

The Progression of the Early Christian Church

The early progression of the church was formed as Christianity following the ordinances written in what is known as the Seven Catholic Epistles found in the New Testament. These epistles were written by authors who may have had personal knowledge of Jesus or the letters may have been attributed to the disciples who had personal knowledge and relationship with Jesus, The Christ. The following letters, James, First John , Second John , Third John , First Peter, Second Peter and Jude are sacred documents that scholars deemed to canon as the Catholic Epistles. The instruction within the documents has transformed individuals lives heavily by Paul's thoughts to the Christian's way of life through the saving knowledge of Jesus, beginning with the Jews and to Gentiles. (p. 404) These epistles and others epistles that are written in the New Testament which are, canonical and noncanonical has preserve the Christian faith by authors attributing the texts to Paul and other followers with knowledge of Christ across the diaspora. Because Paul had acknowledged the three pillars James, Peter, John and Jude in this order, it was agreed upon by the editors to canonized the books in that sequential order.

The Pilar James and First Peter

Peter and James are two authors of the epistles that has harmony in thought and teachings. Peter is recognized as Jesus's chief apostle. James is recognized as Jesus' brother and a disciple. Although his book is found in today's New Testament canon, it is absent from early canonical books. Scholars aren't in agreement that these authors, Peter and James, had a close relationship with Jesus because both authors don't esteem their personal relationship or share in Jesus's teaching, although they are considered to be of Jesus's inner circle.

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The author of the epistle of James main focus is on relationships between the rich and the poor, relationships with having faith in God and control of the tongue to maintain your right position with God. He teaches the lack of the being rich doesn't mean you are a lesser class of people. James called Gentile believers a chosen race and royal priesthood. (Jas 2:9-10) He instructs the rich to share and not compete with each other for material possessions. It was the same business of yesterday, like it is with today's rich, most rich doesn't necessary share their wealth with the poor.

This author also shares his illuminating knowledge of faith in the nature of works, trials and temptation. The author expresses that having faith one would endure internal temptations and that external suffering. These experiences would help increase one's faith and maturity in God. Both authors James and Peter teaches that temptation or testing and suffering is the glory of God. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" (Jas 1:2), (1 Pe 4:16), Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you (1 Pe 4:12). The author of James shares to grow in God one must have works as having faith, "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:17, 26). He teaches one must control their tongue to keep from sinning. He writes that God is "untouched by evil" and doesn't cause anyone to sin and sin is achieved by one's own evil ambitions and desires. (p412-414)

The Second Pillar Peter

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Peter is known as “Cephas.” It is recognized that this author has written both First and Second book of Peter. First Peter and Second Peter books didn’t appear together in early canonical books. Second Peter letter was initially absent from early canonical books because of his expression of the Parousia, Second Coming of Jesus. (p405, 419) The author of this book appears to be an imposter of Peter, stealing his identity. Scholars are not persuaded as Peter being the author due too many indications and that it was written long after Peter’s death by martyrdom. Scholars are saying that First Peter resemble James because of the Greek style of in well versed in the culture while James and Peter were simple Aramaic speaking fishermen, unlearned. The letters of Peter and James has similar agendas regarding to suffering, enduring trails and the responsibilities of the Christian life.

The purpose for this letter is to encourage all believers that are called to hold fast to their integrity which is a responsibility as being a Christian, especially in the position of suffering, like the example Peter set in Nero’s time. The author states peaceful submission during testing builds character as a believer along with love and prayer that causes sins to be forgiven and wipes out sin. (Jas 5:20, 1 Pet 4:8, Pet 4:12) So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:7)

In 2 Peter 3:4, They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." Second Peter is the only book in the New Testament the speaks about the world will be totally consumed by fire.

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The Third Pillar John

The Book of John is ascribed to John, the Evangelist, the disciple of Jesus as being part of inner Jesus circle, the son of Zebedee. The authors have written three letters First John, Second John and Third John.

