

THE ORIGIN
AND
EVOLUTION OF THE
GOSPELS

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THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

That the Church preceded the Gospels is undisputed, though how and why the Gospels came to be written has been a matter of considerable controversy during the past two hundred years. The Catholic Church has always held that the four Gospels are the most important part of the written tradition handed on by the Twelve Apostles in virtue of their personal knowledge of Jesus acquired during their instruction by him in the course of his earthly mission.(1). But the ancient apostolic and patristic tradition that the three Synoptic Gospels (Mt, Mk, Lk) were composed in the lifetime of Peter and Paul, that the Gospel of Matthew had been first to be committed to writing, and that all the Gospels were composed by the Apostles to whom they are attributed has been widely denied by modern liberal scholars.

Instead they argue in favour of the priority of the Gospel of Mark and as a result date all Gospels to post-apostolic times, composed by anonymous authors. Among the discoveries of the 18th century Enlightenment one of the most important though seldom recognized factors influential in the argumentation for Markan priority has been the general Theory of Evolution, the view that progression is always a logical development from the simple form to the more complex, and, applied to our Gospels, from the phase of simple memorizing to that of note-making, through the parataxis of Mark to the rounded periods of Matthew.(2). A further significant, perhaps decisive factor which nowadays is paid little, if any, attention is the enormous political interests and pressures in

1 cf. B. Orchard, 'Dei Verbum and the Synoptic Gospels', Downside Review, July 1990, pp. 199-214.

2 'The traditions about Jesus underwent a long and probably highly complex process of development before reaching their present form in the canonical Gospels' (C. Tuckett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, BETL Vol. 87, Leuven 1990, pp. 160-161).

19th century Germany that deeply affected Protestant biblical scholarship.(3). During the current century the majority of Catholic scholars have followed suit and in all but principle abandoned the ancient tradition, claiming the support of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, promulgated in 1964 at Vatican Council II. I have shown elsewhere(4), that in fact *Dei Verbum* did no more, and intended to do no more, than to give for the first time official approval to free discussion of source theories at variance with the traditional priority of Mt.

In recent years the hypotheses based on Marcan priority have been steadily losing ground, though the modern academic arguments from the diverse disciplines for the recognition of the priority of Mt have as yet to be stated in their entirety and correlation (5). The correct order and relationship between all four Gospels is in itself of course of vital theological importance and also necessary for understanding Jesus' true relationship not only to his Church but also to his Jewish contemporaries.

After carefully sifting the patient and thorough investigations of the modern critical scholars I am in a position now to formulate a hypothesis that does justice both to modern critical scholarship and to the integrity of the ancient Fathers of the Church who first recorded for us the fundamental facts.(6) My present essay is based on the tradition that Mt, Mk and Lk first appeared in the early Christian Church as we find it described in the Acts of the Apostles, (7). i.e. in the lifetime of Peter and Paul, and demonstrates

3 cf. W.R. Farmer, *State Interesse and Marcan Primacy 1870-1914* BETL Vol. 100, Leuven 1992, pp. 2477-2498.

4 cf. note 1 above.

5 cf. H.Merkel. 'Die Ueberlieferungen der alten Kirche ueber das Verhaeltnis der Evangelien', ed. D.L. Dungan. *The Interrelations of the Gospels*, Leuven 1990, p. 566; J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* London 1975; J. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke*, London 1991.

6 J.B. Orchard, *Matthew, Luke and Mark*, Greater Manchester 1976; J. B. Orchard and H. Riley, *The Order of the Synoptics*, Mercer UP, Macon Ga. 1987; J. B. Orchard *A Synopsis of the Four Gospels, in English:* Mercer UP, Macon Ga 1982 in Greek: T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1983.

7 cf. Colin J. Hemer. *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, WUNT Tuebingen 1989.

that in the history of the Apostolic Church there were in fact four main phases, four turning points at each of which a suitable Gospel document was found to be necessary for its proper growth:

- 1) The Jerusalem Phase (Ac 1-12) under the presidency of Peter,
- 2) The Pauline Mission Phase (Ac 13-28),
- 3) The Roman Phase requiring joint action by Peter and Paul (Ac 28:30).
- 4) The Johannine Supplement.

