

The Apocrypha and Pope St. Gregory the Great: The First Innovator of the Biblical Canon in the West?

Rev. Dr. Christiaan Kappes

In spite of the thus far, irrefutable, expansion of the classic work on the biblical canon by [Martin Jugie](#) (standing the test of criticism among scholars since 1909), as well as our expansion of Jugie's work in translation in 2023 in our book: [*A Complete History of the Biblical Canon in the Christian East and Latin West: Vol. 1: Greek, Latin, and Slavic Biblical Canon from the New Testament until AD 1500*](#), there is a claim that the medieval Pope, St. Gregory the Great, somehow rejected the Deuterocanonical books.

The argument goes: Pope Gregory (who openly confessed his belief in the, until then five, ecumenical councils, which our book above showed such Councils to quote extensively from the Deuterocanon and call it Scripture) denied the Deuterocanon once in his life. As Pope St. Gregory writes:

I admit that I take up and venerate the four councils, just like the four books of the Holy Gospel, that is to say the Nicene council, wherein the perverse doctrine of Arius is destroyed, that of Constantinople also, wherein the error of Eunomius and Macedonius is refuted, the first of Ephesus also, wherein the impiety of Nestorius is judged, and that of Chalcedon, wherein the depravity of Eutyches and Dioscorus are reproved. These four I embrace with total devotion and I guard with purest approbation, because in them the structure of the holy faith rises up as if built on a square stone, and whoever does not uphold their solidity, whatever his life and works may be, even if he appears to be of stone, yet he lies outside the building. I also venerate equally the fifth council, in which are refuted the letter, said to be that of Ibas, as being full of error, that of Theodore, who separates the person of God and man as mediator into two substances, who is convicted of having fallen into the perfidy of impiety, together with the writings of Theodoret, in which the faith of blessed Cyril is condemned with audacious madness. Indeed I spurn all of those per-sons whom the aforesaid venerable councils spurn, and I embrace those they venerate. For, since they have been established with universal consensus, whoever presumes either to untie those they bind, or to bind those they untie, destroys himself and not those councils. And so let whoever thinks otherwise be anathema. (Pope Gregory, [Letter XXV](#))

The strange argument by Reformer-minded apologists is framed thus: Gregory in his *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* clearly and once denied the Deuterocanon and thus Lutherans and Reformers finally have something, other than some post-fourth century Jewish authors first attested by Jerome, to prove that their canon is the real Bible.

Problem 1: If we were to admit that Gregory denied the Deuterocanon, then he would have done so as a monk in Constantinople in the 570s, when he wrote *A Synthesis of Moralia in*

Job. Therefore, it is wrong to say that a pope rejected the Deuterocanon, but that Monk Gregory once rejected it. Next, a pro-Reformer must demonstrate that Gregory's *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* and many post-570s works (many of them commentaries on Scripture) fails to cite Deuterocanon and/or refuses to call it Scripture. Monk Gregory quotes Deuterocanon in *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* (See **Appendix III** below) and later works (See **Appendix III** below) and calls it Scripture. At best for pro-Reformer apologists, they can only say that Monk Gregory did not practice what he preached and is confusing and self contradictory.

Problem 2: It is furthermore argued that Pope Gregory later made unnamed and unknown corrections, that is, revisions his *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* after his election to the papacy. Thus, infallibility –say the anti-Catholics– is at stake because Pope Gregory's final version was published then (much like Pope Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth Trilogy*). This argument still spectacularly fails. Let us remember that anti-papal apologists oppose today's papacy with today's papal claims:

- i. Papal infallibility was defined as dogma in 1870 at Vatican I (*Dei Filius*) under 3 conditions.¹ *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* is not written explicitly to the entire Church anywhere in the document and it does not invoke the authority (seat) or power of Peter. It lacks at least 2/3 of the conditions of Vatican I, even taking into account the final edition of *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* was published after becoming pope.
- ii. Pope Benedict XVI also wrote theological books and did not consider them part of the magisterium nor do we. *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* is just like *Jesus of Nazareth*. An infallible document has internal conditions from Vatican I that must be met to be infallible. A theological book written by a pope has the same rank as anything published by a theologian in communion with the Roman see. For this reason, some Catholic apologists have called it “[private](#)” which is layman's language, but it is accurate to say that neither the *Moralia* nor Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth* is magisterium and therefore has no bearing on the conscience of Christians. After Gregory's death and his elevation to Saint and Doctor of the Church, his writings are part of the “Fathers of the Church” which individually

¹ Vatican I, [Dei Filius](#), chapter 4, paragraph 9:

“We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that:

[Condition 1:] when the Roman pontiff speaks from his chair (*ex cathedra*), that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians,

[Condition 2:] in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority,

[Condition 3:] he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the church, irreformable.”

are not infallible but are given the presumption of orthodoxy until proven otherwise and form part of the Tradition (extraordinary magisterium) when all approved Fathers – according to the [Council of Trent](#) (session IV) – are unanimous in their doctrinal teaching as a whole on a passage of Scripture.

