

BOOK REVIEW

David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). xii + 224 pp. Pbk. US\$17.00.

David Dungan is a widely known advocate of the Griesbach hypothesis and, related to that, a staunch opponent of Q. In 1975 he wrote an article, 'The New Testament Canon in Recent Study' (*Interpretation* 29 [1975], pp. 339-51) in which he showed his more direct research interest in issues of Scripture and canon in Christian origins. His concluding comments and questions spell out the focus of the book he has published 32 years later, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament (CB)*. In commenting upon Hans von Campenhausen's standard *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Dungan writes in his article,

The only shortcoming of the book I will mention here is that although Von Campenhausen rightly stresses the importance of tradition and loyalty to authority in the early Christian church, he nowhere successfully demonstrates that this necessarily entails the conscious creation of a canon of sacred writings. Although Von Campenhausen has seen more sharply than most what 'canon' means in its strictest sense, even he has not yet realized how peculiar a thing it is for a religion to canonize some of its writings. No other religion, save Judaism...and Islam...have done this—yet most of them have plenty of sacred writings...and experience revelation much as it is found in Christianity. Why is this? (p. 350).

Dungan then includes a lengthy quote from Wilhelm Schneemelcher about the significance and meaning of the word 'canon' in Greek and Hellenistic contexts—'canon' as standard and rule of perfection and ideal in relation to many things ('The History of the New Testament Canon', in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* [W. Schneemelcher (ed.); trans. R.M. Wilson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963] I, pp. 21-28 [21-22]). Following the Schneemelcher quote, Dungan concludes the article with,

Unfortunately, Schneemelcher does not go on to probe this extraordinarily clear-sighted clue into the wider cultural factors and motivations behind the Great Church's obsession with its own 'canon' ... How does the New Testament canon fit into the wider Hellenistic world's craving for 'canon', so that Jewish rabbis, Christian bishops, and Hellenistic philosophers are all busily forging canons, denouncing rival canons, and in general all acting very much alike? (b) What is the difference between 'scripture' and 'canon?' (pp. 350-51).

The first chapter of *CB*, 'What a "Canon" of Scripture Is—and Is Not', essentially drives home the distinction between scripture(s) and a canon of scriptures; following in the tradition of Albert Sundberg. Dungan emphasizes the rarity of the phenomenon of a canon of scriptures. Scripture or sacred writing(s) refers 'to a semidurable, semifluid, slowly evolving conglomeration of sacred texts (not by any means necessarily all in written form) in use by members of a religious tradition over hundreds or even thousands of years' (p. 2). For Dungan,

a canon results when someone seeks to impose a strict boundary around a smaller subset of writings or teachings within the larger, slowly evolving 'cloud of sacred texts'. Any effort to promulgate the new subset with the force of law creates an immediate tension between the new subset and the powerful, living religion surrounding it. The fixed boundary requires strenuous official efforts to enforce it. Efforts to prevent additions or deletions often fail, however, since it is the nature of sacred scripture to grow and change along with the changing religious situation... In terms of the history of Christianity, a canon of scripture...did not appear until church officials, acting under the guidance of the highest levels of the Roman government, met together on several occasions to create a rigid boundary around the approved texts (p. 3).

Dungan concludes the first chapter by explaining that such a canon-phenomenon within Christianity belongs to the fourth and fifth centuries. He aims to assess this canon-phenomenon in early Christianity within its cultural and political contexts.

In the second chapter, 'The Greek *Polis* and the Demand for Accuracy', Dungan seeks to trace the rise of the ancient Greek city-state, in which context he contends '*kanon* first became an important category' (p. 11). He focuses on the rise of the city-state and its accompanying structures for ensuring order, especially laws and features tending toward a democratic structure of government. Dungan notes, 'A striking feature of the new democratic rhetoric was the frequency with which the carpenter's ruler or canon (*kanon*) was used as a

metaphor for accuracy, definiteness, and truth' (p. 14). Furthermore, Dungan argues that 'canon' became a metaphor for *mathematically* based conceptions of order and precision. People began conceiving of ideals for order, perfection and accuracy for society and government in such mathematical ways. They soon sought ways of doing philosophy and understanding life that fit in with this mathematical quest for order, perfection and accuracy. Dungan ends the second chapter with,

The radical innovation of the *polis* was thus a part of a larger cultural revolution, characterized by a penchant for mathematically based precision in various fields of human relations. Alexander the Great and his armies carried the Greek *polis* ideology and Greek 'philosophy' across the length and breadth of western Asia, from Egypt to the Indus River. To the extent that Hellenism penetrated the host cultures in the many cities he refounded, the radically different Greek *polis* concepts, methods, values, and institutions replaced the traditional monarchy-oriented political structures, along with the rituals and social elites that went with them. Of course, none of this happened smoothly and evenly everywhere... Alexander often had to enforce...with the sword (p. 19).

