

to determine what was and what was not orthodox was to share opinions on the common practice and belief of Christian communities; in this way the 4 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John came to be included. It was judged that they contained the correct teaching on Jesus. Gospels attributed to Peter, Thomas, Philip were rejected as containing some deviations from orthodoxy.

St Irenaeus was central to this task. His insight was to include the 4 Gospels, despite their containing some internal divergencies; these variations he regarded as explicable by analysis and commentary, as has proved to be the case. He forcefully rejected any suggestion of a single Gospel, maintaining that this was the desire of heretics, e.g. Marcion (Luke's) and the Gnostics (John's). Irenaeus and his many supporters advocated that an artificial reduction to just one text must be avoided. In this way the 4 Christian Gospels are to this day a living, human witness to the truth. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the majority of the texts now forming the corpus of the New Testament were agreed and accepted. Yet it took many centuries for the Church finally to declare the New Testament as we know it as the authorised version. This was done by the Council of Trent in 1545.

Note: This article is based on part of Episode No. 5 in the 2009 Arté TV documentary series "The Apocalypse"

-**Stephen. S**

**Entrance antiphon: As for me, in justice I shall behold your face; I shall be filled with the vision of your glory.**

**First Reading: Isaiah 55: 10-11**

**Responsorial Psalm: 64. Response: Some seed fell into rich soil, and produced its crop.**

**Second Reading: Romans 8:18-23**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening; you have the message of eternal life. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Matthew: 13: 1-23**

**Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.**

**Communion Antiphon: The sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for her young; by your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they who dwell in your house, forever singing your praise.**



## **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: The Making of the New Testament:** How and why did the New Testament come into

being towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD? In the first 100 years or so after the death of Jesus, many texts abounded and were used by Christians. These were obviously in manuscript form; this and other factors militated against homogeneity across the wide geographical range of Christendom. Perhaps paradoxically it was certain heresies which were a partial catalyst to arrive at a common, authorised corpus of writings. Marcion (85-160 AD) was one of first to propose a New Testament. He suggested that it include only one Gospel, that of Luke, and 10 Letters of St. Paul. Why was this? It followed from his view that the Christian God was completely different from the Jewish God. His opinion was that the apostles were so steeped in their Judaism that they could not see clearly what he regarded as the true Christian God. He even taught that some passages of St Paul and of Luke's Gospel had been interpolated by Jewish scribes and required 'abridging'. Marcion was subsequently condemned as a heretic, but his heresy seems to have been an impetus to create an accepted body of new Scripture.

What criteria were used by Christian leaders for the inclusion and exclusion of the works which abounded at the time? Essentially there were four. A text had to be:

1. *Contemporaneous*:- reasonably contemporaneous with Jesus' life on earth.
2. *Apostolic*:- written by an apostle or the companion of an apostle. Paul was widely viewed as an apostle and so his letters and the works of Luke (the Gospel and Acts) qualified. There was much discussion about the Book of Revelation since there was doubt whether its author was John the Apostle, or another John. Revelation was thus excluded until it later became accepted as written by John the Apostle
3. *Universal*:- i.e. universally used by the Christian Communities as a whole.
4. *Orthodox*:- if a book contained something contrary to accepted right belief it was not included. The approach adopted by the early Christian leaders