THE JERUSALEM PHASE - AD 30-42 (Ac 1-13)

According to the divine plan of salvation the Messiah was not to appear until the time and circumstances were right. Among these prerequisites were

- a) the existence of the Septuagint, an excellent Greek version of the Sacred Books of the Jews, i.e. the Old Testament, including what we now call the Deuterocanonical Books. After the resurrection the Septuagint became the Bible of the Christian Church, and a powerful instrument for conveying to the whole world the knowledge of the true God that had already been given to the Jews;
- b) the wide dispersion of Jews, with their synagogues in all the main centres of the Roman empire which had Greek as its common language, making the spread of knowledge of the Jewish religion and way of life easily available to all educated and interested persons;
- c) the Pax Romans, which gave Christianity the opportunity to take firm root during the working life-time of the Twelve Apostles whose function it was, as the principal witnesses of the Lord's life, death and resurrection, to proclaim all that he had taught them.

The Church that the Gospels served

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the 120 disciples in the Upper Room gave them the confidence and

vision to go forth and preach all they had learned from Jesus. Their first task, under the presidency of Peter, was undoubtedly to agree on the minimum organisation necessary to undertake their World mission; and the Acts of the Apostles reveal to us that from the very beginning the Church of God enjoyed the good order that came from right understanding of the mind of Jesus. The Twelve Apostles were the supreme authority in virtue of being the eye-witnesses specially selected by Jesus to look after the development of the Church.

Their Church was a living organism entirely independent of the theocratic state of Judaism, and responsible to no one but God himself. And while reverencing the Temple of God on account of its past associations, they were obliged to set up their own house churches (e.g. the church in the house of John Mark's mother), where they were able to celebrate the unique Eucharistic rite of 'the Breaking of the Bread' bequeathed to them by Jesus. This, as well as their insistence on exact adherence to Christ's teaching, led to the immediate emergence of a fellowship (based on Baptism into Christ) that distinguished them from all other citizens of Jerusalem. Jesus himself, together with his Father and his Holy Spirit - the one Trinitarian God - was now the object of worship in the Apostolic Community of the Church of Jerusalem. But this little community of followers of Jesus had to justify its existence in the face of the fierce hostility of the unconverted high priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, Levites and scribes.

As soon as the first wave of converts had been baptised and their instruction organised by the Twelve - no mean achievement because they had no direct precedent to go by - their thoughts must have turned to the practical question of how to unify and consolidate their teaching about Jesus. The Apostles realized that they had somehow to promulgate those passages of the Holy Scriptures 'of Moses and all the prophets concerning himself' which Jesus had explained to Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27). It also became clear to them that their main apologetical task would be to demonstrate to the Jewish authorities that Jesus had in fact quite literally fulfilled all the prophecies about the Messiah. These considerations indicate the original motivation for the composition of the Gospel of Matthew.

We are very fortunate to possess the Acts of the Apostles (Published about AD 63) which provides us with the necessary background information to enable us to see that the Gospel of Matthew was the ideal instrument to refute the calumnies about Jesus that the high priests were circulating.

Mt met all the apologetical needs of the Jerusalem Church in the years immediately following the Resurrection, when its doctrines were under attack: namely, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, proved by his ancestry as Son of David, his being born of a virgin, his birth in Bethlehem, his commendation by the holy Baptist John, his miracles (raising the dead, casting out devils, healing the sick, curing the lepers, controlling the sea and the winds), his 'teaching with authority' in the Temple, his Coming to fulfill the Law of Moses and not to destroy it, and above all by his suffering pictured in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, by his rejection by the rulers of his own nation, and by his resurrection from the dead and ascension into Heaven after establishing the framework of the Church, his Kingdom on earth.

All the above facts had long been foretold or foreshadowed in The Sacred Writings of the Jews. How then was all this and a great deal more to be reduced to the compass of one commercial roll of ten metres, the standard length of a book, if the Apostles were to travel 'light' in compliance with their Master's explicit instructions? The help of the Holy Spirit was indeed necessary if the essentials of the life and teaching of a man of Jesus' stature were ever to be competently sketched. The universal tradition tells us that the Twelve entrusted this important work to the Apostle Matthew; and so, not long after the resurrection, Matthew set to work. His brief seems to have been to compile schematically the Master's teachings without special regard to their chronological order, as his Gospel was simply meant to be a handbook for unified teaching and administration in the Church.

Perhaps the greatest problem that Matthew faced was that of reducing the immense mass of material available to the Twelve in the form of their personal reminiscences of the Lord into a manageable body by deciding which stories to include and which to omit, before editing and setting forth those to be included.