Problem 3: Anti-Catholic apologists claim that both Monk and Pope Gregory rejected the entire Deuterocanon ([Moralia chapter 19, section xxi, paragraph 34](#))?

With reference to which particular we are not acting irregularly, if from the books, though not canonical, yet brought out² “**for the edifying of the Church**,” we bring forward testimony. Thus Eleazar in the battle smote and brought down an elephant, but fell under the very beast that he killed. [1 Maccabees 6:46] Whom, then, does this one represent, whom his own victory bore down, but those persons who overcome bad habits, but by being lifted up are brought down under the very things they bring under? [...] Therefore let blessed Job, because he had covered himself on every side with good practice, say, “With righteousness I was clothed, and arrayed myself as with a garment.” Where it is forthwith added, “And my judgment a diadem.” (**emphasis** mine)

Notably, the translator’s word choices are vague concerning the monk Gregory’s categorization of the books other than the canonical ones. This generic translation: “brought forth” is technically possible but only if one does not understand Gregory’s reference (that is: a book)³ and Gregory’s source (a quotation of Scripture). To propose a clearer translation,⁴ let’s notice the agreement between the *Patrologia Latina* (PL) version of the Latin (See **Appendix I** for my Screenshot of PL LXXVI, column 119) and **Appendix II** (*Corpus Christianorum* for the scientific or critical edition). Let’s use my translation after becoming aware of Gregory’s technical language and citations from Scripture:

‘It is absolutely necessary to watch against pride’ (Job): We now comment on this verse lacking no due order if we cite a [biblical]⁵ witness from books – although they are not listed under the canonical [Jewish canonical] books – but they are nonetheless published for “building up of the

² This is a generic vocabulary word that is contextually a poor choice since “*edo, edere*” in relation to “*liber*” should mean something like “publish” as the Protestant divine Cosin is cited as translating below.

³ I would be amazed if anyone can locate a published academic or classical book of English literature where “publish a book” or “produce a piece of literature” or “edit a book” can be rendered: “I brought forth a book” or “the publishing house brought forth a book.” The translation is stilted and irreflective of the clear meaning of the Latin text. I prefer the translation of the Protestant divine Cosin.

⁴ The reader may wish to know that I have published a peer-reviewed scholarly translation of a medieval Latin for Notre Dame press. My doubters need to base their objections to my translation upon its latinity, not upon my lack of credentials to understand.

⁵ Throughout this article [brackets] signify that I have supplied something implied by either language or context for better understanding that is not explicitly in the Latin vocabulary word.

Church” (1 Corinthians 14:5, 12) (translation mine)” (*de qua re non non inordinate agimus,⁶ si ex libris, licet non canonicis, sed tamen⁷ ad aedificationem Ecclesiae editis⁸, testimonium proferamus*). (Monk Gregory, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*; my translation)

Commentary on *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* 19, xxi

Monk Gregory reveals that citing from a book for interpreting the meaning of Job and that the use of this book is within proper theological limits. We do not explicitly know the occasion for his need to assure his monastic readers of the authority of Maccabees, but the only historically preserved source that could be at the root of his fellow monks’ interests in this question stems from another famous Latin monk and Scriptural commentator Jerome, who had written nearly 200 years before:

As, then, there are twenty-two elementary characters by means of which we write in Hebrew all we say, and the compass of the human voice is contained within their limits, so we reckon twenty-two books, by which, as by the alphabet of the doctrine of God, a righteous man is instructed in tender infancy, and, as it were, while still at the breast [...] This preface to the Scriptures may serve as a “helmeted” introduction to all the books which we turn from Hebrew into Latin, so that we may be assured that what is not found in our list must be placed amongst the Apocryphal writings. [1.] Wisdom, therefore, which generally bears the name of Solomon, and [2.] the book of Jesus, the Son of Sirach, and [3.] Judith, and [4.] Tobias, and [5.] the Shepherd are not in the canon. (Jerome, *Helmeted Introduction*)⁹

As Jugie’s and our published book demonstrate, here “canon” (that is: Protocanon) means: **Those books that local Jewish tradition and Roman Christian tradition affirm as inspired.** These books are the only acceptable sources for arguing between Christians and Jews whether Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Any other books used by only the Christian community as Scripture go beyond the originally Jewish term: “canon” and are useless for local (Greek-speaking) Jews to see Jesus in light of Old Testament prophecy. So, the common division of the biblical books by Greek Fathers was: (i.) Jewish-Christian canon and (ii.) Christian-only Scriptures (at least until the Councils of Hippo AD 393 and Carthage AD 397-419). Hippo-Carthage innovated in Latin by extending the word “canon” and “canonical” to mean all books

⁶ The first phrase: *agimus de...* is pretty typical of somebody commenting on a topic and monk Gregory wanted a properly ordered treatment (*non inordinate*) of Job.

⁷ Note, also, that in Latin: “*licet...tamen*” is classically linking two phrases to mean “although ‘x’ still ‘y’,” which means that the force the canonical books is primary but the secondary books are valued not devalued, but are somehow of a second rank (thus, Deuterocanon).