This section of Dungan's book serves as the primary framework within which his overall aim in *CB* will take shape. As I indicated at the start, Dungan desires to set the early Christian canon-phenomenon within a broader cultural-ideological context. Along these lines, again, the second chapter sets out the broad horizon within which his more specific articulations, which constitute the remainder of *CB*, are to be understood.

The conclusion of the second chapter, with its reference to Alexander the Great and the Hellenization of the East, primes the reader for where Dungan goes in the third chapter. Broadly, he aims to explore the presence of such '*polis* ideology' in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. Dungan detects, 'the clearest signs of Greek polis ideology during the first century C.E. in the rise to power of the quasilegal, quasicultic, quasipolitical movement known as Pharisaism, with its two 'schools of thought' (Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel) and its prominent chain of succession' (p. 21). Dungan asserts that, especially by the second century, one begins to see 'Greek styles of argument' in the descendants of these groups, as they focus upon sacred writings in the Synagogue. Turning to the early Church, Dungan finds such *polis* ideological influence in the name Christians gave their assemblies, *ekklesia*, along with their election of a council of rulers. Noting some of the contextual pressures and identity struggles of the early Church, Dungan writes, 'Hence

there arose within the Christian ekklesia powerful impulses towards a greater order and standardization, accompanied by written regulations dealing with church doctrine and church polity' (p. 23).

Dungan walks through some early Church literature showing this tendency, especially a 'general avoiding [of] innovation while adhering strictly to the received doctrine' (p. 24). Dungan sees *I Clement* as exemplary of this tendency. In its cross-congregational setting it was a 'legal brief' defense 'that served to solidify Rome's reputation as a bastion of orthodox church order' (p. 25). Dungan then works through some early Church usage of 'canon', showing the concern for order, truth and accuracy in doctrine and right belief—noting its greater frequency in the second century and beyond (Gal. 6.16; Irenaeus; Tertullian; Clement of Alexandria; Origen). He stresses that in no case does one find 'canon' as a reference to a list of books, but to a 'canon of faith'; 'the central core of the Christian faith' (p. 28). Nor does one find 'canon' with reference to various church rules and regulations prior to the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century. Thus, according to Dungan, one sees Greek *polis* ideology in the early Church.

At first glance the title of *CB*'s fourth chapter, 'The Influence of Greek Philosophy upon Early Christianity', seems to fit better as a title for a multi-volume work. Dungan is specifically concerned to elucidate second- and third-century discussions about sacred writings in intra-Christian polemics—all in the context of the polemical discourse of Greek philosophical schools. He commences by discussing Greek philosophy's desire to establish the actual authors of texts and their authentic texts as part of its 'quest for accuracy in all things'. He examines, briefly, individuals such as Callimachus of Cyrene, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Galen of Pergamum etc.—their literary criticism, their categories of genuine or spurious and sometimes disputed writings and their quest to so divide and classify writings. Dungan observes how Diogenes Laertius reported on various Greek philosophical schools. For Dungan, this serves as a window into ancient Greek conventions for such philosophical polemical discussions. (1) Diogenes Laertius reports the 'state of the question': he did not intend to end discussion about the philosophical school, its founder(s), doctrines, writings and leaders. (2) He followed this order: Founder (biography, summary of main doctrines, list of genuine writings); successors (biographies, doctrines, list of genuine writings). (3) He always listed the genuine writings of founder and successors alike. (4) He

depended upon an objective report of past evidence accepted in his own day—the judgment of recognized experts. (5) He took care to examine the most accurate copies of writings available. (6) Correspondingly, the schools took care to preserve accurate copies in order to ascertain correct interpretation. (7) He trusted the ongoing philosophical discussion rather than the application of external authority to determine questions of interpretation. In other words, he did not appeal to government officials to end the dialogue and to enforce one interpretation (pp. 38-42). From this whole discussion Dungan argues that we see,