The author of the first John letter is not identified. The author cautions Christians to holdfast to their faith because of the teaching of where “false prophet.” The author denounced as [Antichrist](#), and those who denied the incarnation of Jesus.

Second John and Third John are considered authentic letters and the author is known as the “elder.” Third John is the shortest book in the New Testament and is also absent from early canonical books.

The Jude

Jude or the name Judas, is recognized as Jesus’ brother although the author states that he is a servant of Jesus Christ. (p418) Scholars believe that the book of Jude is a pseudonymous work. Jude is the seventh and last letter of the Catholic Epistles and was also absent from early canonical books. Jude’s content is similar to the second and third chapters of second Peter.

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The book of Jude focuses on dangerous influences of the church heresies on false teachers who led people to sin against God. The book of Jude author is the only author in the New Testament that quotes from the books of the Apocrypha First Enoch. Jude outline the discussion between the devil and Michael the Archangel about the body of Moses. (p418) Jude also made references of stories in that is found in the Old Testaments books, such as the story about Enoch, who is a descendant of Adam and ancestor of Noah. Enoch was very close to God and which whom walk with God. Enoch was translated from earth . (Jd 14; Gn 5:24) The author also made reference to the story of Cain and Able, in which Cain, the son of Adam, killed his brother Able. (Jd 11) The story of burning of Sodom and Gomorrah that was destroyed is another story the author highlighted from the Old Testament Book (Jd 7; Gn 19:24)

There are several non-canonical letters that was found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in December of 1945 by Mohammed Ali, an Egyptian farmer. There were thirteen letters found in a leather-bound papyrus codices in a jar containing over fifty two texts. These letters are listed in The New Testament apocrypha.

Most of these letters are attributed to Peter, Paul, John and Thomas. Some are the sayings gospel of The Gospel of Thomas, The Prayer of the Apostle Paul, The Apocryphon of James (also known as the Secret Book of James), The Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of the Egyptian, The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, The Treatise on the Resurrection, The Tripartite Tractate,, The Apocryphon of John and The Gospel of Philip. (p458-474). I will discuss The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter and The Apocalypse of Peter.

Gospel of Thomas

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The Gospel of Thomas had been translated from Greek to Coptic which contains no narratives of Jesus' miracles, deed, death and resurrection. The Gospel of Thomas contains 114 saying and they are considered secret saying, being revealed in the form like a parable, only those who understand their interpretation is considered as "life giving." (p459)

Listed are the first five verses in these secret saying with the opening phrase was "These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded." **2.** Jesus said, "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all. [And after they have reigned they will rest.]" **3.** Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty." **4.** Jesus said, "The person old in days won't hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live. For many of the first will be last, and will become a single one." **5.** Jesus said, "Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. [And there is nothing buried that will not be raised.]"

The Apocalypse of Peter

The Apocalypse of Peter is attributed to Peter with the author being unknown. Scholars believed that the other derived his informational text from the Gospels of Mark, Luke, James

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and the Revelations of John with his focuses is on eternal rewards and punishments.

(Encyclopedia Britannica)

Gospel of Peter

The Gospel of Peter is attributed to Peter with the author being unknown. Scholars believed that the author wrote this to convince unbelievers about the truth of the Resurrections. The majority of the text covers” Christ’s body had only the appearance of reality, Serapion, bishop of Antioch c. AD 190, believed it was written by a member of the heretical Docetist sect.”

(Encyclopedia Britannica)

The New Testament comprises the foundation for the Christian faith that was inspired by God to point Believers to the Christian way. The thoughts that went into these books, canonical and noncanonical still give life regardless of the opinions of scholars alike. I find in this study how the bible was put together by the stories of all those involve is intriguing. Yes, it is very difficult to see the bible as just being there in a leather bound book. Individuals lives, sweat, tears, fears , happiness, hopes and dreams fills the pages of those who were involved in the lives of those who confesses in maintain the belief of a one God, one Creator, and His Son, Jesus, the Christ and Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be sanctified for the for us then and to the world to come.