⁸ This is a play on words from 1 Corinthians 14: 5, 12. *Edo* (to breath forth, to publish) means that Maccabees is both published by the Christian Church and inspired (literarily “breathed forth”) by it like the Spirit of prophecy that is for building up the Church of Paul in Corinth.

⁹ Jerome, The Books of Samuel and Kings, in St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, & W. G. Martley, ed. P. Schaff & H. Wace (New York, 1893), 6:489-490.

used exclusively by Christians with no reference to Jewish-Christian lists of agreement. So, the Greek Christian world by the Jewish-Greek word “canon” meant: “Jewish-Greek inspired book list accepted also by Christians.” Above, Monk Gregory’s division of books simply employs this older Christian grouping of books that was not used among Latins generally (at least since the late-fourth century) but was the normative way of dividing books in Greek in Constantinople until the Council of Trullo (691-692) adopted the new division of the Council of Carthage (inspired by Augustine) as catalogued in Jugie’s and our book. Still, even after the sack of Rome (AD 410), St. Augustine referred to the term “canon” to mean “agreed upon Jewish-Christian Scriptures,” as in his most famous [*The City of God*](#), Book XV, chapter 23:

There is therefore no doubt that, according to the Hebrew and Christian canonical Scriptures (*scripturas canonicas hebraeas adque christianas*)¹⁰ there were many giants before the deluge, and that these were citizens of the earthly society of men, and that the sons of God, who were according to the flesh the sons of Seth, sank into this community when they forsook righteousness.

The significance of this citation cannot be overstated for supplementing our case. The context is one where Augustine has just endorsed the Septuagint (LXX) which for Augustine means the Pentateuch, prophets, historical books and the Deuterocanon (just as decades earlier at Hippo and Carthage, where Augustine inspired the Fathers by preaching as a priest at Hippo and voting for the Deuterocanon to be called “canon” at various council of Carthage). So, for Augustine he knew two methods of dividing the Bible:

1. From his Baptism in AD 387–AD 393 innovation of Hippo
2. From Hippo AD 393–death AD 430

The older division (above no. 1) taken from the Greek Christians was: “Jewish-Christian canon” (= today’s Jewish-Protestant Old Testament). The innovative use of the term canon (above no. 2) in Hippo and Carthage was to call all books used by Christians alone (the Septuagint = Jewish-Christian canon + Deuterocanon) together with New Testament as all and each: “canon,” without further distinction. Nonetheless, sometimes Augustine (as in the *City of God* XV, 23) uses the language of his youth to talk about the canon as Jewish-Christian agreed books, which justifies Monk Gregory usage of this same division in the Latin language in AD 570.

All the more, since Monk Gregory is writing his *Moralia* in (Greek) Constantinople where he and his Latin monks are surrounded by Greeks, it makes sense that he may have been asked to explain his use of Maccabees in light of some of monks being made aware of the older Greek division of Scriptures into “canon” and other books of Scripture. Furthermore, some Latin

¹⁰ This phrase: “*atque/adque*” forms a strenuous relationship between between “Hebrew” and “Christian” that could be written: “Hebrew-Christian canonical Scriptures.” This shows that even in the Latin West the convention was used so that one of Gregory’s favorite authors (Augustine) justified the notion of a “Jewish canonical list (that Christians approve) with Christian only published/added additions.

monks may have even become aware of Jerome's attempt (for a limited time of Jerome's own life) to class the Deuterocanon with the "apocrypha" or forbidden books. Jerome ultimately gave up on this project (proven by him quoting Deuterocanon in his late works at the end of his life and referring to them as Scripture). Before the year AD 400, however, he was a sole voice for a number of years for promoting a fourth-century Jewish group endorsing today's Jewish canon of Scripture that was far more limited than earlier groups of Jewish according to the Jewish [Mishnah](#) and later Talmud (for example, Sirach was cited by some earlier Rabbis as Scripture). All This sufficiently explains the possible reasons why Monk Gregory needs to clear the air in Greek-speaking Byzantium for monks possibly aware of Monk Jerome temporarily expressing rejection of the Deuterocanon. But, instead of calling Maccabees "apocrypha (hidden/unpublished)" as Jerome did, Monk Gregory refers to them oppositely as published (viz., made public for reading) by the Church. According to development in papal law from the fourth century well known among Latin Christians in Italy, if a book were designated "apocrypha" outside the canon of Hippo/Carthage, then would have been impossible to read or to publish (See the [Decretum Gelasianum](#)). Thus, Pope Gregory's "published" book of Maccabees (and the other unnamed books in this group) are clearly not considered by Gregory number **ii** as in Jerome's twofold group: (i.) canon, (**ii.**) apocrypha. Rather Gregory refers to Maccabees according to number **ii** in the traditional Greek grouping: (i.) canon, (**ii.**) Deuterocanon, (iii.) apocrypha.