Matthew did not take this challenge lightly and in order to produce a work worthy of proclaiming the Lord's Glory made skilful use of all five of the literary forms that were then the hallmark of good writing in the Hellenistic world, namely: the proverb or maxim, the narrative, the parable, the anecdote (known as the *chreia* or short story), the reminiscence (the *apomnemeuma* or longer story).

The use of these Greek literary forms is an important indication that Matthew composed his work in Greek. In any case, since Greek was the common language of communication throughout the Roman empire and beyond, and with the Septuagint as the successful precedent, the Greek tongue was the obvious medium for the effective presentation of the Gospel message. However, Matthew, though highly educated, had to cope with the difficulties of anybody seeking to express himself in a foreign language and so betrayed his Palestinian origin in the style of the original Greek text, which contains many signs of Aramaic, his Semitic mother tongue. It may be this underlying Semitism which one ancient tradition meant when referring to Mt as having been composed in the 'dialect of the Hebrews'.

With the help of the Holy Spirit and that of the rest of the Twelve Matthew then arranged the selected material in three main sections:

- 1) the Origin of Jesus down to the opening of his public ministry in Galilee (1:1-4:17);
- 2) the Galilean Ministry (4:18-18:35) - containing the bulk of his teaching - to which is attached a brief interlude in Transjordan (chh.19-20);
- 3) all the Jerusalem events of his public mission, from the Cleansing of the Temple to his passion, death and resurrection (chh.21-28).

Matthew's account of the infancy of Jesus is mostly apologetical, its aim being to prove that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and Son of David through legitimate adoption by Joseph. The main part of the teaching of Jesus is

given in a series of carefully edited sermons, masterly compiled from his words (a literary technique widely used and fully accepted at the time) and designed to give the reader the clearest possible notion of the way in which the Messiah, depicted as the Redeemer of the world, set out his implementation and supplementation of the Old Law. Thus the Great Sermon on the Mount (chh. 5-7) is constructed to give the reader the full power and beauty of the new spirit infused by Jesus into the letter of the Old Law of Moses. His other teachings are arranged in a series of five more discourses:

- 1) the Missionary Discourse (Mt 10),
- 2) the Parables' Discourse (Mt 13),
- 3) the Discourse on the Church Community (Mt 18),
- 4) the Discourse exposing the wickedness of the opposition to him (Mt 23),
- 5) the Eschatological Discourse (Mt 24-25).

This Gospel of Matthew was the manifesto of the Mother Church of Jerusalem; and it is therefore the fundamental document of the Christian faith. It was the document that each of the Apostles needed to take with him to his own distant field of evangelization, and also the one which Paul was to take with him on his own missionary journeys and from which he appears to quote in 1 Thess 4 & 5. A savage persecution of the Church, begun by Herod Agrippa I in AD 42, was the signal for the dispersion of the Apostles now possessing in the Gospel of Matthew the necessary tool to support and confirm their preaching, while at the same time preserving their theological unity. The first phase was completed and the second phase of the Church's expansion was about to begin with the Mission of Paul.

THE PAULINE MISSION PHASE - AD 42-63 (Ac 13-28)

At the very beginning the Apostles and their disciples had been content to preach only to Jews and to 'God-fearers*' (pagans who

believed in the truth of Judaism); but three events that occurred during the first phase were portents that laid the foundation for the expansion that was soon to follow:

- 1) The conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, God's Chosen Vessel for the conversion of the Gentiles (Ac 9);
- 2) the reception of the centurion Cornelius and his family into the Church by Peter with the approval of the Jerusalem Church (Ac 10-11) without the obligation to be circumcised or to keep the food and marriage regulations that had hitherto prevented Jews mixing with Gentiles;
- 3) the dispersion of the faithful during the persecution and martyrdom of Stephen, which first brought missionaries to Antioch (Ac 11) who converted a number of pagans in that wealthy city.

Understandably, in the first phase the Apostles were far too busy with the problems of the nascent Church of Jerusalem to initiate a concerted drive to win over to Christ the Greek-speaking world of the Roman empire; their immediate concern was quite properly their fellow Jews. However, the rapidly increasing number of Gentile converts at Antioch finally persuaded the Jerusalem Apostles to send Barnabas there to check the new development; and he in turn decided to invite Paul to join him in instructing these new followers of Jesus who were soon labelled Christians by the general public.

