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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

### I

ANY DISCUSSION about the Canon of Scripture demands a definition and an explanation at the beginning. The definition concerns the meaning of the term "Canon", and the explanation is a statement of the grounds on which we look for a Canon at all.

The first known application of the actual word *κανών* to the Bible is in Athanasius's *Decrees of the Synod of Nicaea*, written soon after A.D. 350, where the *Shepherd* of Hermas is described as *μη̄ ὄν ἐκ τοῦ κανόνος*, i.e. not belonging to the Canon. A few years later, Athanasius speaks of the Scriptures as *κανονιζόμενα*. The word *κανών* means originally a measuring-rod, and is borrowed from some Semitic language. The Hebrew *קָנֶה* (*qāneh*) means a reed, and is used of the measuring-rod in Ezek. xl. 3. In practice, the word has several metaphorical uses. The two that concern us are (a) the norm or rule that regulates and tests, and (b) a list or index. The origin of the former meaning is clear: it is simply taking the idea of the measuring-rod into a wider province. The latter meaning probably arises from the line of marks on a measuring-rod to denote varying distances. Hence comes the idea of a marked list. Souter in his *Text and Canon of the New Testament*, pp. 154-6, believes that the word was first applied to Scripture in the sense of a list of books, but that it quickly became bound up with the other idea of the books that were normative and regulative for the Christian.

Now we are not so much concerned with the actual use of the word "Canon" as with the idea that it conveys. For it is obvious, as Souter says, that "the idea of a Canon is much older than the word in that sense". And the idea is certainly pre-Christian. To whatever extent the limits of the Jewish Canon were debated before the time of Christ, the existence and use of the LXX version proves that certain Jewish writings were regarded as forming a set of authoritative Scriptures.

Thus, in order to try to define what we are now attempting to discuss, we can say that we are dealing with the idea that a certain set of books is outstanding above any other books. The reason why they are outstanding is that they form the canon,

norm or standard which should regulate all religious experience, and by which all religious experience should be tested. Whilst in theory one might have a canon of books that would be normative for mathematics or physics, we are looking for the Canon that is normative in the sphere of religion.

## II

So much for an attempt to define what we mean by the Canon of Scripture. But what right have we to expect such a Canon at all?

The answer to this question arises from the fact of the existence of God and of the religious experience of man. Obviously, if there is no God, the question of revelation does not arise at all. But once we assume the existence of God—and we have valid grounds for doing so—the religious gropings of mankind suggest that God has made us to have fellowship with Himself. If this is true, then presumably He has somewhere revealed Himself to us or does somewhere reveal Himself to us now. Otherwise He is no more than the eternal Jester, creating men and women with appetites but refusing to create the food that their appetites demand.

But the moment we have reached this conclusion, the question of a Canon forces itself upon us. The Canon may be as wide as the human mind, or it may be as narrow as a single sentence. That is, any human mind at any moment may know the will of God directly; the words and writings, then, of any sincere religious mind will be normative and regulative in the sphere of religion. On the other hand, God might have spoken no more than a single sentence: such a word as “Man, know thyself!” might be all that man requires in the way of religious guidance.

Quite obviously the first canon—if it can be called a canon at all—is altogether too wide to be true. Apart from the conflicting views of God that emerge from the different religions of history, we all know the impossibility of discovering the voice of God directly, however sincerely we try. On the other hand, to attempt to reduce the revelation of God to a sentence or two appears to be unworthy of God. Whilst souls have been saved through a single text, they have grown in the knowledge of God only through considerably more than one. If God has revealed Himself at all, He has presumably revealed Himself adequately.

There is no clear evidence that God is still revealing Himself in an authoritative and normative way to-day. *Science and Health* and *The Book of Mormon* and *The Scripts of Cleopas* do not impress us as being the voice of the living God. That may, of course, be due to prejudice. But before accepting any of them, it is worth turning back to see whether there exists any set of books that appears to form such a Canon as we feel ought to exist. If it does, then I shall have something by which to guide my religious strivings; and if I make some statement about God, or recommend some belief to you, you are in duty bound to set what I say against the Canon. If my statement then appears to be greater or less than what Scripture says, you must not adjust Scripture to my statement, but adjust my statement to Scripture.