Significantly, Monk Gregory quotes the nature of 1 Maccabees as: "for the building up of the Church" (*ad aedificationem ecclesiae*), where he cites verbatim the Old Latin ([Latina vetus](#)) verse of 1 Corinthians 14:5, 12 (*ad aedificationem ecclesiae*).¹¹ This chapter for this verse of Paul's epistle affirms the Holy Spirit gives prophecy for "the building up of the Church." So, the context of the reference to Maccabees shows that Monk Gregory considers Maccabees to be a case of the Spirit inspiring with prophecy like in the new testament Church of Corinth. Compare Jerome's Latin [Vulgate](#) (verbatim with the Old Latin on this phrase) of 1 Corinthians 14:5, 12 ([Douay](#)):

And I would have you all to speak with tongues, but rather to prophesy. For greater is he that prophesieth, than **he that speaketh with tongues: unless perhaps he interpret**, that **the church may receive edification** (*ecclesia aedificationem accipiat*). [...] So you also, forasmuch as you are zealous of spirits, seek to abound unto **the edifying of the church** (*ad aedificationem ecclesiae*).

¹¹ "for the building up of the Church" is first used by the Old Latin, cited in the commentary on 1 Corinthians by Ambrosiaster/Ambrose (385/397), which is subsequently cited by St. Augustine (AD 390s-430, from both the Old Latin and Ambrosiaster) and followed by Gregory who knew Ambrose/Ambrosiaster and Augustine. Jerome did not edit 1 Corinthians for the Vulgate (He stopped editing in the middle of the Gospel of Joh), but the Latin Vulgate retains the Old Latin reading and Jerome himself did cite 1 Corinthians 14:12 in agreement with the Old Latin in his commentary on the Galatians once. Jerome used again the phrase "for building up the Church" about St. Barnabas the companion of St. Paul when referring to the epistle of Barnabas written: "for the building up of Church," which St. Jerome calls "apocryphal scriptures" in [On Famous Men](#). Jerome's use of "for the building up of the Church" to refer to the Epistle of Barnabas and the sub-Apostolic writings of Theophilus of Antioch may explain the origin of the Latin monks question prompting Gregory 1 Corinthians 14:12 to refute Jerome's association of "apocrypha" with it. The term in Latin already meant "forbidden to read in public." Gregory, above, clearly is reading publicly Maccabees which automatically excludes Jerome's meaning and usage.

The Scriptural context of Corinthians might suggest that Monk Gregory is aware of Jerome who devalues these books because they are “interpreted” that is “translated” and do not exist in Hebrew. This interpretation of Monk Gregory is maintained when he becomes Pope Gregory and writes the same phrase around AD 604, when he writes the Patriarch of Alexandria repeating the same phrase: “May almighty God guard your life throughout a very long period of time ‘**for the sake of building up the holy Church**’” (1 Corinthians 14: 5, 12; *Omnipotens Deus vitam vestram **ad aedificationem** sanctae **Ecclesiae** per longa tempora custodiat*).¹² Why does Pope Gregory call to mind 1 Corinthians 14: 5, 12 for blessing the Patriarch? It is because – like Corinthians – there is a question of **the interpretation of tongue/languages** and how difficult it is for the needs of the Church, which matches perfectly with his earlier citation as Monk Gregory. As such, we are sure that Monk and Pope Gregory associated this phrase with the interpretation of prophecy and with Scripture.

The Nail in the Coffin of Naysayers

Jugie’s and our book already addressed the ancient logic behind listing biblical books, of which Gregory is but another example in the Latin West. The tradition from the first centuries was for Greek churches to have a list of books shared between local Jews and themselves from the Old Testament and then add to that list their own inspired Old Testament books used exclusively in their own communities and unacceptable to Jews. This is the origin of the Greek listing: (i.) Jewish (local) canon, (ii.) Christian local Scripture (eventually Deuterocanon), and (iii.) forbidden books (apocrypha). We are fortunate, however, that the poor scholarship – or rather the lack of scholarship – among recent generations of pro-Reformer apologists and today’s other naysayers omit the most important proof of what Pope Gregory meant in now infamous citation from the *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*. Let’s turn to Pope Gregory’s secretary who reproduced Gregory’s quote and adjusted it slightly in an even clearer manner to justify our translation and interpretation of Monk Gregory’s *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* 19, xxi. Paterius, Pope Gregory’s notary, recorded Monk Gregory’s meaning as follows:

Monk Gregory, <i>A Synthesis of Moralia in Job</i> 19, 21 (AD 570 with later edits):	Paterius, <u><i>Exposition of the Old and New Testament</i></u>, chapter 12 (AD 606):
We now comment on this verse lacking no due order if we cite a [biblical] witness from books – although they are not listed under the canonical [Jewish] books – but they are nonetheless published ¹³ for “building up of the Church” (1 Corinthians 14:5, 12) (translation mine)	We now comment on this verse lacking no due order if we cite a [biblical] witness from books – although they are not listed under the canonical [Jewish] books – but they are nonetheless added thereto for “building up of the Church” (1 Corinthians 14:5, 12) (translation mine)
The scientific Latin Text of Monk Gregory:	The Published Latin Text of Notary Paterius:

¹² Pope Gregory the Great, [Letter 39](#).

¹³ Old Anti-Papal Protestant tracts agree with the proper translation here as “published” (viz., publicly made available to the Church). See for example John Cosin, [A Scholastical History of the Canon of Scripture](#).

