe this is to ask too much.

La Piana, in his very interesting work on the Roman Church at the end of the second century, suggests that Montanism first appeared in Rome about 177, during the early years of the episcopate of Eleutherus.<sup>3</sup> In spite of some opposition, as is suggested by the letter of the Gallican martyrs to Eleutherus, it was not proscribed.<sup>4</sup>

It is very probable that Victor, the successor to Eleutherus, was the bishop, mentioned by Tertullian, who not only recognized the authenticity of the Montanists' prophetic inspiration but also wrote letters in their behalf to the churches in Asia.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, i. (Grand Rapids, 1951), 309: Irenaeus is reported to have found, on his visit to Rome in 177, "the Montanist heresy patronized by Eleutherus the Bishop of Rome". See also ii. 3-4, and x. 631. This set of the work revised by A. Cleveland Coxe is hereafter referred to as *ANF*.

<sup>2</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> George La Piana, "The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century," *Harvard Theological Review*, xviii (1925), 246, n. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 245. La Piana reviews the position of much of modern literature on Montanism, especially Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris, 1913), and Faggiotto, *L'Eresia dei Frigi, Fonti e Frammenti* (Rome, 1924), neither of which was available to the writer. La Piana writes, "That Eleutherus was concerned with the question is undeniable, since to him among others the confessors of Lyons sent their appeal for the peace of the church. But that Eleutherus issued a definite condemnation of Montanism is unlikely. If such had been the case there would have been no need for his successor to pass a new judgment."

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, i. This work by Tertullian appears in *ANF*, iii. 597-627. See La Piana, op. cit. p. 245, n. 48, for an impressive list of scholars who interpret this to be Victor. See also *ANF*, i. 630, for a similar interpretation. La Piana, p. 247, writes that probably up to that time "Montanism in Rome had not taken an attitude antagonistic to the hierarchy, for it was seeking the latter's approval. One can easily understand the hesitation of Victor on this

It was not until Praxeas came to Rome from Asia, where Montanism had already developed its anti-hierarchical movement and where (unlike Rome) whole communities turned Montanist, that Victor was made to realize the serious consequences of an official recognition of a movement which already in Asia had "developed the practical implications of the prophetic claim, degenerating into a spiritual and ecclesiastical anarchy".<sup>1</sup> Victor therefore withdrew the letters approving Montanism which he had written to the eastern bishops but also held his judgement in suspense. The timely arrival of Praxeas had prevented Victor from making a serious mistake. There is no evidence, however, that Victor ever condemned Montanism.<sup>2</sup>

If, as seems likely, Montanism received a friendly welcome from the time of its arrival in Rome early in the episcopate of Eleutherus (174/5-189) and that his successor Victor (189-98) not only tolerated Montanism but even seemed to encourage it for a time, up to the arrival of Praxeas, then it would be impossible for the Roman Church to create the New Testament in opposition to the "extreme prophetic claims of Montanism" as Goodspeed would have us believe.<sup>3</sup> Even if we should grant the date of 185 which Goodspeed proposes (although 180 is a much more likely time), still the motive he suggests cannot be accepted. The New Testament appeared in Rome before the threat of Montanism was clearly seen in Rome.

account. If the narrative of Tertullian is trustworthy and refers to Victor, this hesitation was at first overcome, and a decision reached in favour of Montanism. This fits well with Victor's policy, which had set out to clear the field of all equivocations and ambiguities. It is possible also that the attitude of the Asiatic bishops who had refused to accept Victor's decision on the celebration of Easter, and from whom he had withdrawn Communion, may have affected Victor's feelings in the matter, since they were exactly the bishops who now condemned Montanism and called upon other bishops in the church to condemn it. On the one hand, the lack of peremptory reasons, either doctrinal or disciplinary, for the condemnation of the Roman Montanists, and on the other, the necessity of establishing a definite policy, together with feelings of irritation against the Asiatic bishops, would fully explain the fact that Victor was brought to recognise the legitimacy of the new prophecy."

<sup>1</sup> La Piana, op. cit. pp. 247-8. See also Kidd, *A History of the Church to A.D. 461*, i. 364.

<sup>2</sup> La Piana, op. cit. p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 67.

## III

If, as we have decided, the New Testament came into existence as a conscious creation between 170 and 180, then neither of the two usual answers to the problem of *why* it was produced at this time is satisfactory. Another solution to the question is therefore required. There was, during this very period, another movement in the church that was bound to cause all of Christendom much trouble and which was, eventually, to bring about the creation of the New Testament.