### III

In our search for a Canon amongst the religious books of the world, we notice that the Subject of one set of writings is outstanding in the whole process of history. We are brought face to face with the Person of Jesus Christ. Even those who will not recognise his Deity are prepared to admit His uniqueness, and to regard Him as a special revelation of God. To spend time here arguing for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ would be beside the point. I must frankly leap the gap in the argument and come down on the Christian conclusion that our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God—that He is God made Man. If this is so, the writings that are bound up with Him must also belong to the revelation of God. The reason for this is that, apart from the writings, we do not know how to judge Christ aright. Possible allusions to Him as a person of history in Tacitus and Josephus do not help us in the least. Even if I try to get into touch with Him on the basis of some vague historical allusion, I shall in all probability remain in the dark. God's revelation of Himself in a Person demands an equal revelation of that Person in a book.

Now the interesting thing is that Jesus Christ stands as the mountain-top of two religions, and each of these religions has a set of writings bound up with it. Up one side of the mountain winds the Jewish track, unfolding all the time fresh views of the summit that is its final end. Then down the other side sweeps the Christian path, which is there not because of itself but because of the glories of that peak from which it runs.

Jesus Christ in fact is linked in history by two sets of Scriptures—one that preceded Him and prepared for His coming, and the other that told of Him and interpreted Him after He had come.

If then Jesus Christ is the centre of everything, it is important to discover His attitude towards the Canon of Scripture as it already existed in His day. If we can discover the Canon that He accepted, we shall at least know what to accept and what to reject of the Jewish sacred writings. Our Old Testament Canon must be the one that He accepted.

Fortunately, it is not too difficult to discern what that Canon was. It was the Canon of official Judaism of His day. As a Jew, Jesus was brought up to know and love the Jewish Scriptures. He frequently quotes them, and in argument regards them as final. He said that He Himself did not come to destroy them, but to fulfil them (Matt. v. 17); and both before His death and after His resurrection He declared that His experiences had been foretold there. He handed on this same outlook to the Early Church. Now, here is an important point. Jesus Christ accused the Jews of many things, but on no occasion did He accuse them of having a faulty Canon of Scripture. In arguing from the Scriptures He and they met on common ground.

It is thus not necessary for us to be able to demonstrate that Christ quoted from any book before we can regard it as part of the Old Testament Canon. It is sufficient to show that He did not quote, or at any rate did not quote as authoritative, any book that was outside the recognised Canon. And so far as our present New Testament goes, He is never recorded as quoting in this way from any other known book.

But it does rest with us to show that the Jewish Canon of Christ's day was identical with our present Old Testament Canon. External evidence suggests that it was, that it did not include the Apocrypha.

In order to make our witnesses clear, we must first notice that the traditional Jewish division of the Hebrew Bible (that is our Old Testament) is into twenty-four books. This number is made up of (a) the Five Books of the *Torah* or Law; (b) the *Nebhi'im* or Prophets, consisting of the Four Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the Four Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve [Minor]

Prophets); and (c) the *Kethubhim* or Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles). It is impossible to include the Apocrypha and still have twenty-four.

This tradition of twenty-four books can be traced back to between A.D. 81 and 96. In the Apocryphal 4 Esdras xiv. 19-48 there is a fabulous story of Ezra dictating ninety-four books, after the originals had been destroyed, and being told to publish twenty-four of them. The books are not specified, but the number twenty-four must be more than a coincidence.

Josephus in his *Contra Apionem*, about A.D. 100, has his own division into twenty-two books, which he divides into five books of Moses, thirteen books of history, and four books of hymns to God and practical precepts to men. In all probability he joins Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah. At first sight we might think that the total of twenty-two was reached by omitting the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, but it seems that these would both be necessary to make up Josephus's third division of hymns and practical precepts. The four books he includes under this head must be Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. A possible reason for Josephus's choice of a total of twenty-two rather than twenty-four is that twenty-two corresponds to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

So far as formal definition goes, in A.D. 90 a Council of Jewish rabbis at Jamnia discussed the question of the Canon, and decided in favour of the books that form our present Old Testament. To speak of this Council as deciding may, however, give a wrong impression. The Council did not meet with the idea of picking out a number of books from a queue of applicants for canonicity. So far as we can tell, it merely concerned itself with the decision of whether the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, which were already commonly regarded as within the Canon, should remain. It was not a question of nominating or adding any book, but of retaining two that already had claims to be there. The Council of Jamnia was the confirming of public opinion, not the forming of it.