A severe famine (AD 45-46) led the Christians of Antioch to send Barnabas and Paul on their Famine Relief Visit to Jerusalem with a large sum to relieve the brethren's distress (Ac 11:25-30; 12:24f; Gal 2:1-10). The Holy Spirit had intimated to Paul to use the opportunity to compare privately his teaching with that of the Twelve on the requirements of the Church regarding the admission of Gentile converts. This was an urgent matter as there was a powerful group of Pharisaic Christians in the Mother Church who wanted all converts to be compelled to submit to the full rigour of the old Law of Moses. Paul's meeting with Peter, James and John is recorded in his Letter to the Galatians (2:1-10); and its outcome was

a comprehensive understanding between him and those whom he calls the Three Pillars, and it included an agreement to demarcate their respective fields of apostolate and a decision not to require Gentile converts to take on the external obligations of the Mosaic Law.

Shortly after Paul's return to Antioch the Holy Spirit called him and Barnabas to set out on their First Missionary Journey to the districts of Southern Galatia. His astounding success (cf. Ac 14-15) quickly aroused the hostility of the strict Pharisees of Jerusalem, who sent a delegation to remonstrate with him. Some of them, unbeknownst to Paul, went on to Galatia to pervert his converts there. Meanwhile a fierce debate took place at Antioch, and since neither side would give way, Paul had no option but to go up to Jerusalem and argue for the freedom of the Gentiles before the Three Pillars (Ac 15:1-6). He was of course certain about the outcome since previously they had already acknowledged his complete orthodoxy. The recognition of Gentile freedom from the Law of Moses at the Council of Jerusalem (AD 49) then marked another milestone in the progress of the Church (Ac 15:16-35).

Above all Paul saw the paramount need to integrate into one harmonious body the Jewish Christians with their Mosaic-Pharisaic traditions and the Greek and Roman converts of non-Jewish extraction. For his missionary experience had proved that the Gospel of Matthew, which he was faithfully using as a follow-up to his oral teaching, did not answer all the questions of his Asian and Greek converts. This made him aware of the need for a presentation of the Gospel nuanced to suit the mentality of the Hellenistic world. In his great Letter to the Church of the Romans (c. AD 56) he had, in fact, already produced the necessary theological synthesis (Rom 9-11).

He was now faced with a twofold task, firstly to produce a version of Matthew's Gospel that would meet the spiritual needs of the Greek world, and secondly to make sure that the modified version would be acceptable to Peter and the other Pillars. Before he came to the end of his Third Missionary Journey Paul had chosen the man he needed for this difficult and delicate

undertaking, his friend Luke, a physician, who joined him on the latter stages of his voyage back to Jerusalem. While there Paul found himself disenchanted by the reserved attitude of the Elders of James who looked askance at what they regarded as the too easy terms on which Paul was admitting Greeks into the Church. But the Holy Spirit was now urging him insistently to look towards Rome; and he was longing to go there (cf. Ac 19:2 If).

As it so happened, Paul's hope did not materialise immediately, because of his fortuitous detention by the Romans for more than two years in their headquarters in Caesarea. Actually, this enforced stay in Palestine turned out to be a blessing in as much as it provided Luke with sufficient time to check the details in Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus, to interrogate some of those who had known Jesus some thirty years before, and to prepare a new Gospel document modelled on Matthew's that would find favour among cultured Greek-speakers.

Through hindsight, by comparing the Gospels of Luke and Matthew and noting Luke's deviations, we can determine the brief that Luke had received from Paul. In the first place, Luke carefully followed the main structure of Matthew throughout, as well as generally adhering to the order of the various pericopes and anecdotes; but he also made highly interesting changes. For example, his story of the birth of Jesus is totally different from Matthew's which, as we have noted, was apologetical in tone and content. Luke however provided a straightforward narrative that stems either directly or indirectly from Mary herself. When he came to the Galilean Ministry he added certain details to each of those stories from Matthew's Gospel that he decided to adopt. Indeed in one way or another he absorbed nearly everything that Matthew had written and yet managed to add a good deal of new material. This Luke did in two ways:

- 1) by omitting a number of stories that he regarded as duplicates (e.g. the famous Lukan omission of Mt 14:22-16:12) and
- 2) by inserting into the heart of the Matthean text at the end of the Galilean Ministry (cf. Mt 19:1-2) a section of no less than nine long chapters, 9:52-18:14 (his Central Section), comprising:

- a) the excerpts which he had withdrawn from Matthew's six great discourses,
- b) additional sayings and parables which he must have collected while visiting the scene of Jesus' labours thirty year before.(8)

Luke was all the time mindful to keep his attention directed on the audience and readership for whom Paul needed this Gospel, in particular on the Greeks' scientific bent, on their desire to know names, dates and places, and their interest in such matters as the emancipation of women. Moreover he made it his aim to reveal an aspect of Jesus that would impress the Gentile reader, namely by exhibiting him as a truly adorable hero blessed by God, yet one too good for this world, one who after his apotheosis was still bringing blessings to the world which he had saved by his sacrificial death.