a basic three-fold structure: the over-all control mechanism was the school's *succession of heads*, who, generation after generation, handed on the scrupulously *correct texts of genuine writings* from the earliest days of the school, in order to remain true to the *correct interpretation*, i.e., the Truth as that school perceived it. We will need to keep these component parts in mind and remember how they fit together, because each component—true succession, genuine writings (with accurate texts), and accurate interpretation—became focal points of great stress and increasingly bitter disagreement in the Christian church, until they were all unexpectedly resolved by the forceful intervention of the Roman emperor on the side of the orthodox Catholic faction in the fourth century (p. 41; emphasis original).

Thus far Dungan has sketched his understanding of a Greek-philosophical thought world, specific conventions and a general situation. He spends the final 100 pages of *CB* (1) arguing for these as governing the intra-Christian discussions, especially by Eusebius, concerning the writings that eventually constituted the New Testament and (2) describing how Constantine ended the process. Chapters Five and Six cover these two main points, respectively.

Before moving onto the fifth chapter, some further outline of Chapter Four is in order. Following the above quote, Dungan works through some examples of this Greek-philosophical way of understanding philosophical schools and debating as being operative in the early Church—the ‘basic three-fold structure’ of successors who preserve the genuine writings and thus ensure the correct interpretation. He notes Marcion as an early example of one who claims his ‘school’s’ (version of Christianity) legitimacy based upon having the true writings—with interpolations filtered out—of the true successors of the founder. Dungan points to Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus as working within the same type of structure, with all of them leaning especially heavily on true succession. He notes that their arguments also included arguing the

false succession of their opponents, arguing through literary criticism—that their opponents engaged in forgery—and arguing based upon a lack of variation of doctrines within a spread-out Church. All of these functioned together in their arguments for their ‘canon of faith/truth’ understanding and version of Christianity against their opponents (pp. 44-49). Dungan concludes this chapter with a five-page discussion of Origen as ‘an especially clear-cut example of the application of methods and goals of the Greek philosophical school’ (p. 49). He concentrates upon Origen as a literary critic bent on establishing accurate texts.

Chapter Five, ‘Against Pagans and Heretics: Eusebius’ Strategy in Defense of the Catholic Scriptures’, constitutes the centerpiece of Dungan’s overall investigation. He seeks to examine how Eusebius evaluated the Church’s sacred writings and to show that ‘the key terms and methods [he used] he inherited from Origen, Irenaeus, and other orthodox authorities, and, behind them, the Greek philosophical schools’ (p. 61). Dungan commences the chapter with a general description of the proliferation of Christianities throughout the Greco-Roman world by the end of the third century. He then brings up one of the pagan critiques of Christianity at the time, namely ‘that it was impossible to tell what Christians believed, since they disagreed among themselves so completely’ (p. 55). After mentioning Celsus, Dungan discusses Porphyry of Tyre as the recognized deadliest foe of Christianity at this time of the ancient Church. Dungan provides his distillation of Porphyry’s main critiques: Christians reject the Greek cultural heritage for the contemptible one of the Jews, Christians *actually* reject the Jewish heritage, Jews regard them and their Christ with disgust, Christians make a mockery of the teachings of their founder, opposing each other more than outsiders and it is impossible to know what they believe, their sacred writings are ‘riddled with contradictions’ and they alter their writings for theological reasons (p. 57).

Dungan goes on to explain how individuals such as Hierocles took up Porphyry’s criticisms and wrote their own. For Dungan, Hierocles is an example of someone well-connected in the Roman court who had influence over the emperor’s policies. Such ‘polemical writings, amplified by certain provocative actions on the part of Christians at the imperial court, had their desired effect. A flood of imperial rage at the Christians burst over the eastern empire in February 303’ (p. 58).