Now, admittedly, the Lord Jesus Christ lived within the first thirty years of the century, while the evidence that I have referred to comes from the last twenty years. But there is not the slightest hint of any change of ideas during the intervening years.

There were discussions among the Jews during this time as to whether Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and Esther should be retained, but, as at Jamnia, the problem was dealt with from the point of view of retention rather than admission; that is, they were inside the room already, not standing in the street.

#### IV

What then are we to say about the Apocrypha? It is often said that the Apocrypha was accepted by the Jews of Alexandria in the time of Christ. This rests solely on assumption, and not on proof. It is particularly noteworthy that the liberal Alexandrian Jew, Philo, whose date is 20 B.C.—A.D. 50, quotes a number of Old Testament books, but never the Apocrypha.

The books commonly called the Apocrypha occur in MSS. of the LXX, intermingled with the Old Testament books. Our MSS. of the LXX date from about A.D. 350 onwards, and are all from Christian sources. We do not possess any Jewish MS. of the LXX. Thus it cannot be safely argued that the Jews, whether in Alexandria or in Palestine, ever accepted these books as part of Scripture. The evidence of Philo and Josephus suggests that they did not. But their inclusion may well be due to the uncritical judgment of certain Christians, who felt that anything Jewish could be taken at its face value.

In thinking of the LXX as the Bible of the Early Church, one must dismiss altogether the idea of a carefully bound volume of so many books. The Churches would possess separate rolls of individual books, or groups of shorter books, and it would be easy for other separate religious rolls, also written in Greek, to pass as genuine Scriptures. But some of the more enlightened Fathers of the Church endeavoured to check up on the genuine Canon, and such men as Justin Martyr (*d.* A.D. 164), Tertullian (200), Origen (254) and Jerome (400) accepted only the books that we recognise to-day. Origen might be quoted on the other side on the ground of what he says in his *Letter to Africanus*. But a careful reading of this letter shows that Origen is really a witness for the Palestinian Canon, and thus is consistent with what he says elsewhere. For in writing to Africanus he is maintaining the genuineness of the Additions to Daniel. He is not dealing with the Apocrypha as a whole. His contention is that these additions, contained in the LXX, must have been in the original Hebrew, though the Jews suppressed them. Africanus

had pointed out on sound philological grounds that these sections were originally composed in Greek, not in Hebrew. Origen, in a way unworthy of a scholar, sweeps the evidence aside. But the importance of the letter is that it shows that the Hebrew Palestinian Canon was regarded as the criterion both by Africanus and by Origen.

There is, however, one further point to be considered. In calling our witnesses, we have not called the writers of the New Testament. Yet they too are important, since they come nearer to the time of Christ than do the Jewish witnesses. Their testimony is almost wholly on the side of our present Old Testament Canon. They quote from practically every book at some time or other, and generally in a way that implies that they recognize its authority—that is to say, they frequently do more than quote by way of reminiscence and aptness, as we might quote from Shakespeare. Now they do not quote from the Apocrypha in the same way as they do from the Old Testament. It is generally agreed that they knew some of the books of the Apocrypha, and that certain of their expressions and phrases may be due to reminiscences of the Apocrypha, as, for example, Rom. i. 18–32 may contain reminiscences of Wisdom xii–xiv. But such reminiscences are no more than we ourselves use when we allow the phraseology of a hymn to colour an idea or expression. If, then, the New Testament writers knew the Apocrypha, and yet did not quote it as Scripture, it is clear that they did not regard it as having the authority of Scripture.

