

The Muratorian Canon

Roberts-Donaldson Translation: Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 5

III.-Canon Muratorianus.²² (In Muratori, *V. C. Antiq. Ital. Med. oev.*, vol. iii. col. 854.)

I. ...those things at which he was present he placed thus.²³ The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, the well-known physician Luke wrote in his own name²⁴ in order after the ascension of Christ, and when Paul had associated him with himself²⁵ as one studious of right.²⁶ Nor did he himself see the Lord in the flesh; and he, according as he was able to accomplish it, began²⁷ his narrative with the nativity of John. The fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples. When his fellow-disciples and bishops entreated him, he said, "Fast ye now with me for the space of three days, and let us recount to each other whatever may be revealed to each of us." On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should narrate all things in his own name as they called them to mind.²⁸ And hence, although different points²⁹ are taught us in the several books of the Gospels, there is no difference as regards the faith of believers, inasmuch as in all of them all things are related under one imperial Spirit,³⁰ which concern the *Lord's* nativity, His passion, His resurrection, His conversation with His disciples, and His twofold advent,-the first in the humiliation of rejection, which is now past, and the second in the glory of royal power, which is yet in the future. What marvel is it, then, that John brings forward these several things³¹ so constantly in his epistles also, saying in his own person, "What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, that have we written."³² For thus he professes himself to be not only the eye-witness, but also the hearer; and besides that, the historian of all the wondrous facts concerning the Lord in their order.

2. Moreover, the Acts of all the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book, and addressed to the most excellent Theophilus, because these different events took place when he was present himself; and he shows this clearly-i.e., that the principle on which he wrote was, to give only what fell under his own notice-by the omission³³ of the passion of Peter, and also of the journey of Paul, when he went from the city-Rome-to Spain.

3. As to the epistles³⁴ of Paul, again, to those who will understand the matter, they indicate of themselves what they are, and from what place or with what object they were directed. He wrote first of all, and at considerable length, to the Corinthians, to check the schism of heresy; and then to the Galatians, to forbid circumcision; and then to the Romans on the rule of the *Oid Testament* Scriptures, and also to show them that Christ is the first object³⁵ in these;-which it is needful for us to discuss severally,³⁶ as the blessed Apostle Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches by name, in this order: the first to the Corinthians, the second to the Ephesians, the third to the Philippians, the fourth to the Colossians, the fifth to the Galatians, the sixth to the Thessalonians, the seventh to the Romans. Moreover, though he writes twice to the Corinthians and Thessalonians for their correction, it is yet shown-i.e., by this sevenfold writing-that there is one Church spread abroad through the whole world. And John too, indeed, in the Apocalypse, although he writes only to seven churches, yet addresses all. He wrote, besides these, one to Philemon, and one to Titus, and two to Timothy, in simple personal affection and love indeed; but yet these are hallowed in the esteem of the Catholic Church, *and* in the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There are also in circulation one to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians, forged under the name of Paul, *and*

addressed against the heresy of Marcion; and there are also several others which cannot be received into the Catholic Church, for it is not suitable for gall to be mingled with honey.

4. The Epistle of Jude, indeed,³⁷ and two belonging to the above-named John-or bearing the name of John-are reckoned among the Catholic *epistles*. And the *book of Wisdom*, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive also the Apocalypse of John and *that of Peter*, though some amongst us will not have this latter read in the Church. The *Pastor*, moreover, did Hermas write very recently in our times in the city of Rome, while his brother bishop Plus sat in the chair of the Church of Rome. And therefore it also ought to be read; but it cannot be made public³⁸ in the Church to the people, nor *placed* among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles to the end of time. Of *the writings of Arsinous*, called also Valentinus, or of Miltiades, we receive nothing at all. Those are rejected too who wrote the new *Book of Psalms* for Marcion, together with Basilides and the founder of the Asian Cataphrygians.³⁹

²² An acephalous fragment on the canon of the sacred Scriptures, ascribed by some to Caius. This very important fragment [vol. ii. pp. 4 and 56, this series] was discovered by Muiatori in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, and published by him in his *Antiquitates Italicae* in 1740. This manuscript belongs to the seventh or eighth century. Muratori ascribed it to Caius, Bunsen to Hegesippus; but there is no clue whatever to the authorship. From internal evidence the writer of the fragment is believed to belong to the latter half of the second century. The fragment has been much discussed. For a full account of it, see Westcott's *General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 2d ed. p. 184f., and Tregelies' *Canon Muratorianus*; [also Routh, *Rel.*, i. pp. 394-434].

²³ The text is, " quibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit." Westcott omits the " et." Bunsen proposes " ipse non intermit." The reference probably is to the statement of Papias (Euseb., *Histor. Eccles.*, iii. 39) as to Mark's Gospel being a narrative not of what he himself witnessed, but of what he heard from Peter.

²⁴ The text gives " numine suo ex opinione concriset," for which we read " nomine suo ex ordine conscripsit" with Westcott.

²⁵ Reading " secum" for " secundum."

²⁶ The text gives " quasi ut juris studiosum," for which " quasi et virtutis studiosum," = "as one devoted to virtue," has been proposed. Bunsen reads "itineris socium" = "as his companion in the way."

²⁷ " Incepit" for " incipet."

²⁸ Or as they revised them, *recognoscentibus*.

²⁹ Principia. Principali, leading. [Note this theory of inspiration.]

³⁰ *Singula*.

³¹ 1 John i. 1.

³² The text is, " semote passionem Petri," etc., for which Westcott reads " semota." [A noteworthy statement.]

³³ Reading " epistolae" and " directae" instead of " epistola" and " directe," and " volentibus" for " voluntatibus."

³⁴ *Principium*.

³⁵ The text is, " de quibus singulis necesse est a nobis disputari cum," etc. Bunsen reads, " de quibus non

necesse est a nobis disputari cur" = "on which we need not discuss the reason why."

³⁶ *Sane.*

³⁷ The text is " in catholica," which may be "in the Catholic Church." Bunsen, Westcott, etc., read " in catholicis."

³⁸ Reading "sed publicari" for "se publicare." [Vol. ii. p. 3.]

³⁹ [For remarks of my own on the *Muratorian Canon*, see vol. ii. p. 56, this series.]

[[This is the mentioned paragraph in the second volume.]]

To say that there was no evidence to sustain this [[the ascription of Hermas to a brother of Pope Pius]], is to grant that it doubles the evidence when sufficient support for it is discovered. This was supplied by the fragment found in Milan, by the erudite and indefatigable Muratori, about a hundred and fifty years ago. Its history, with very valuable notes on the fragment itself, which is given entire, may be found in Routh's *Reliquiae*. Or the English reader may consult Westcott's very luminous statement of the case. I am sorry that Dr. Donaldson doubts and objects; but he would not deny that experts, at least his equals, accept the Muratorian Canon, which carries with it the historic testimony needed in the case of Hermas. All difficulties disappear in the light of this evidence. Hermas was brother of Plus, ninth Bishop of Rome (after Hyginus, circ. a.d. 157), and wrote his prose idyl under the fiction of his Pauline predecessor's name and age. This accounts (1) for the existence of the work, (2) for its form of allegory and prophesying, (3) for its anachronisms, (4) for its great currency, and (5) for its circulation among the Easterns, which was greater than it enjoyed in the West; and also (6) for their innocent mistake in ascribing it to the elder Hermas.