<i>de qua re non non inordinate agimus, si ex libris licet non canonicis, sed tamen ad aedificationem Ecclesiae editis testimonium proferamus</i>	<i>De qua re non inordinate agimus, si ex libris, licet non canonicis, sed tamen ad aedificationem Ecclesiae additis, testimonium proferamus</i>
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The meticulous notary Paterius, honoring, citing, and clarifying Monk Gregory's intention by means of a simile notes that Pope Gregory (in his edits of the *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* after becoming pope) means to say: **In addition to** the books known under the Greek word: "canonical" **there are added to it** other books "for the building up of the Church." The Latin: *addo* (*additis*) means: "to add by way of increase" or "to augment" and has the connotation of making "essential additions" and, finally, to attach a "supplement." (see [Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary](#)). In other words, Monk Gregory avoided any reference to "apocrypha" for Maccabees, which is hidden and forbidden to be published and read in church and instead Monk Gregory originally called Maccabees a "published" or "produced" book (Latin: *edo*). Complimentarily, his notary Paterius who would have taken Gregory's dictation and performed Gregory's edits on *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* employs a not too dissimilar word: "**to add to** (the canon)" or "**to supplement** (the canon)" or "**to make an essential addition**" to the canon.¹⁴ What does canon in Monk Gregory's context in Greek Constantinople? It is the shared books used between the local Jewish synagogue and local Greek Christians as their basis to debate doctrine in that part of the empire. What do Christians add to this local Jewish list (undoubtedly differing from synagogue to synagogue)? The Christians added to this Jewish canon their essential book of Scripture: Maccabees (among other that go unnamed by Gregory). The reference to 1 Corinthians 14:12 makes further sense in this context because Maccabees is rejected by Jerome (as well as other Deuterocanon) for being in a foreign tongue (not Hebrew). Where 1 Corinthians 14:12 affirms that prophecy – if there is someone to interpret the original tongue – is valuable for building up the Church. Thus, Jerome's objection to Maccabees (which he thought – wrongly – not to have been originally Hebrew) is implicitly refuted since the Spirit gives many tongues and all languages admit of translation and value when they are prophetic and can we can build the Christian Church with such translations.

Conclusion: As a monk, St. Gregory the Great (see **Appendix III**) quoted several books of the Deuterocanon in his *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*. After Pope Gregory's papacy, Paterius the notary emphasized Pope St. Gregory's meaning of this now controverted passage so that Latin

¹⁴ An incontestable authority for Gregory (and the Medieval Latin Church) is Augustine, who forcefully argued in [On the Acts having to do with Felix the Manichean](#), chapter VI: "You [heretics] even have this point in your apocryphal scriptures, **which the catholic canon does not at all enroll into itself**. However for you heretics, as much as books are excluded from our catholic canon, so much more are they for you of greater weight!" (*Habetis etiam hoc in scripturis apocryphis, quas canon quidem catholicus non admittit, vobis autem tanto graviores sunt, quanto a catholico canone secluduntur*). The notion here is that there is – by Hippo – an enrollment of books into the canonical list as done in the North African councils (Hippo/Carthage) where the Jewish canon of books cited by Athanasius is expanded and the Church in North Africa extended the Jewish word "canon" for Christian usage to include all of the New Testament and the Deuterocanon. The language of Paterius is the same: Books have been "essentially added to" the canon. This is a fair description of the canonical innovation at Hippo.

Christians more easily understand how Maccabees is an inspired scriptural books of the Deuterocanon. They would not have easily understood the Greek convention of “canonical books” as Jewish-Christian agreed list. But, by Paterius, they easily understood that books “added” the canon of Jews are inspired Scripture (like Maccabees) for Christians in the Latin West. QED.

An Addendum on the Term in Latin “Canonical”

Jugie’s and our book demonstrated:

1. Athanasius of Alexandria in Greek first referred to a Jewish tradition that was called canon in Alexandria in the 350s
2. Then in a famous Epistle in AD 367 Athanasius again quoted this Jewish term “canon” and he adopted it officially for his local Christian Church that was agreement with the local Jews about their inspired books to be held such by Christians too (Hence, the Hellenistic Jewish term “canon” enters into Christian vocabulary in the realm of Scripture for the first time).
3. We saw in our book that Philo the Jew (of Alexandria too) was the first Greek-Jewish author in Alexandria to speak of Old Testament books as “canon” around AD 50
4. So, while Hellenistic Jews used “canon” to refer to a list of Scripture from AD 50 – AD 367, Athanasius began this convention in Greek Christianity. Eventually, the Greek word “canon” (ruler) was also taken up by Latin Christians to talk about their own lists of Scripture in the late fourth century (for example: the Council of Hippo AD 393).
5. However, because “canon” is Greek and the term “canonical” is a Latin adjective formed from a Greek word imported into the language, we can easily trace the meaning of this term used in the Christian word until the time of Gregory the Great.