In view of the evidence of the New Testament writers and of the Fathers, it is certain that the Reformers were right, as against the Council of Trent, in adopting the Hebrew Canon and not the Canon of the LXX.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, one book which, judged by the test of its use in the New Testament, might appear to have a fair claim to rank as canonical. Yet, curiously enough, this book is not even included in our Apocrypha, and does not occur in any version of the LXX, though it forms a part of the Bible of the Ethiopian

<sup>1</sup>Yet in the latest edition of the Douai Bible published in U.S.A., the Rev. H. Schumacher, writing in the introduction, says with regard to the Apocrypha: "Catholics follow the tradition of the Hellenistic Jews on the decisive ground that Christ and the Apostles and the entire early Christian Church by their quotations recognised the Sacred Books of the Jews in the Dispersion, that is, the books of the Greek Septuagint." (The fact that Jerome himself is a witness on the other side is not mentioned in this introduction!) One can only say that this writer misrepresents the facts as much as he does when he says almost immediately afterwards: "Following the example of Luther, Protestants also reject a number of N.T. Books."



Church. This is the Book of Enoch. In R. H. Charles's edition of this book, and in his *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, there is a list of parallels between Enoch and the New Testament. Most of these are no more than reminiscences of language and similarities of phraseology, and quite a number seem to be no more than coincidences arising from familiarity with Old Testament ideas and subjects.<sup>1</sup> With two possible exceptions, the Book of Enoch is not treated in the same way as Scripture, though it seems that some of the New Testament writers knew it as a religious writing and that this knowledge is reflected in occasional adaptations of its phraseology.

I mentioned two possible exceptions, and these must be considered. The first is Christ's use of the title "The Son of Man" in an apocalyptic sense. A fair case can be made out for the influence of Enoch on this title. Dan. vii. 13 speaks of a figure "like a son of man"—that is, in the context, a man, as opposed to the beasts that Daniel had previously seen. Enoch, on the other hand, speaks of a heavenly figure with the title "The Son of Man". In chapters xlvi–lxix he appears to be a pre-existent Messianic figure, but in lxx–lxxi it is likely, as Otto maintains in *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man*, that Enoch discovers that it is he himself who is to fulfil the rôle of the Son of Man. Charles, writing earlier than Otto, does not accept this interpretation; but Otto has the advantage of taking the text as it stands, while Charles relies on emendation. If Otto is correct, Jesus Christ obviously did not take the title from Enoch, and thus identify Himself with Enoch.

But, ignoring this particular interpretation of chapters lxx and lxxi, we notice that much of Enoch's picture is drawn from Daniel. The question is whether Christ drew His use of the title from Enoch or from Daniel. Now, although Daniel does not use the Aramaic *status emphaticus* to denote the figure whom he sees, and thus his phrase "a son of man" (*bar enash*) is simply equivalent to "a man", yet the figure has an individuality, and would be appreciated by the Jewish mind as a mysterious person who had some connection with the time of the end. Thus, if Christ used the term "The Son of Man" in an apocalyptic

<sup>1</sup>For example, 1 John 1. 7, "Walk in the light", has a parallel in Enoch's "Walk in eternal light". Both John and Enoch use the phrase "The darkness is past"; and as a parallel to John's command not to love the world Enoch has "Love not any of the good things that are in the world". The Book of Revelation has more reminiscences than any other single book.

context, the mind of the hearer would travel back to Daniel, irrespective of whether he was familiar with Enoch.

Perhaps the key passage in this connection is the scene at the trial before the high priest. When Jesus was put on oath to declare whether He was "the Messiah, the Son of God", He admitted it, and added: "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64). The first clause is an allusion to Ps. cx. 1, the second to Dan. vii. 13; and neither of the clauses has any parallel in Enoch. If on any occasion Christ had used of Himself that other title employed in Enoch of this heavenly being, "The Elect One", then we should have been more inclined to acknowledge His dependence on this book. But, as it is, there is no need to look farther than the Book of Daniel, and it is clear that Christ did not confer canonical status on the Book of Enoch.<sup>1</sup>

But, leaving the testimony of Jesus Christ on one side, there is, of course, one direct quotation from the Book of Enoch in Jude 14: "And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly works which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him'." The quotation comes almost verbatim from Enoch i. 9.