Early in the second century there began to appear an ever-growing stream of pseudepigraphical and apocryphal Christian works. As the second century wore on this stream became a veritable flood. The Roman Church itself indulged in the practice of pseudepigraphy—witness the letters of I and II Peter and “Paul’s” letters to Timothy and Titus. There arose a whole multitude of other letters, gospels, apocalypses, and acts—each one claiming one or another of the apostles as its author. The Gospel of Peter and the Preaching of Peter both appeared close to the middle of the second century.<sup>1</sup> The Acts of Paul was composed in Asia about 160-70.<sup>2</sup> This practice of pseudepigraphy ran riot in the last two-thirds of the second century, so that as has been pointed out, “so many books have been written in Christian circles about the apostle Peter, or under his name, that one could have collected a whole New Testament of works bearing his name”.<sup>3</sup>

If such a body of literature could be built around Peter so could one also be raised around the other apostles ; and this was exactly what was happening in the last half of the second century. In addition to the works mentioned above, there were also produced before 175 the following writings : The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistle of the Apostles, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Gospel According to the Egyptians, The Gospel According to the Hebrews, The Traditions of Matthias, and perhaps The

<sup>1</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 37 ; Montague Rhodes James (trans. and ed.), *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1934), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago, 1937), p. 331 ; this work is hereafter cited as *Introduction*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 349.



Acts of John, The Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of Thomas and The Gospel of Basilides.<sup>1</sup>

Irenaeus, an invaluable witness of just a few years later, records that the Marcosians not only misinterpreted the real scriptures but that they also “adduce *an unspeakable number* [italics mine] of apocryphal and spurious writings which they themselves have forged, to bewilder the minds of foolish men, and of such as are ignorant of the Scriptures of truth”.<sup>2</sup> What was true of the Marcosians was undoubtedly true also of the other sects of the time. The Valentinians had the Gospel of Truth.<sup>3</sup> The Gnostics produced the Gospel of Eve and also the Gospel of Perfection.<sup>4</sup> As has been said, the stream of apocryphal literature had turned into a veritable flood by the third quarter of the second century.<sup>5</sup>

It is our contention that this mass appearance of apocryphal Christian writings, many of which were projected as a means of furthering heretical doctrines,<sup>6</sup> posed as great, if not greater, a threat to the Christian scripture as Marcionism had several decades earlier and as Montanism was still to do a little later.

<sup>1</sup> James, op. cit. *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I. xiii. 1; this work by Irenaeus appears in *ANF*, vol. I. Irenaeus lists two quotations from their apocryphal writings—one from the Gospel of Thomas and the other from an unknown apocryphal work.

<sup>3</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (London, 1896), p. 80. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III. xi. 9, where he says that the Valentinians boast more gospels than there are.

<sup>4</sup> Westcott, op. cit. p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to these apocryphal gospels, acts, epistles, and revelations, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian and the harmony of Theophilus may point to another tendency at work in the church at this time. Perhaps there was a movement, only somewhat conscious, to unite, to simplify, to harmonize. Irenaeus' blast against those who do not accept the church's view that the gospels are four in number would include such attempts. He writes that “all who destroy the form of the Gospel are vain, unlearned, and audacious”—*Against Heresies*, III. xi. 9. This tendency, if it ever existed, had not gone very far before the creation of the New Testament which ruled out any further developments along that line.

<sup>6</sup> When writing of Hegesippus, Eusebius records the following: “And in treating of the Apocryphal [books], as they are called, he records that some of them were fabricated by certain heretics in his own time”. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. xxii. 9. The edition used is Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine* (London, 1927), vol. I; this work was translated by Hugh Jackson Lawlor and John Ernest Leonard Oulton.

The gospels were already viewed somewhat as scripture before the creation of the canon of the New Testament—that is, they were read in the church services and quoted as authorities.<sup>1</sup> The same is true of the Pauline epistles and probably of the few other works which were included in the New Testament when it was consciously formed between the years 170 and 180. As with Athenagoras,<sup>2</sup> the authorities were the prophets, the gospel and the apostle. Although they were all probably used with equal confidence, until the creation of the New Testament it was still in the prophets that, necessarily, the orthodox Christians most definitely recognized inspiration.

The creation of the New Testament was the result of a conscious effort on the part of the Roman Church to protect those writings which that Church held to be apostolic and which were, therefore, being read in its services of worship. The limits of the New Testament were meant to serve as dykes to keep out the flood of secondary literature. The line which (in its conflict with Gnosticism) the Church had drawn sharply between the apostolic and post-apostolic ages was here brought out to measure the literature of the Church. Those writings which could meet the test were accepted and the others were rejected. In this way the creation of the New Testament in the decade ending in 180 resembled what happened nearly a century earlier at Jamnia. The action of the Roman Church merely served to ratify the position which most of the accepted writings had already won for themselves. It was the decision to reject the other Christian literature—the mass of apocryphal acts, epistles, and gospels—which produced the New Testament. The inclusion of a number of “apostolic” writings within the collection, to the exclusion of all others, gave to this corpus the character of a canon. These writings were now the “books of the new covenant”.

The New Testament was produced during the episcopate of Eleutherus, probably close to 180, as a means of protecting the

<sup>1</sup> Justin, II Peter, the Martyrs of Scilli, and Athenagoras all witness to this fact.