According to Dungan, this is the context within which Eusebius wrote his apologies for (proto-) Orthodox Christianity and his responses

to Porphyry, which Eusebius and others saw as necessary for their survival. Following others, Dungan sees Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Proof of the Gospel* as responses to some of Porphyry's criticisms. Dungan adds his own creative contribution by claiming that the *Ecclesiastical History* along with *Sections and Canons* served with the previous two major writings as Eusebius's grand response to Porphyry. Specifically, in his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius sought to demonstrate 'the coherence, consistency, and reliability of the orthodox Christian set of sacred writings and of the orthodox interpretation of them' (p. 59). Dungan spends the rest of the chapter (pp. 61-93) seeking to demonstrate his claim by working through various sections of the *Ecclesiastical History*, including 3.25.1-7—the well-known sacred writings 'list'. Again, for Dungan, Eusebius functioned within the Greek-philosophical schools' discourse on authenticity as Eusebius inherited it from Irenaeus, Origen and others. Dungan notes how Eusebius lays special stress on establishing writings as authenticated by bishops and leaders within 'true' chains of succession. These true chains of succession also relate to Eusebius's understanding of true Christianity, against which he judges other forms of Christianity and writings. Thus Eusebius, relying on the opinions of experts (within the true chains of succession) as to authentic writings and their interpretation, functions within the broad Greek-philosophical schools' world of discourse and self-legitimizing conventions. Dungan also notes the supposedly open-ended character of Eusebius's discussion. Eusebius does not intend to give a last word but the state of the discussion (p. 92). Questions or criteria of divination, inspiration and martyrdom did not factor into Eusebius's discussion and analysis of sacred writings.

In the final main chapter, 'An Emperor Intervenes: Constantine Reshapes Catholic Christianity and its Scriptures', Dungan explores how 'the vibrant, active, free atmosphere' (p. 123) of discussion and polemics between various forms of early Christianities came to an end. Christianity became standardized and legalized. Canon began to refer to a *final* official list of books as well as to canon laws/regulations within the Church, all ensuring uniformity and conformity. With the advent of Constantine,

what had been the persecuted Church of the Martyrs underwent a period of *rapid enculturation* during which it shed its original antagonistic, otherworldly posture in favor of the values, concerns, and—if it is not

putting the matter too strongly—the god of mighty Rome. Catholic theology and church politics became thoroughly imbued with Roman imperial ideology (p. 95; emphasis original).

Dungan provides a helpful historical review of the rise of Constantine to power and his relationship with Christianity(ies). Dungan focuses upon how Constantine sought to merge Christianity with his Roman Empire's goals and to use Christianity for the purpose of unifying and sustaining the Empire. Dungan gives a concise discussion of Constantine's role as a functional leader of the Church along with his motivations and actions to bring about a more standardized and unified version of Christianity for the sake of the Empire. In the end this resulted in the version of Christianity with which Constantine sided becoming the legal version of Christianity—thus ensuring the official triumph of the proto-orthodox. Dungan seeks to tie in the official ending of scripture-canon discussions with such actions by Constantine. Dungan sees Constantine's impact on the Church as

clos[ing] down what had been a thriving, sometimes heated, and fundamentally beneficial controversy over the authentic writings of the apostles and the correct interpretation of them... after Constantine ordered his Bibles and Eusebius proudly filled the order, the evidence shows that the debate over 'true' and authentic scripture simply withered up and practically disappeared' (pp. 120, 122).

Dungan concludes this final main chapter with,

In short, the former, vibrant, active, free atmosphere has disappeared. Gone, as well, is any flexibility to understand the person of Christ in different ways and still remain within the broader Christian movement... The church of Jesus Christ, hailed as the 'Prince of Peace', was offered recourse to the imperial sword—and took it, gladly. No longer would it have to give reasoned, honest replies to difficult questions from critics and fellow theologians; now it could simply compel agreement and punish disagreement. When it began to use the sword against its enemies, the 'heresies'...the church thus became twisted and lost its way (pp. 123, 125).

In his fourteen page epilogue Dungan briefly discusses canonization within Islam and Judaism. This brings him back to one of his earlier points—a canon of sacred writings is a rare phenomenon in world religions. He extols Martin Luther as a man who broke free from the 'canonical strait-jacket'. Luther held James and Revelation, for example, on a lower level than Romans and Galatians. Dungan works

through what he considers to be the enlightenment assault on the canon and proposes that the Church should go back to the freedom from having a canon and resume the dialogical posture seen in Eusebius, which Dungan views positively.