Actually, of course, the question is not simply: Does this quotation occur in the pseudepigraphical book of Enoch? but: Did the genuine Enoch actually say the words or their equivalent? Notice what the quotation actually says. It is not a technical extract from a highly-coloured passage of the book. It boils down to a general statement that God will one day break into the course of world-history with His angels or His saints, to judge the ungodly. If we assume the historicity of Enoch, he was the sort of man to whom we should expect such a revelation to be

<sup>1</sup>The trend of modern scholarship is against the direct dependence upon Enoch, as witness T. W. Manson (*The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 229), Vincent Taylor (*Jesus and His Sacrifice*, p. 26), C. J. Cadoux (*Historic Mission of Jesus*, p. 99), C. H. Dodd (*Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 92), T. F. Glasson (*The Second Advent*, pp. 55f.), etc. Besides, while the section of Enoch known as "The Similitudes" (chapters xxvii-lxxxi), in which this heavenly figure occurs, is dated by Charles 95-79 or 70-64 B.C., others, such as G. H. Dalman (*Words of Jesus*, pp. 242f.), W. Bousset (*Jesus*), N. Schmidt (Art. "Enoch" in *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1937 edition), and T. F. Glasson (op. cit.), date it in the first century A.D.—"say 37-41" (Schmidt). V. H. Stanton in *HDB* iii, 356, suggests that this section is due to Christian influence on Jewish thought, i.e. that it portrays a rival Messiah to Jesus.

made. His rapture was a type of the rapture of the Church at the Second Coming. Was it pure superstition that ascribed several apocalypses to Enoch, or were they ascribed to him because the tradition had been accurately handed down that to him had been given a glimpse of the climax of the ages? I am very much inclined to this latter answer. Obviously Jude quotes from the spurious book of Enoch, but the words that he quotes may be sufficiently accurate summary of what the genuine Enoch actually said.

It is worth noticing that in the Book of Enoch the words come from the introduction of about a dozen verses. This introduction is free from any fanciful ideas, and expands the theme that Jude quotes. It is almost as though the writer was aware of a tradition that Enoch had spoken in general terms of a coming of the Lord in judgment, and he puts this tradition at the forefront of his book before passing to fancies of his own.

Before we leave Jude, there is another quotation in his Epistle, which is said to come from "The Assumption of Moses". It is *v.* 9, with its reference to Michael the archangel contending with the devil about the body of Moses. A full discussion of this verse would need a paper in itself. We can only touch on it briefly now.

We possess a sixth-century A.D. Latin MS. of what is called "The Assumption of Moses", but this quotation does not occur in it. Charles, however, believes that this extant version is really "The Testament of Moses" (referred to once or twice in lists of apocryphal books), with which the now lost "Assumption of Moses" was combined.<sup>1</sup> He dates the books between A.D. 7 and 29. The first extant writing to ascribe Jude's quotation to "The Assumption of Moses" is Origen's *De Principiis* (iii. 2. 1), written about A.D. 225; and other references in Origen, Clement, and Didymus, all of Alexandria, to strange incidents accompanying the death of Moses, make it likely that a book, different from our so-called "Assumption of Moses", was circulating at Alexandria. It is perfectly possible to argue that this book was compiled after Jude, and that Jude's words actually formed the basis of the tradition about Michael.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Charles points out that our present "Assumption", which he believes to be the "Testament", implies that Moses is to die an ordinary death.

<sup>2</sup>Euthalius, Photius and Syncellus say that Paul derived Gal. vi. 16 from a book called *Apocryphum Mosis* (*Ἀποκρυφὸν Μωυσέως*). Charles says in his introduction to "The Assumption of Moses" (p. xvii): "There can be no doubt that the borrowing is just the other way, and that this Apocryph is a Christian composition, of the general contents of which we have no knowledge."