The [Corpus Corporum](#) is perhaps the most universally accessible search engine of Latin literature today. While scholars have access to the Brepols database, this requires an expensive subscription. In the *Corpus Corporum* link above (in Latin) I summary my provisional findings:

The term canonical (*canonicus*) was, in Latin, first invented to translate the Greek term *kanonikos*. Because the Greek invention of the term is post-Classical (post-330s BC) the Latin term also is quite recent. The, according to the [TLG](#), first was taken up by Christians in the 3rd century AD but without reference to Scripture. Later, it appears as an adjective in Greek on the scene of Nicaea I (AD 325). As one can imagine, it is quickly adopted into Greek to refer to what is according to the authoritative regulation of the Church. Shortly thereafter, by the AD 360’s the Latin term *Canonicus* has been firmly established **but in regard to rules set up by authoritative letters and synods**.

It does become associated with the Scriptural lists in canon law or the collections of mainly Greek laws and papal epistles gathered in the late-fourth century that is collected. After the African Councils of Hippo and Carthage, the Latin word “canonical” then becomes attached to official lists of Scriptures from that council.

For our purposes, there are two plausible sources for Gregory's usage of "canonical" in Latin prior to becoming pope:

- (1.) An alleged Latin translation of St. Athanasius's statement in *On the Observance of Monks* on "canonical" Scripture (cited as early as St. Caesarius of Arles before AD 540)
- (2.) Latin lists of "canonical" Scripture that record the word "canon" associated with Scripture list after AD 393 (Hippo, Africa).

First, let us turn to the alleged translation of Athanasius that was circulating in Southern France and plausibly in Italy:

On the subject at hand,¹⁵ care must be taken concerning the **canonical** memoirs: we need not especially reject **apocrypha** whose provenance we do not know but we suppose that the links fastened together in the chain of the canon as they are arranged and published can be enough for knowledge of God (*Cujus rei cura in **canonicis** ponenda est monimentis: non quod apocrypha debeamus praesertim ignorata damnare; sed quod ad scientiam Dei digestam canonis seriem putemus posse sufficere*). (Ps.-Athanasius, [*On the observance of monks*](#))

Monk Gregory and his Latin monks would have thought this authentically written after Athanasius's AD 367 canon list for his local Church. For Monk Gregory, Athanasius would have been thought to be imposing on Alexandrian monks the same canonical list he had required for parish services. Let us remember that monks in the desert had their own customs and, sometimes, clergy apart from any bishop. So, Latins like Monk Gregory would have interpreted Athanasius to be getting monks to conform to his newly legalized "canon" from his authentic and famous AD 367 letter. As our book and other scholars admit, Athanasius's AD 367 document was the very same to which St. Jerome later reacted, rejecting St. Athanasius's 367 Epistle above in his *Helmeted Introduction*.

So, our chronology looks to be thus:

- (1.) 350s AD: Athanasius admitted there is something called "canon" with relation to Scripture in Greek
- (2.) 367 AD: Athanasius imposed this Jewish list plus more books used exclusively by Christians
- (3.) 395 AD: Athanasius' list is indirectly criticized and rejected by Jerome in an introduction to the Vulgate
- (4.) 440 AD: Athanasius's *On the observance of monks* was composed by an unknown author in Latin
- (5.) 570 AD: Athanasius's monastic rules in Latin plausibly are used by Monk Gregory who definitely read the Latin version of Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*
- (6.) 570 AD: Athanasius's *On the observance of monks* and Jerome's *Galeatus* may be at the root of the monks asking Gregory in Constantinople about Athanasius's canonical list and the Deuterocanon.
- (7.) 570 AD: and Gregory explains that Athanasius's list is a foreign Greek list (unlike the Latin list of Carthage) having two sets of books: (i.) canon, (ii.) supplemental books published only by the Christians. Athanasius *On the observance of monks* suggests not reading apocrypha, which is

¹⁵ The topic is on monks interrupting their scheduled rest in order to read something.

forbidden to be copied and read in churches so that Gregory speaks on Maccabees to clarify that something published by the Church (but perhaps not read in the lectionary at Mass and the divine office).

- (8.) 604 AD: Paterius, the secretary to Gregory, clarifies for Latin Christians in Italy that Gregory's word "published" means "added thereto" or "supplemented" so that Latin Christians understand that Gregory is talking about the their Deuterocanon addressing a different audience than the Greek Athanasius and the Alexandrian monks and or monks in Constantinople.

Clarification: Because Gregory's problem is not *pastoral* (he is not a pastor of an Italian diocese nor the Pope serving the Church), but it is monastic in relation to monastic rules and monastic literature, it is not a surprise that Monk Gregory is not using the Latin collection of canons by Dionysios Exiguus (died AD 544) who compiled biblical lists based upon AD 393 Hippo – AD 419 Carthage councils. In these Latin lists, "canonical" means the Old Testament and New Testament lists *exactly as used later by the Council of Trent*. Here, the canon-law usage of canonical in the Latin west was new or innovative. In the East, canonical since AD 367 to AD 691 meant principally the list of books in Athanasius's 367 Epistle. In AD 691 (well after Pope St. Gregory death) The Byzantine Church at the Council of Trullo (Constantinople) adopted in Greek translation the Council of Carthage (as our book details) and expanded the use of "canonical" to mean the Deuterocanon. Before this the older Greek tradition of naming only Jewish-Christian lists as canon prevailed under the inspiration of St. Athanasius. The reason why Monk Gregory does not cite this list in Constantinople in AD 570 is therefore clear:

