

Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments

Preface

In the previous two companion volumes, dedicated to the parts of the New Testament called “Gospels” and “Pauline Epistles,” an attempt was made to introduce readers to those documents with which the readers would be familiar. Hence the respective prefaces acknowledged the foundational character of what the early church called “the Gospel” and “the Apostle.”

A different kind of introduction is called for in this third yet complementary reference work. Here—in the remaining books of the New Testament canon—the reader is more than likely to be on a *terra incognita*. Features such as the complex arguments of the letter to the Hebrews, the moralizing tendency of James the Just, the fierce denunciations sounded in the epistle of Jude as well as the more accessible First Peter and the Acts of the Apostles will come to mind as representing books which cry out for elucidation. And who has not felt the need for scholarly and sympathetic guidance while patiently, if with puzzlement, reading the final book, called the Revelation? This *Dictionary* will, we hope, be among the first resources a student, teacher and communicator will turn to when seeking assistance.

It is to offer such help that the contributions to the present full-scale *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* were conceived, assembled, composed—and now are offered to the public. The editors are bold to surmise that this volume, perhaps more than the two earlier dictionaries, will fill a perceived gap in the field of reference books on the New Testament. It is designed to come to the aid of

preachers, ministers, Christian laypeople and hard-pressed students of theology no less than the editors' colleagues in the academy when called on to teach these often neglected books of the canon.

Mention of the New Testament canon calls to mind a recent (1983, 1995) pronouncement of the doyen scholar C. K. Barrett. Writing on "The Centre of the New Testament and the Canon" (in his collected essays *Jesus and the Word* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995] 259-76), he states in support of his position that the *norma normans* of New Testament theology, the means of testing theological propositions (or better, he would say, the church's proclamation), is a nuanced version of the slogans *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, the "claim that *in practice* no harm but good results [follow] if we look at all the literary products of the apostolic and subapostolic ages" (his emphasis). To respond to this remark would involve a discussion of the ongoing debate regarding the "center of the New Testament" and the limits and definition of canonical authority. It is sufficient here to note that the coverage in this *Dictionary* will, we trust, put the readers in a position to see the ways the formulation of the Christian message developed from the Synoptic Gospels and Paul to the remaining New Testament books and then up to about the middle of the second century. Commitment to a determinative canon (embracing the twenty-seven books in our New Testament) should make room for (1) a frank admission that books often thought to be peripheral to the alleged "center" are still held to be normative, for as Dr. Barrett remarks, "there cannot be degrees of canonicity"; and (2) an equally frank acknowledgment that Christian thinking did not cease with the last New Testament book, and it developed in those writings usually called the apostolic fathers.

The decision to take the lines of development up to A.D. 150 was a matter of convenience, since a cut-off point was

clearly needed if the volume was to be of manageable size. A certain editorial latitude, however, was granted to contributors who felt it needful to include material from the later patristic period. One reason for this inclusion is to allow developments that come to fuller fruition in the late second and subsequent early centuries to cast their light backward on the obscurities of the period A.D. 100-150. To change the metaphor, germination and flowering of a Christian truth often requires a considerable length of time to appear.

The editors and publisher struggled to find a suitable title for this volume that would do justice to its diverse subject matter and yet stand in continuity with the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* and the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. No prejudicial judgment should be read into the part-title, *The Later New Testament*. As will be clear, the case for dating Jude or James anterior to the Pauline letters still continues to be made, even if the tendency is to place these letters in a subsequent decade. By general consensus, however, the bulk of the literature covered in this volume was written chronologically after the Pauline chief letters and, in some cases, after the publication of the Synoptics. Again, the adjective “later” is one of convenience, just as the term *Developments* is in no way intended to blur the line of demarcation the church has accepted (since Athanasius) between canonical and noncanonical, even if the story of the canonization of the New Testament has the ragged edges admitted by Eusebius.

Once more the editors are quick to recognize their debts and pay tribute to all who have made this volume possible. Secretarial help in the production processes and the ready cooperation of our team of contributors, drawn from around the world and across the boundaries of church affiliation, ethnicity and gender, are gratefully acknowledged.

It remains to send out the third member of this ambitious series (which will eventually include a *Dictionary of New Testament Background* and four volumes on the Old Testament) in the hope that it may, with its partners, serve the interests of readers. It is designed to assist those who seek to understand the remaining books of the New Testament in their historical, literary and religious setting and to observe the flow of church life, thought and history across a diverse spectrum of geography and culture, from Paul and the Synoptic Gospels to Justin in Rome.

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