For there is no need to go outside the canonical Scriptures for Jude's reference. In Zech. iii there is the incident where the angel of the Lord rebukes the Satan in precisely the words quoted by Jude. The scene is the accusation of Joshua the high priest, who is seen clothed in filthy garments, and the Satan is there as his adversary. Joshua here seems to stand as the nation's representative. C. H. H. Wright, in his commentary on Zec-hariah, suggests that the phrase "the body of Moses" in Jude is formed on the analogy of "the body of Christ". If the body of Christ is the Christian Church, the body of Moses might be the Jewish Church. A further indication that this was the chapter in Jude's mind is his use of the filthy garment metaphor in *v.* 23 of his Epistle.

Charles finds three other reminiscences of "The Assumption (or Testament) of Moses" in Jude 16. The first is ludicrous. Both use the term "murmurers" or "complainers". The second, about speaking great things, comes from Dan. vii. 8, 20, and there is no proof that Jude here borrowed from the other book. The third, about respect of persons for the sake of gain, comes from Deut. xvi. 19.

It is thus not certain that Jude quotes from "The Assumption of Moses". If he does, and thus canonises it as Scripture, that is unfortunate, because the book that contains the incident referred to by Jude no longer exists.

So much for the Canon of the Old Testament. We accept the books of our present Old Testament as canonical because it is evident that our Lord Jesus Christ accepted them. We reject the Apocrypha because there is no evidence that He accepted it, and every indication that He did not accept it.

## V

When we turn to the Canon of the New Testament, we must again start with our Lord Jesus Christ. If the Old Testament leads up to Him, it is equally true that the New Testament has Him as its source. That is to say, we should expect that, if Christ is the supreme revelation of God, God would provide a further written revelation to unfold His Person and the meaning of His life for us who live long after the time when men saw Him and heard Him and touched Him. Only so can the revelation of Christ in time be the revelation of Christ in every age.

Without doing violence to the text, we can see the promise of a New Testament Canon in John xiv. 36 and xvi. 12f.: "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you . . . I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear; these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come."

I find it difficult to suppose that this is a promise for the whole of the Church age, so that every devout Christian preacher to-day is infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit. If he were, then the Canon of Scripture would still be open, and in fact there need be no Canon at all. One part of the promise at least cannot apply to-day—the promise of a reminder of all that Christ taught. That promise belongs to those who heard Him when He was on earth, and covers the Gospels. But which Gospels? One can only say the four Gospels that we possess, since there are no others that can for one moment compete with them. I venture to say that even the most uninstructed Christian would pick these four if he were asked to say which bore the stamp of authentic inspiration out of the canonical and apocryphal Gospels that we possess to-day.

It would be beyond the scope of our subject now to discuss the relationship between this promise of Christ to those who heard His teaching and the actual compilers of our Gospels, two of whom at least were not numbered among the Twelve. We may, however, assume, without staying to argue the matter, that the actual compilers were conscientious enough to check their records against the memory of eyewitnesses, as Luke in his introduction certainly suggests, and that Christ's promise extended to all eyewitnesses who were so questioned.

The Epistles are covered by the promise that the Holy Spirit would teach the disciples things that Christ had been unable to teach them. Such a promise is reasonable. It is clear that the disciples had a totally inadequate view of Jesus Christ before His death and resurrection. And since His risen and ascended life was to be a more permanent state than His earthly life, it was necessary that there should be an unfolding of this when Christians had the new data upon which to build.

None the less we must face the curious fact that the majority of the Epistles were not written by any of the disciples to whom this promise in the Upper Room was actually made. Peter and John alone have left a record of the teachings that the Holy Spirit inspired them to give, though some would include the Epistle of Jude as by "Judas, not Iscariot". Their Epistles, then, rightly rank as canonical. But let us be clear that these are the only claimants for canonicity from any authors to whom this promise of Christ's was actually made. We are not rejecting any writings by the other ten apostles in favour of epistles by other writers outside the circle of the Twelve. If there were any such epistles, there is no record of them in the literary history of the Church. The so-called "Epistle of the Apostles" is obviously spurious and belongs to c. A.D. 160 (M.R. James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 485).

Either, then, our canonical Epistles must be limited to five or six short letters, or we must recognise that the promised inspiration of the Holy Spirit for teaching purposes extends to more than the circle of the Twelve.