Luke completed his task in time to accompany Paul on the journey by sea to Rome, but there were two reasons for holding up the publication of his Gospel. In the first place, it was not an eye-witness account, since neither Luke nor Paul had been eye-witnesses of the ministry of Jesus, but was in the main a work of Historical research; and if it was to have credibility it would need the support of some authoritative eye-witness such as Peter. Even more serious was the possibility that the publication of this manifesto for Paul's Gentile converts, unless diplomatically handled, might easily result in another explosion from the Circumcision Party which was still very active and was to remain so until the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Therefore Luke's Gospel could not be published until this danger had been defused.

THE ROMAN PHASE

The situation was then as follows: The Gospel according to Matthew had been in circulation for some twenty years throughout the Christian world both inside and beyond the Roman

8. It is perhaps worth noting here that the contents of Luke's Central Section roughly correspond with the conjectural document known as *Q' which many modern exegetes consider to be one of the sources of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

empire when Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner of Caesar some time in AD 60 or 61 (cf. Ac 28:30). Luke accompanied Paul, bringing with him his new Gospel, in fact a substantial reworking of the Gospel of Matthew. Paul's former disciple Mark, who had left him at Perga early on during his First Missionary Journey and had later gone with Barnabas to Cyprus, had since become Peter's devoted assistant in Rome, as is proved by the reference to him in 1 Pet 5:12-13, a Letter which most scholars agree was written about AD 62. (9).

Paul was well aware of the importance attached by the secular Greek and Roman world to the testimony of actual eye-witnesses; but whereas the Gospel of Matthew had emanated from the Jerusalem community, many of whom had known Jesus personally and could corroborate the witness of the Twelve preserved in that Gospel, neither he nor Luke had known Jesus while he had walked on earth. Of course, Paul had been given a vision of the Resurrected and Glorified Christ; but he was still dependent on the Twelve for information about his earthly life. And as far as Luke was concerned, he, too, had to rely entirely on the tradition he had received from the Apostles and from the Gospel of Matthew, to which he added his own personal researches into the events of the life of Jesus, gleaned from material supplied to him by many surviving eye-witnesses whom he had succeeded in interrogating. In order to get Luke's work recognised as a true account and one worthy to be read in the Christian assembly alongside Matthew's Gospel, Paul needed to get it ratified by an apostolic eye-witness. Furthermore, although Paul's primary

9 The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, Colossians and to Philemon, traditionally said to have been written from Rome during Paul's detention (which probably ended in AD 63), reveal that he remained in intimate contact with both Mark and Luke (Col 4:10, 14; Philem 24). Thus it seems that at this time. c. AD 62, both Peter and Mark, and Paul and Luke, were all in Rome in contact with one another. In the light of what Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus wrote about the composition of Mk (EH 2:15; 3:39; 5:8; 6:14), the consensus among the Fathers is represented by Jerome's laconic judgement that 'Mark's Gospel was composed of Peter's narration and Mark's writing'. In the paragraphs that follow I have sought to explain and illustrate all that is entailed in this judgement in the light of what we know about the Church and Roman society in the reign of Nero.

concern was to secure the publication of Luke's Gospel in the region of the Churches he himself had founded, i.e. in Achaia and Asia, he was also aware that, once published, it would inevitably find its way into the Churches of the other Apostles. Therefore it was necessary for him now well in advance not only to establish the fact that Luke had not erred in any particular but also to make sure that the new work was acceptable to an eye-witness Apostle like Peter.

