



# The Pre-Nicene New Testament: Fifty-four Formative Texts

*Robert M. Price*

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In this monumental work, Professor Price offers an inclusive New Testament canon with twenty-seven additional sacred books from the first three centuries of Christianity, including a few of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi writings. Price also reconstructs the Gospel of Marcion and the lost Gospel according to the Hebrews. Here, for the first time, is a canon representing all major factions of the early church.

As an interpretive translation, Price's text is both accurate and readable and is tied more closely to the Greek than most previous translations. Price conveys the meanings of words in context, carefully choosing the right phrase or idiom to convey their sense in English. For words that had a specific theological import when first written, Price leaves the Greek transliteration, giving readers archons for the fallen angels thought to be ruling the world, paraclete for encourager, and pleroma for the Gnostic godhead.

Within the collection, each book is introduced with comments about the cultural setting, information about when a document was probably written, and significant textual considerations, which together form a running commentary that continues into the footnotes. The findings of scholars, documented and summarized by Price, will come as a surprise to some readers. It appears, as Price suggests, that most of what is known about Jesus came by way of revelation to Christian oracles rather than by word of mouth as historical memory. In addition, the major characters in the New Testament, including Peter, Stephen, and Paul, appear to be composites of several historical individuals each, their stories comprising a mix of events, legend, and plot themes borrowed from the Old Testament and Greek literature.

In the New Testament world, theology developed gradually along different trajectories, with tension between the charismatic ascetics such as Marcion and Thecla, as examples, and the emerging Catholic orthodoxy of such clergy as Ignatius and Polycarp. The tension is detectable in the texts themselves, many of which represent "heretical" points of view: Gnostic, Jewish-Christian, Marcionite, and proto-orthodox, and were later edited, sometimes clumsily, in an attempt to harmonize all into one consistent theology.

What may occur to many readers, among the more striking aspects of the narratives, is that the earliest, most basic writings, such as Mark's Gospel in inarticulate Greek, are ultimately more impressive and inspirational than the later attempts by more educated Christians to appeal to sophisticated readers with better grammar and more allusions to classical mythology and apologetic embellishments.

The critical insights and theories on display in these pages have seldom been incorporated into mainstream conservative Bible translations, and in many ways, Price has made the New Testament a whole new book for readers, allowing them, by virtue of the translation, to comprehend the meaning of the text where it is obscured by the traditional wording. Whatever usefulness teachers, students, and clergy may find here in terms of pedagogical and inspirational value, The Pre-Nicene New Testament is guaranteed to provoke further thought and conversation among the general public—hopefully toward the goal of more personal study and insights.

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