

“In *The Catholic Epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation*, Daniel J. Scholz masterfully integrates the later New Testament writings into the broader theological, ecclesial, literary, and social contexts in which they were composed. Solidly rooted in the best modern scholarship, his approach is both profoundly Catholic and thoroughly historical, revealing to students the connections between the biblical writings and the postbiblical Christian tradition to which they gave rise. As an accessible and reliable text for undergraduates beginning their Scripture studies, the book stands apart from a crowded field. Both students and teachers are indebted to Dr. Scholz for his clear and concise presentation of the scholarly debates and theological issues that make these writings especially important. Highly recommended!”

—Lance Richey
University of Saint Francis

“In *The Catholic Epistles*, Daniel J. Scholz offers careful scholarship in a readable style and accessible format. In each chapter, he pairs books of the New Testament with early extracanonical literature (e.g., James with the *Didache*). This approach encourages readers to compare the books in question and to consider the breadth of early Christian literature. It is a pleasure to recommend this volume.”

—Jeannine K. Brown
Bethel Seminary, San Diego

AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr. James A. Kelhoffer of Uppsala University and to Kathleen Walsh and Maura Hagarty of Anselm Academic, who have become an invaluable editorial team.

Publisher Acknowledgments

The publisher owes a special debt of gratitude to James A. Kelhoffer, PhD, who advised throughout this project. Dr. Kelhoffer's expertise and passion both as teacher and scholar contributed immeasurably to this work. Dr. Kelhoffer holds a PhD in New Testament and Early Christian Literature from the University of Chicago and is professor of Old and New Testament Exegesis at Uppsala University in Sweden.

The publisher also wishes to thank the following individual who reviewed this work in progress:

Jeffrey S. Siker

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California

THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES, HEBREWS, AND REVELATION

INTRODUCING THE NEW TESTAMENT

DANIEL J. SCHOLZ

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Created by the publishing team of Anselm Academic.

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Printed in the United States of America

7076

ISBN 978-1-59982-709-4

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Ed and Betty Scholz, who
planted in me a love and passion for the study of Scripture.

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INTRODUCTION

Studying the Later New Testament Writings

In addition to the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, the New Testament includes nine other writings: Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude, and the Revelation of John. This book primarily focuses on these nine texts, which are usually referred to as the later New Testament writings. The term “later” does not allude to their date of composition, as these books were composed within the same general time period as the four Gospels and the deutero-Pauline letters, roughly 70–140 CE. Rather, it refers to their placement within the list of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament; these are the last nine books in the New Testament canon.¹

Seven of these writings—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude—are commonly grouped together under the label “Catholic” or “General” Epistles. Eusebius of Caesarea (a church historian and bishop of Caesarea who died around 340) was apparently the first to use the term “Catholic Letters” to designate this group of writings. Eusebius refers to both James and Jude as Catholic Epistles but, interestingly, denies the epistles of James and Jude a place in the New Testament

1. Not all of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament contain the exact same writings or the same order of writings. Some early manuscripts, for example, list the *Didache* among the New Testament writings. The list of the last nine books found in the canonical New Testament is found in manuscripts such as the fourth-century codex known as Codex Sinaiticus. For a good resource on this topic, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

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canon because few ancient authorities had quoted those two writings, despite their use in most churches:

Such is the story about James, whose is said to be the first of the Epistles called Catholic. It is to be observed that its authenticity is denied, since few of the ancients quote it, as is also the case with the epistle called Jude's, which is itself one of the seven called Catholic; nevertheless we know that these letters have been used publicly with the rest in most churches.²

Although the debate about James and Jude continued into the fourth century, these writings, too, were eventually included in the New Testament canon.

Nowadays, when scholars refer to these writings, the terms *letter* and *epistle* may be used interchangeably. Previously New Testament scholarship argued for a distinction between a specific “letter” (for example, Paul’s letters addressed to particular congregations) and a catholic, or more general, “epistle” that addressed the church as a whole. Today scholars recognize that these seven writings, just like those attributed to Paul, are occasional documents written to address a specific audience or situation.