Certainly the New Testament itself encourages us to extend the scope of the promise. For Paul certainly claims to be directly taught by the Holy Spirit. Thus in 1 Cor. ii. 13 he says that he speaks "in words . . . which the Spirit teacheth"; and in 1 Cor. vii, where he sets his own teachings alongside the commands which Christ gave while He was on earth, he concludes with the words: "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God."

Now Paul may have been mistaken in his claim, but if we reject it, and wipe his Epistles out of the Canon, we have seriously impoverished our knowledge of Christ. We should expect a New Testament Canon that approximated to some extent to the Old, but without the Pauline Epistles our Canon is meagre indeed. Besides, if we accept the canonicity of 2 Peter (and I agree that there are difficulties here; but if we do accept it), then 2 Pet. iii. 15f. clinches the matter, when it equates Paul's letters with the inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament by comparing them with "*the other* Scriptures". The use of the words "the other" indicates that Paul's letters are regarded as Scripture.

So far there is no great difficulty about the New Testament Canon. We can show clearly that the Four Gospels, and the

Epistles of Paul, Peter and John are canonical. But it is not so easy to demonstrate the right of Hebrews, James and Jude to be there.

I think the best way to start is by way of comparison. If any letters or writings in addition to those of Paul, Peter and John are to be admitted at all, are there any others with a better claim than Hebrews, James and Jude? The only possible candidates are Hermas, the *Didaché*, Barnabas, and 1 Clement. Hermas is a somewhat wearisome book, and its late date rather militates against our ranking it with the epistles of apostolic days. According to the Muratorian Canon, which belongs to the latter part of the second century, Hermas wrote "very lately in our times, while his brother, Bishop Pius, occupied the chair of the Church of the city of Rome".

The date of the *Didaché* is uncertain, but some of its contents would militate against its acceptance as part of the New Testament Scriptures. Thus, its interpretation of Christ's words about not being as the hypocrites when we fast is almost ludicrous. The hypocrites, that is the Jews, fast on Monday and Thursday; therefore Christians should fast on Wednesday and Friday!

The Epistle of Barnabas might be early enough to be by Barnabas the apostle, but whether it is by him or by some other Barnabas it is difficult to say. But on the ground of its contents we must view it with some suspicion. In its treatment of the Old Testament it has certain resemblances to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but, to quote Bishop Westcott, "In parts there is an evident straining after novelty wholly alien from the calm and conscious strength of an Apostle; and the details of explanations are full of the rudest errors" (*On the Canon of the N.T.*, p. 44). For example, Barnabas adopts the idea that the consummation of all things will take place at the end of 6,000 years from the Creation. On the grounds of its contents, therefore, the claim of the Epistle of Barnabas to canonicity must be rejected.

There remains 1 Clement, a genuine letter from Clement of Rome, belonging probably to the end of the first century. To read it is to have the impression that Clement does not regard himself as teaching by inspired authority, but as following an authority derived from the apostles. He speaks at second hand rather than first hand, and there is no extant evidence that any of the early Fathers regarded it as Scripture, though several quote it.

Compared with these four, the three Epistles in our New Testament certainly have a better claim both internally and externally. Internally they have that authoritative note that we associate with an inspired word of God. They are definite and dogmatic. Hebrews certainly deserves to stand. It gives a sane and balanced key to much of the Old Testament type of teaching, and might well be drawn from what Christ Himself taught during the forty days after His resurrection, when He showed how the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of Him.

The Epistle of James, in spite of Luther's reactions against it, has not seemed to Evangelical Christians as a whole to be in contradiction to Paul's teaching on justification by faith, but rather to give a certain balance and emphasis on practical righteousness that we so badly need. Since this Epistle has a serious claim to be a part of Scripture, I see no reason to reject it.

The Epistle of Jude is much more problematical. To reject it from the Canon would be to solve out of hand our earlier problem of the possible canonicity of Enoch. But note that we have to say "reject it from the Canon". It has its feet firmly planted in the Canon, and it speaks with that familiar authoritative ring which marks the other canonical books and which is absent from most of the uncanonical. Intrinsically it has probably more right to be in the Canon than to be excluded from it.<sup>1</sup>

So far as external evidence for these books goes, the position is roughly as follows. They won their way to common acceptance, not through arbitrary decisions of the Church, but through their own weight. In the references to them and to the non-canonical books we can see the opinion of Christian writers gradually crystallising in favour of them and against the others. Some doubts and hesitations were due to the fact that certain letters were not in widespread circulation for many years, and when they did become better known they were viewed with some suspicion at first.