At the end of Dungan's book are several helpful appendixes: 'References in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* to Early Christian Writings', 'Writings Considered "Scripture" by One Group or Another Christian Group' (a list), 'The Library from Nag Hammadi' (a list), and 'Timeline of Figures and Events Discussed in the Text'. He also includes a select bibliography at the end of the book along with a general index, mentioning subjects along with ancient and modern authors and key Greek words. The first 139 pages constitute the main text of the book while the final 83 are end-notes, appendixes, bibliography and indexes.

In short, my assessment of the book is *yes and no*. Concerning the final main chapter, Dungan seems to be somewhat correct about the dynamic of the Church's relation to the Empire. To oversimplify, one large part of the Church did shift from 'officially' marginalized to marginalizer, with the shape and dynamic of its piety changing dramatically. That said, it seems that one must be careful about making the individual versions of Christianity prior to this time sound much more 'open-minded' than they actually were. Though they did not have official legal power to stamp out competing and unacceptably different versions of Christianity, many second- and third-century Christians who engaged in polemics were arguably just as 'closed-minded' as the supposedly more closed-minded official Church after Constantine. Dungan seems very driven to present an idyllic open-minded Church, free from the straight-jacket of the canon, prior to Constantine, *over and against* the legalized and constricted closed-minded official state-church of Constantine and beyond.

Also, caution is in order in the face of claims that the whole, or most of, the ancient Church radically changed, almost immediately, with the advent of Constantine and his later actions and policies. One cannot tell such a narrative of immediate wide-ranging change across the early Church and/or assign it to such a simple and single cause. Constantine heavily impacted the Church. The Church, the shape of its piety, and its relation to the state all underwent massive transformations associated with Constantine. Even so, one must also account for how such changes worked out slowly across various regions and at local levels. I imagine

Dungan agrees with these points. Such agreement does not, however, manifest itself in *CB*.

Related to this, the incorporation of Christianity into the official politics of the Roman Empire, and the resulting movements towards uniformity, certainly impacted the broader establishment of a more common set of scriptures and eventually a canon of scriptures. One of Dungan's main theses is much more bold and specific: Constantine and his political efforts actively determined and basically set the final canon of Christian Scripture. From my point of view Dungan fails to prove this specific point. In the section where *CB*'s discussions supposedly converge on this point, 'Constantine's Influence on the Selection of Scripture' (pp. 118-25), Dungan does not really flesh out the connection between Constantine's political and ecclesiastical activities and the closing of the canon. Rather, his argument turns on the logic that if Constantine used his power and authority to enforce his version of Christianity and church practice for the sake of unity, surely he would have done the same in the area of the sacred writings—or at least his activities must have also decisively and almost immediately impacted the establishment of the canon. Dungan offers only two pieces of evidence to illustrate this connection, upon which his bold thesis depends. First, there is evidence of Constantine creating an index of banned books and ordering the books of heretics to be searched out and destroyed. Dungan moves from here to his observation that Constantine thus shut down the 'thriving, sometimes heated, and fundamentally beneficial controversy over the authentic writings' (p. 120). Secondly, Constantine ordered fifty Bibles from Eusebius. From here Dungan asserts, 'after Constantine ordered his Bibles and Eusebius proudly filled the order, the evidence shows that the debate over "true" and authentic scripture simply withered up and practically disappeared' (p. 122).

Again, this logic and evidence does not convince me of Dungan's bold thesis that Constantine's activities essentially established the canon. Neither Eusebius nor any other ancient source indicates what writings constituted 'Constantine's Bible', copies of which he ordered from Eusebius, referenced in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* 4.36 ('fifty copies of the sacred Scriptures'). Since we do not know the contents of these copies of 'sacred Scripture', how can Dungan connect them and Constantine's activities to the closing of the 27-book New Testament canon? Eusebius himself only has 19 (or 20, if we include Revelation)