As early as the third century, these seven New Testament writings were grouped together as a collection.³ This was not the case with the book of Hebrews or the Revelation of John. The book of Hebrews circulated in the early church with the thirteen letters of Paul, even though Paul himself did not write it. The Revelation of John was thought to have been written by the same author that produced the Gospel and letters of John, especially given the writer’s self-identification as “John” (Rev 1:1, 4, 9, 22:8). In addition, some second- and third-century Church Fathers seemed to support that claim.

2. Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23.24–25.

3. Darian Lockett, *An Introduction to the Catholic Epistles* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 3, identifies early-third century priest and author Origen of Alexandria as the first to cite these seven letters as the “Catholic Epistles.”

Apostolic and Familial Claim of Authorship

Over time each of these nine later New Testament writings became identified with figures from the period of the original apostles. Association with the apostles or, in some cases, Jesus' relatives contributed to the authority of these writings and confirmed their status in the eyes of their intended recipients.

Apostle/Relative	New Testament Text
Peter	First and Second Peter
John	First, Second, and Third John and the Revelation of John
James	Letter of James
Jude	Letter of Jude
Paul	Book of Hebrews

Some of these writings appear to be pseudonymous. Derived from the Greek *pseudos*, "false," and *onoma*, "name," the term *pseudonymity* refers to the act of writing in another person's name. Many scholars are convinced, for example, that 1 and 2 Peter are from different authors who wrote in the late-first or early-second centuries. The Apostle Peter is thought to have been martyred in the mid-sixties, which would mean he could not have written either of them. Other writings, such as Hebrews and 1 John, are anonymous, making no claim of authorship, although tradition has associated Hebrews with the Apostle Paul because of its attachment in Greek manuscripts to the Pauline collection of letters. In the case of the letters of James and Jude, the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3) identify a "James" and a "Judas" (Jude) as "brothers" (Greek: *adelphoi*) of Jesus.

In volumes 1 and 2 of this series, *Introducing the New Testament*, extracanonical gospels and extracanonical apocryphal writings associated with Paul were included as a final chapter in *Jesus in the Gospels and Acts* and *The Pauline Letters*. For this third volume, a somewhat

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different approach is employed. While *The Later New Testament Writings* focuses on the last nine books of the canon, it also presents eleven writings from the “Apostolic Fathers.” These extracanonical writings include *1 Clement*, *2 Clement*, the *Didache*, the seven letters of Ignatius, Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Quadratus’s *Apology*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus*. Rather than devoting a final chapter to these extracanonical writings, introductions to these extracanonical writings are integrated into each chapter with the canonical writings since early Christian works of the first, second, and third centuries were not distinguishable as canonical and extracanonical writings. The original addressees, for example, of the Letter of James and the *Didache*, would have likely heard both writings as early Christian wisdom literature. Thus, for example, while chapter 1 covers mainly the Letter of James, it also includes the *Didache*.⁴

These eleven writings are discussed alongside the nine New Testament texts for four additional reasons. First, these twenty canonical and extracanonical texts stem from roughly the same time period: the late-first century to mid-second century. While these nine New Testament writings date to as early as 90 (1 Peter) and as late as 140 (2 Peter), the writings of the Apostolic Fathers begin with *1 Clement* (about 95) and extend to about 155 with the *Epistle to Diognetus*. Second, believers in this period read some of these extracanonical texts alongside the canonical writings, considering them as instructive in the faith and as authoritative as the latter. The fourth-century text the *Apostolic Canons*, for example, even lists *1–2 Clement* as part of an early New Testament canon. In fact, some of the earliest New Testament manuscripts, for example Codex Alexandrinus, included *1–2 Clement*, while Codex Sinaiticus apparently even counted *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* among the New Testament writings. Third, like the later New Testament writings, these texts—and the genres in which they were written (wisdom, apologies, letters, exhortations, and apocalypses)—reflect the struggles and development

4. It should be noted that the title of “Apostolic Fathers” is a modern construct (originating from the sixteenth century) and that the exact content of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers varies somewhat in different scholarly editions. Moreover, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which is discussed in chapter 5, is not included among the Apostolic Fathers.

of the emerging Christian community. And fourth, it is pedagogically helpful to introduce similar types of early Christian literature together. Inclusion of these canonical and extracanonical texts in each chapter offers a more holistic view of this complex period of early Christianity. It is important to remember that the New Testament as known today did not exist in the beginning stages of Christianity. One of the main goals of this third volume is to introduce the readers to the later New Testament writings, and in doing so, employ a methodology common among biblical scholars—studying extracanonical texts alongside canonical ones.