When finally, either at a small Council at Laodicea (c. A.D. 363) or at the Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397), a list of the Canon of the New Testament was first promulgated by a Christian Council, the list is identical with ours. The Acts of

<sup>1</sup>According to the *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, which dates it about A.D. 66, "it is included in the Old Latin version, listed in the Muratorian fragment, quoted and referred to as Jude's by Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian and later by Origen, and was clearly from the beginning a part of the Christian Canon".



the Council of Carthage made it clear that the decision was not reached by any arbitrary method nor by haphazard voting, but it was regarded as a solemn declaration of the books that had attained the position of canonicity in the Church. Certain it is that no book was rejected which later Christian opinion has felt should be admitted. And the vast majority of the Christian Church does not feel justified in turning out any of the books that have for so long found a place there.

I have not touched on the Book of Revelation. That, I think, is covered by Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit would show the disciples things to come. While, of course, this does not necessarily mean a written record of things to come, it does incline us to expect something of the kind. Since the Apocalypse of John is the only extant Christian apocalypse, and others, such as the Apocalypse of Peter, have perished, it is a case of accepting the one that we have or not having one at all. A New Testament apocalypse balances the Old Testament Daniel. And the concluding chapters form a perfect ending to a Bible which opens with the first chapters of Genesis.

The only other book in our New Testament is the Acts of the Apostles. Whilst this is not covered by the promise of Christ, it appears to be a vital book for the Canon. We need to have some record of Christianity in action. We might have expected more than one. But there is no other claimant for an equal place, and such a book as "The Acts of Paul and Thekla" is so obviously inferior that we can assume that God did not wish to give us more than the one history.

In this discussion of the New Testament Canon I am aware that I have unduly simplified one point. I have assumed that the Pastoral Epistles are authentic letters of Paul, and that 2 Peter is genuinely Petrine. Supposing that it could be demonstrated that these letters were not the work of the professed authors, would they still be eligible for the Canon?

For myself, I should find it very difficult to retain them, especially 2 Peter, which makes such an emphatic claim to be Petrine. It is not like Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, where it is possible to hold that a later writer is deliberately putting himself back into the position of Solomon. But others may feel differently about this, and would be willing to retain the books, even if their claim to apostolic authorship were disallowed.

## VI

In conclusion, let me summarise the position that I have tried to maintain. The fact of revelation leads me to expect a Canon in the form of a definite set of authoritative writings. Associated with Jesus Christ I find two such definite sets. I accept the Old Testament of our Hebrew Bibles as one Canon, since the evidence is that Jesus Christ accepted it. I do not have an identical form of authority for the New Testament, but I can reason from analogy, and look for a set of books that won and retained recognition for themselves as canonical. If God worked that way with the Old, He will presumably work in a similar way with the New, and, since His Holy Spirit apparently overruled in the presentation and collection of the Old, I believe that the same will be true of the New.

There is only one set of writings that has so won recognition for itself. I have not attempted to discuss precisely how each book came to have its place. Clearly both the testimony of the Holy Spirit and reasonable arguments, such as that of apostolic authorship, played their part in this. My line of approach has rather been that, having been led to expect a Christian Canon, I have examined the only extant Canon that there is, and found it reasonable to suppose that God in His providence has here given and secured for His Church a complete New Testament comparable to the Old. This New Testament appears to be a living organism, having different members, but forming one body. It would hardly be consistent with the overruling providence of God if, after so long a time, any of the members should prove to be in need of amputation.

In the Bible, then, we have the divine Canon, the Canon which is consistent with itself, which is complete, containing all that in this life we need to know about God, and about the way to God, and about living the spiritual life. It is a complete Canon, or measuring-rod, by which all Christian teaching to-day must be tested, and, being tested, must either stand or fall.

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