

## The Canon and Text of Scripture

P.J. Williams, 29/1/08

### The Canon of the Old Testament

#### Prologue to Ecclesiasticus

You are therefore asked to read this book with good will and to show indulgence in those places where, notwithstanding our efforts at interpretation, we may seem to have failed to give an adequate rendering of this or that expression; the fact is that there is no equivalent for things originally written in Hebrew when it is a question of translating them into another language.

#### 2 Maccabees 15:37–8

I shall bring my own work to an end here too. If it is well composed and to the point, that is just what I wanted. If it is worthless and mediocre, that is all I could manage.

### The Canon of the New Testament

#### Irenaeus:

John, the disciple of the Lord, the one who leaned back on his bosom, gave forth his gospel while he was living at Ephesus in Asia. (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1)

As there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four universal winds, and as the church is dispersed over all the earth, and the gospel is the pillar and base of the church, and the breath of life, so it is natural that it should have four pillars, breathing immortality from every quarter and kindling human life anew. Whence it is manifest that the Word, the architect of all things, who sits upon the cherubim and holds all things together, having been manifested to mankind, has given us the gospel in fourfold form, but held together by one Spirit... (*Against Heresies* 3.11.8)

#### Irenaeus on the Catholic faith:

The churches planted in Germany have not believed or handed down anything different, nor yet the churches among the Iberians or the Celts, nor those in the east, nor yet in Egypt and Libya, nor those established in the centre of the world. (*Against Heresies* 1.10.2)

### Alleged Contenders for Canonicity

#### 1. Gospel of Thomas

These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down. (logion 1)

Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a

living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.’ (logion 114)

## 2. Shepherd of Hermas

The Muratorian Canon says it was

...written by Hermas in the city of Rome quite recently, in our own times, when his brother Pius occupied the bishop’s chair in the church of the city of Rome.

(Bishop Pius overlapped with emperor Antoninus Pius, AD 138–161)

## 3. Epistle of Barnabas

But I not as a teacher, but as one of you will show you a few things by which you may rejoice in your present circumstances. (1.8)

## 4. First Epistle of Clement

Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. What did he first write to you at the beginning of his preaching? With true inspiration he charged you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had made yourselves partisans. (47.1–3)

# The Text of the New Testament

### *Major Collections of New Testament Manuscripts*

**Cambridge 72** (14th in World) U.L., Trinity, Westminster, etc.

Jerusalem 146

**Oxford 158**

Sinai 230

St Petersburg 233

**London 271**

Rome 367

Paris 373

Athens 419

Mt Athos 900

### *By Age:*

Manchester: parts of John 18 (< AD 150)

Dublin: parts of Romans–1 Thessalonians, Hebrews (AD 200) Oxford: parts of Matthew 3, 5 and 26 (AD 200)

London: first complete N.T. (AD 350)

### *Early Translations include:*

Latin, Syriac, Coptic (Egyptian), Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Anglo-Saxon