From the Apostolic Age to the Apostolic Fathers

The period in which the original twelve apostles lived is traditionally known as the “apostolic age.” It covers approximately seventy years, from the death of Christ (around 30) to the presumed date for the death of the last apostle, John. Certain writings from the next generation of Christian leaders, who lived from the late-first to the mid-second century, are called the “Apostolic Fathers.” This term refers not only to early church bishops, such as Papias of Hierapolis, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna, but also to the unknown authors of significant writings from this time period, such as the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Barnabas*, *1–2 Clement*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

Most of the writings studied in this book are commonly referred to as letters. Letters were the most common form of communication in the ancient world and certainly within the New Testament itself. Indeed, twenty-one of the twenty-seven New Testament writings are letters. However, the letter framework often served as the vehicle to accomplish other purposes, such as defense of the faith (apology) or education and formation in the faith (exhortation). For that reason, the five chapters in this volume are arranged according to ancient literary forms: wisdom literature, apologies, letters, exhortations, and apocalypses. While most of these writings present themselves as letters in

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the broadest sense of the word (with such standard elements as sender, receiver, greeting, body, and farewell), the style and content very often point to a more dominant genre or genres. For example, while the Epistle of James clearly takes the form of a letter, much of the content contains marked similarities to earlier Jewish “wisdom literature.”

Each chapter in the book contains two parts. The first part addresses the canonical texts (those writings that came to be included in the New Testament). The second part treats a number of similar extracanonical writings (those works belonging to the category of the Apostolic Fathers). For each chapter, twice as much space is given to the New Testament writings. Outlines of the canonical and extracanonical books are provided along with an overview of the historical settings (author, audience, date, and place of composition) and the occasion of the texts. Major themes, including the theology and ethics of these canonical and extracanonical writings, are also discussed.

The Subject Matter and Organization of This Book

The Catholic Epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation contains five chapters arranged according to the predominant theme and structure of these writings. Listed below is a general definition of each genre and the New Testament writings and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers assigned to each chapter:

	Theme or Genre	New Testament Books	Noncanonical Books
Chapter 1	Wisdom: Literature characterized by instructions, admonitions, and moral sayings that emphasize the right way of living.	Letter of James	The <i>Didache</i>

Continued

The Subject Matter *Continued*

	Theme or Genre	New Testament Books	Noncanonical Books
Chapter 2	Apologies: Rooted in the Greek word <i>apologia</i> , meaning “speaking in defense,” works of this type are not apologetic in the modern sense, but typically defend an idea or tradition to outsiders.	The First Letter of Peter	The seven letters of Ignatius <i>The Martyrdom of Polycarp</i> <i>The Apology of Quadratus</i> <i>The Epistle to Diognetus</i>
Chapter 3	Letters: Private or public written communication characterized by an opening, a body, and a farewell.	The First Letter of John The Second Letter of John The Third Letter of John The Second Letter of Peter The Letter of Jude	<i>First Clement</i> Polycarp's <i>Epistle to the Philippians</i>
Chapter 4	Exhortations: Written or oral communication intended to persuade, educate, and form its recipients.	The Book of Hebrews	<i>The Epistle of Barnabas</i> <i>Second Clement</i>

Continued

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The Subject Matter <i>Continued</i>			
	Theme or Genre	New Testament Books	Noncanonical Books
Chapter 5	Apocalypses: Derived from the Greek word <i>apocalypsis</i> , meaning "revelation," these works often focus on end time (end of the world) scenarios.	The Revelation of John	The <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i> The <i>Apocalypse of Peter</i>

Studying the last nine books of the New Testament alongside the writings of the Apostolic Fathers highlights a historical and comparative approach to texts that shaped Christianity in the late-first century through the mid-second century.