- (1.) Dionysius's canonical collection was new and would take time to copy by hand and distribute and it was expensive
- (2.) As a monk (not a priest or bishop) it is often the case that monastics were untaught and unfamiliar with canon law
- (3.) In Constantinople, Gregory may not have carried these many and large tomes to the city, but prioritized monastic texts to continue his monastic ministry to his brothers in the Byzantine Capital.
- (4.) The monastic question that arose is more likely to have concerned making sense of confusion about Greek ways of characterizing the Bible and its rules for reading books of the Bible to Latin monks unfamiliar with these technicalities.
- (5.) Monk Gregory gave a monastic solution for questions being asked by monastic brothers not a pastoral solution for parish churches who had a different language and tradition in Latin Italy.

Appendix I: PL LXXVI

[*Rec. XIII*]. 34. *Maxime cavendum a superbia.* — De qua re non inordinate agimus, si ex libris, * licet non canonicis, sed tamen ad ædificationem Ecclesiæ editis, testimonium proferamus. Eleazar namque in prælio elephantem feriens stravit, sed sub ipso quem exstinxit occubuit (*1 Mach. vi, 46*). Quos ergo iste significat quem sua victoria oppressit, nisi eos qui vitia superant, sed sub ipsa quæ subigunt, superbiendo succumbunt? Quasi enim sub hoste quem prosternit moritur, qui de culpa quam superat elevatur. Pensandum ergo magnopere est quia bona prodesse nequeunt, si mala quæ subrepunt non caventur. Perit omne quod agitur, si non sollicitè in humilitate custoditur. Unde bene quoque de ipso primo parente dicitur: *Posuit eum Dominus in paradiso voluptatis, ut operaretur et custodiret* (*Genes. ii, 15*). Operatur quippe qui agit bonum quod præcipitur, sed quod operatus fuerit non custodit, cui hoc subrepat quod prohibetur. Beatus igitur Job, quia ex omni parte bono se opere texerat, dicat: *Justitia indutus sum, et vestivi me sicut vestimento.* Ubi protinus subditur:

Appendix II: CCSL volume CXLIII A, page 983

34. De qua re non inordinate agimus, si ex libris, licet non canonicis, sed tamen ad aedificationem Ecclesiæ editis, testimonium proferamus. Eleazar namque in proelio elephantum feriens stravit, sed sub ipso quem exstinxit occubuit. Quos ergo iste significat quem sua victoria oppressit, nisi eos qui vitia superant, sed sub ipsa quæ subigunt, superbiendo succumbunt? Quasi enim sub hoste quem prosternit moritur, qui de culpa quam superat elevatur. Pensandum ergo magnopere est quia bona prodesse nequeunt, si mala

Appendix III

Pride is of course the root of all evil, of which it is said, as **Scripture bears witness**: *Pride is the beginning of all sin.* (**Sirach 10:26**) Moreover; proliferating from this poisonous root as its first offspring are seven capital sins: vainglory, envy, anger melancholy, avarice, gluttony, lust. For because he grieved that we were held in bondage by these seven derivatives of pride, on that account our Redeemer, full of the spirit of sevenfold grace, joined spiritual battle for our liberation. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 1, Book 3

The former, **it is said by Holy Scripture**: Do not become like the horse and the mule which have no understanding (Psalm 31:9). The proud effort of the latter is blamed **when it is said**: *Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability* (**Sirach 3:22**). To the former it is said: Mortify your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil consupiscence (Col. 3:5), to the latter it is said: Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy and vain deceit (Col. 2:8) St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Book 1, Part 3, 21

Hence it is that with difficulty is eternal rest attained by the powerful who are surrounded by numberless hosts of lieges and bound with the tight coils of a great variety of concerns. In this regard **Scripture says** *A most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule. (Wisdom 12:6)* Hence Truth says in the Gospel: Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required (Luke 12:48). It rarely happens that those who possess gold strive for eternal rest, inasmuch as Truth himself says: How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God (Mt. 19:25). St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 1, Book 4, 3

He is king over all the children of pride (Job 41:25). **It is written:** *Pride is the beginning of all sin (Sirach 10:15)*. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 1, Book 3

In this regard **it is written:** *By the envy of the devil, death came into the world (Wisdom 2:24)*. For when the decay of envy has corrupted the vanquished heart, exterior indications show how greatly mad impulses provoked the mind. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* Part 1, Book 3, 7

Anger indeed killeth the foolish : and envy slayeth the little one (Job 5:2). **Since it is written:** *But thou, Lord, judgest with tranquility (Wisdom 12:18)*, we must particularly take note that as often as we restrain our turbulent emotions by the virtue of mildness, we are trying to return to the likeness of our Creator. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* Part 1, Book 3, 9

By anger life is lost although wisdom may seem to be retained, as **it is written:** *anger destroyeth even the wise (Sirach 32:26)*, for indeed the confused mind is not effective even if it is able to judge anything wisely. By anger righteousness is abandoned, as it is written: The anger of man worketh not the justice of God (Jer. 9:14). St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job* Part 1, Book 3, 9