<sup>2</sup> Athenagoras, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, xviii. This work appears in *ANF*, i. 149-62. See also Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 61.

recognized literature of the Christian church. As Ayer writes,

The point to be made by the champions of the faith of the great body of Christians was that only those books could be legitimately used in support of Christian doctrine which could claim actual apostolic origin and had been used continuously in the church. As a fact, the books to which they appealed had been in use generation after generation,<sup>1</sup> but the Gnostic works<sup>2</sup> were unknown until a comparatively recent time and were too closely connected with only the founders of a sect to deserve credence. It was a simple literary argument and appeal to tangible evidence. The list of books regarded as authoritative constituted the Canon of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Our first two witnesses—the Muratorian Fragment and Irenaeus—to the consciously created New Testament both point to this desire of the formers of the new canon. The Muratorian Fragment itself seems to reflect the very decisions made at the time this creation of the New Testament took place. Rather than being dated at the very end of the second century and assigned to Victor, it should be recognized as belonging to the period between 170 and 180.<sup>4</sup>

The author of the Muratorian Fragment, reflecting the position of the Church at Rome, speaks with authority—"for he feels that all that the Church does or may do in reference to the New Canon is self-evident and requires no defence".<sup>5</sup> At the same time, however, he still defends and justifies to a degree the Church's acceptance or rejection of certain books. The

<sup>1</sup> The Gospels gradually came to be used in the services of worship during the first half of the second century and about 155-160 the fourfold gospel was introduced into church use. The Pauline corpus, even before it was expanded about 155-160, was probably also employed in the service of worship.

<sup>2</sup> Note Irenaeus' outburst against the *unspeakable number* of books of the Marcosians and also against the Valentinians and the Gnostics.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Cullen Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History, from the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (New York, 1939), p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the possibility of a date as early as 170, see Enslin, *op. cit.* p. 337, who dates the Muratorian Fragment around A.D. 170. Westcott, *op. cit.* p. 215 and Caspar René Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament* (New York, 1907), p. 129, agree with a date of 170. E. Jacquier, *Le Nouveau Testament dans l'église Chrétienne* (Paris, 1911), i. 193, says, while discussing the date of 170 and the opinion of Westcott, ". . . et elle se justifie bien par le caractère des renseignements que donne le fragment sur chacun des livres du Nouveau Testament". See also John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London, 1948), p. 41, and Kidd, *A History of the Church to A.D. 461*, i. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Harnack, *Origin of the New Testament*, p. 106.

letters to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians, both “forged in Paul’s name to suit a heresy of Marcion”, are excluded.<sup>1</sup> The Fragment ends with a rejection of all the apocryphal works which had caused the New Testament to be created: “. . . of Valentinus, the Arsinote, and his friends, we receive nothing at all, who have also composed a long new book of Psalms, together with Basilides and the Asiatic founder of the Montanists.”<sup>2</sup>

The name given by the author of the Fragment to the Book of Acts—“Acts of All the Apostles”—likewise points to the desire of the Church at Rome to exclude “non-apostolic” writings. The primary motive for such a title must have come from the appearance of the apocryphal Acts of John (written before the middle of the second century)<sup>3</sup> and Acts of Paul (composed between 160 and 170).<sup>4</sup> It is questionable whether or not the Acts of Peter had appeared by this time.<sup>5</sup>

There is widespread agreement among New Testament scholars that a second sacred collection would have come into being sooner or later if time alone had been allowed to make the decision. As Harnack has said, the “idea of the New Covenant and the tendency to establish and confirm the idea” would necessarily have called a New Testament into existence.<sup>6</sup> The canonization of these writings meant “little more for most churches than the clear recognition and definition of what

<sup>1</sup> *Muratorian Fragment*, ll. 63-8. See Souter, *op. cit.* pp. 208-10 for the Latin text and Ayer, *op. cit.* pp. 118-20 for an English translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 81-5. The author’s purpose is clearly to separate the “apostolic” from the spurious literature.

<sup>3</sup> James, *op. cit.* pp. xx, 288. Concerning the author of the Acts of John, James (p. xx) writes: “His presentation of the Person of our Lord, and his use of Gnostic terminology, cannot in my mind be reconciled with the view that he was an orthodox Christian.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> This title may also have stemmed, in part, from the desire to show that Paul received his authority from the Twelve and that he was just one of a group of apostles. If such were the case, then it was an attack upon the Marcionites. It would appear, however, since the impulse which gave rise to the New Testament was the decision to erect a wall between the “apostolic” and the false or pseudonymous writings, that it was the threat of these apocryphal Acts which caused the author of the Muratorian Fragment to introduce the work with this “audacious title”, as Harnack calls it in his *Origin of the New Testament*, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31, n. 1.

already vaguely existed"—for the books which were included in this second canon were, for the most part, not only old but also familiar to the various churches.<sup>1</sup> This fact, however, does not prevent us from recognizing the truth of the statement that "the New Testament as it stands and the history of its development bear traces of the element of compulsion".<sup>2</sup> It was not created as an act of attack but as a means of defence—protecting the Church against the almost overwhelming flood of apocryphal literature of the last half of the second century. Once created, however, it was invaluable as a weapon against heresy, as is so clearly shown by the use which Irenaeus and other early fathers make of it.

<sup>1</sup> Goodspeed, *Formation*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> See Harnack, *Origin of the New Testament*, pp. 31, 96-100.