writings listed as ‘authentic’ in 3.25.1-7 of his *Ecclesiastical History*. In fact, a stream of contemporary scholarship understands the fifty ordered copies of ‘sacred Scripture’ in the *Life of Constantine* to mean codices of just the Four Gospels. Furthermore, Dungan’s bold thesis leaves the impression that the canon was essentially settled by the beginning to middle of the fourth century. The evidence from the ancient world, however, indicates that the collections of scriptures used by various groups—beyond a wide-spread core of writings including four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, some form(s) of a collection of ‘Paul’ etc.—continued to vary across various Christian groups for centuries. Dungan recognizes this to some extent. Yet he still asserts that *later* canon-lists, which stand closer to the 27-book New Testament collection, somehow support his thesis of Constantine shutting down debate at a time earlier than those lists. So, it is true that the fourth century saw a much greater uniformity in the area of accepted scriptures and even the proliferation of canon-lists in the early Church. Furthermore, the enshrining of a version of Christianity as the official Roman political religion by Constantine and his ecclesial-political activities surely impacted the discussions and enforcement of what writings would functionally be Scripture. It is not the case, however, that all or most, sacred-writing diversity, even among the so-called orthodox, was over. Dungan has not concretely shown that Constantine’s activities essentially established the canon. Perhaps Dungan’s work could be better seen to show that Constantine’s ecclesial-political activities helped establish a new, or at least seriously modified, matrix within which the scriptural fluidity would continue and eventually solidify into a more or less final shape in later centuries. Thus Constantine and his ecclesial-political activities had a general impact on the canon-formation and solidification process. It was not, however, the immediate, process-ending impact that Dungan seems to present. Dungan fails to persuade me that, ‘It is possible to say exactly when a canon of scripture was created in... Christianity’ (p. 3) and that this moment coincides with Constantine’s more aggressive ecclesial-political actions.

I appreciate Dungan’s attempt to set Eusebius’s discussions and aims within a broader cultural context, especially with respect to Greek-philosophical discourse and the challenges of foes such as Porphyry. He adequately illustrates the importance of questions of authorship, authenticity and true succession—questions and concerns directly out of the self-legitimizing discourse of Eusebius’s context—in Eusebius’s

writings and the discourse of the early Church. That said, I wonder how consciously Eusebius and Origen, for example, were about participating in a philosophical discourse versus simply living and working in the understood conventions of their contexts. I should also note how complex the study of Porphyry is; Dungan acknowledges this. Even though Porphyry clearly loomed large in the minds of Eusebius and many other early Christians, I am not convinced that Eusebius was as explicitly responding to Porphyry in all of his major works as Dungan holds. I do find the suggestion intriguing. To what extent, though, was Porphyry an example of common criticism to which Eusebius would have been responding? To be fair, Dungan is not ignorant of these questions and concerns. Again, I do appreciate Dungan's creative attempt to provide more detailed historical and discursive contexts within which to understand Eusebius's work.

Throughout the book, but especially in Chapter Four, Dungan rightly situates his examination of scripture-canon discussions within the larger context of 'orthodoxy and heresy' issues of early Christian (and Jewish) groups. In relation to discussions of authentic writings, Dungan shows sensitivity to how the conventions of Greek-philosophical school discourse function as part of a larger issue for various groups: their struggles to forge and to legitimate their identities. These struggles are only understandable as part of their larger socio-cultural, religious and political contexts. Dungan thus rightly situates the scripture-canon concerns as part of the larger cultural discourse of group self-legitimation. From the point of view of the ancient groups, the polemics concerned not simply 'which writings?' Rather, the polemics centered on 'which writings-as-correctly-interpreted-by-this-group?' thus legitimating 'this version' of Christianity. Concerning the impact of the discourse of Greek philosophical schools on early Jewish and Christian heresiology, surprisingly, some important works do not appear in the endnotes of the otherwise well-documented *CB*, for example, Shaye Cohen's seminal article, 'A Virgin Defiled: Some Rabbinic and Christian Views on the Origins of Heresy' (*Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36 [1980], pp. 1-11) and Alain le Boulluec's work, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe-IIIe siècles* (2 vols.; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985).

Though I have several further objections on the level of details for *CB*, I applaud Dungan's discussion of cultural-political contexts within which we must understand the eventual canon of sacred writings and its

function. Dungan's stress on the rareness of a canon as a religious phenomenon and his framing questions in terms of comparative religious study add to *CB*'s appeal. As a popular, undergraduate or seminary level book, *CB* is an excellent contribution to the discussion of the New Testament canon. It reflects Dungan's extensive knowledge of primary sources. Dungan's thirty to forty years of research have brought forth mature fruit in *CB*, ripe for feeding the minds and discussions of the next generation of college and seminary students.

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