For hence it is said by Solomon: If a man live many years , and have rejoiced in them all, he must remmember the darksome time, and the many days: which, when they shall come, the things past shall be accused of vanity (Eccl. 11:8). Hence **again it is written:** *In all thy works, remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin (Sirach 7:40)*. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 1, Book 2, 32

For now any sinner casts away the fear of God and yet lives, blasphemes and yet prospers, because the merciful Creator in seeing does not wish to punish the one whom he wishes to correct by waiting of him **as it is written:** *Thou overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance (Wisdom 11:24)*. But when the sinner is looked upon hereafter, he shall be no more, because when the strict judge precisely examines his deserts, the guilty one is not equal to the torments. St. Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 2, Book 1, 11

Observe how through his angels he comes down to establish misdeeds and immediately strikes the evildoers. And he who is patient, who is mild, of **whom it is written:** *But thou, Lord, judgest with tranquility, of whom (Wisdom 12:18) it again is written:* *The Lord is a patient rewarder (Sirach 5:4)*, Gregory the Great, *A Synthesis of Moralia in Job*, Part 2, Book 4, 15

But, if your Holiness knew both what I referred to in my letter and what had been done, whether against John the presbyter or against Athanasius, monk of Isauria and presbyter, and wrote to me, I know not; what can I reply to this, since the **Truth says through His Scripture**, *"The mouth that lieth slayeth the soul" (Wisd. i. 11)* St. Gregory the Great, Book III, Epistle 13

Lest they should give nothing at all to those on whom they ought to bestow something, **let them hear what is written**, Give to every man that asketh of thee (Luke vi. 30). Lest they should give something, however little to those on whom they ought to bestow nothing at all, **let them hear what is written**. "*Give to the good man, and receive not a sinner: do well to him that is lowly, and give not to the ungodly*" (Sir.. xii. 4). And again, "*Set out thy bread and wine on the burial of the just, but eat and drink not thereof with sinners*" (Tobit iv. 17). St. Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, Chapter XX

But **the Lord shews with what strong censure** he disowns them, saying through a certain wise man, "*Whoso offereth a sacrifice of the substance of the poor doeth as one that killeth the son before the father's eyes*" (Sir. xxxiv. 20). St. Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, Chapter XXI, NPNF2

As to what you say you desire to be done for you near the most sacred body of the holy apostle Peter, be assured that, though your tongue were silent, your charity bids the doing of it. Would indeed that we were worthy to pray for you: but that I am not worthy I have no doubt. Still, however, there are here many worthy folk, who are being redeemed from the enemy by your offering, and serve our Creator faithfully, with regard to whom **you have done what is written**; "*Lay up alms in the bosom of the poor, and it shall pray for thee*" (Sir. xxix. 15). Epistles of St. Gregory the Great, Epistle XXXII

Yet surely this is a promise of the life to come, seeing that it is said, "*The righteous shall shine forth as the sun*" (Matth. xiii. 43; **Wisd. iii. 7**). For, in whatsoever virtue any one may excel, how can he shine forth as the sun while still in the present life, wherein "*The corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things*" (**Wisd. ix. 15**); wherein We see another law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity by the law of sin which is in our members (Rom. vii. 23); wherein Even in ourselves we have the answer of death, that we should not trust in ourselves (2 Cor. i. 9); wherein also the Prophet cries aloud, Fear and trembling are canto upon me, and darkness hath covered me (Ps. liv. 6)? **For it is written also**, "*A wise man abideth as the sun; a fool changeth as the moan*" (Sir. xxvii. 12); where the comparison of the sun is not applied to the splendour of his brightness, but to perseverance in well-doing. Epistles of St. Gregory the Great, Epistle VII

It was that you would not speak by letters to a man, having by a good deed made your address to Almighty God. For this same deed of yours has a voice of its own, which calls to the secret ears of God, **as it is written**, "*Hide thy alms in the bosom of the poor, and it shall entreat for thee*" (Sir. xxix. 15). And indeed to me, I confess, it is sad to expend what is not my own, and to add to the accounts which I keep of the substance of the Church those also of the property of my most sweet son the lord Theodore. And yet I rejoice with your benignity that you carefully attend to and observe what the Truth says; Give alms, and behold, all things are clean unto you (Luke xi 41); and **this which is written**, "*Even as water quencheth fire, so alms quench sin*" (Sir. iii. 33). Paul the apostle also says, Let your abundance supply their want, that their abundance also may be a supply to your want (2 Cor. viii. 14). **Tobias admonishes his son, saying**, "*If thou hast much, give abundantly; but if thou hast little, of that little impart willingly*" (Tob. iv. 9) Epistles of St. Gregory the Great, Book VII, Epistle XXVIII

To such, under the guise of a learner, **it is well said in Solomon**, "*My son, do nothing without counsel, and after it is done thou shalt not repent*" (Sir. 32:24)." And again, Let thine eyelids go before thy steps (Prov. iv. 25). St. Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, Chapter XX