Since Peter and Mark were apparently in Rome at some time during Paul's enforced residence there (cf. 1 Pet 5:12-13), it seems that Paul asked Peter's advice about the proper procedure for getting Luke's Gospel into circulation. Peter realised that Paul needed the public assurance that Luke's book was in complete conformity with his, i.e. Peter's, own recollections of Jesus, and, when approached, was ready and happy to compare Luke's treatment of the events at which he himself had been present with Matthew's parallel account. To achieve this aim, Peter's plan then must have been to give a series of discourses, perhaps at his weekly Eucharistic Celebration. His secretary Mark presumably helped him to prepare these talks, which were bound to excite the interest of the most influential Christians in Rome including members of the Praetorium, the headquarters of the Roman Army and the equivalent of our Whitehall, where many Christians were to be found. Since it had long been the custom for public men to have their speeches recorded by competent shorthand writers, (10). Mark must have arranged for shorthand writers of Greek to take down Peter's words just as he uttered them,(11) Greek being then the common language of the inhabitants of Rome.

It is necessary also to recall not only that Peter had an indelible memory of his unforgettable year in Jesus' company, but

10 E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*. WUNT 2. Reihe 42, Tübingen 1991, pp. 28-42.

11 B.Orchard, *Mark and the Fusion of Traditions*, BETL Vol. C, Leuven 1992, pp. 779-800; B.Orchard, *The Making and Publication of Mark's Gospel*, Ealing Abbey 1993; B.Orchard, *The Publication of Mark's Gospel*, BETL Vol. CX, Leuven 1993, pp. 518-520; B.Orchard, 'The Publication of Mark's Gospel', *Annales Theologicae*, Ateneo di S. Croce, Rome 1993, together with Appendix of patristic texts.

that Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit 'would bring to their remembrance' all that he had said to them (Jn 14:26). Moreover Peter himself must have been using the Gospel of Matthew for purposes of catechesis for many years past, yet, as an eyewitness, without feeling himself tied to its every word, seeing himself free either to follow Matthew's wording or to adopt his own according to his mood. Nevertheless his immediate objective at that moment was to relate Luke's new work to what had happened in Galilee and Judea thirty years before as it had been set down in monumental phrases by the evangelist Matthew.

So then, presumably on the days appointed for the Christians to come together, Peter with Mark in attendance, and with the requisite number of shorthand writers, went to the rostrum armed with the scroll of Lk, Mark perhaps holding the scroll of Mt in reserve in case Peter wanted to refer to it.(12). Careful scrutiny of Mk, after comparing it with Mt and Lk, reveals that it falls into five sections or discourses:(13).

- [1] the beginning of the Galilean ministry to the calling of the Twelve (1:2-3:19);
- [2] the training of the Twelve to their first commissioning (3:20-6:13);
- [3] the later Galilean ministry (6:14-9:51);
- [4] ministry on the way to Jerusalem (10:1-13:37);
- [5] the passion narrative (14:1-16:8). The last twelve verses form a postscript noting various resurrection appearances

12 That both Gospels were originally inscribed on scrolls and not on codices seems certain because they are each just about the length of an ordinary commercial scroll, i.e. about ten metres in length. A scroll was written on the inner side in narrow columns at right-angles to its length. When rolled up it was tied with a cord and put into one of a series of pigeon-holes that constituted the bookcase of a learned man. To handle such a scroll required both hands, the right hand unrolling and the left rolling up until the reader arrived at the particular column he wanted to refer to.

13 Orchard's Synopsis (cf. n.6 above) clearly reveals this fivefold division:

Beginning of Ministry	Mk 1:2	-3:19	Mt	3:1f,	Lk	3:1f
Early Galilean Ministry	Mk 3:20	-6:13	Mt	5:2f,	Lk	6:20f
Later Galilean Ministry	Mk 6:14	-9:51	Mt	14:1f,	Lk	9: 7f
Post-Galilean Ministry	Mk 10:1	-13:37	Mt	19:1f;	Lk	9:51f
Passion Narrative	Mk 14:1	-16: 8	Mt	26:1f;	Lk	22: 1f

of Jesus. The omission of the birth narratives, of Lk's Central Section, and most of the composite discourses found in Mt and Lk, as well as their resurrection stories indicates that it was Peter's intention to talk about only those incidents in the life of Jesus of which he had been an eye-witness and could confirm Luke's own account. The fact that Peter was prepared to devote so much attention to this new work of Luke shows that he thought it worthy of independent circulation in the Church.

Further study of the text of Mark indicates that Peter delivered his reminiscence to his audience by word of mouth in Greek while the shorthand writers recorded it word for word. It would seem that although he had the scroll of Lk in his hands as he spoke and followed the Lukan order of events, he was - as we have seen above - to a considerable extent conditioned by his knowing the Gospel of Mt practically by heart.

Hence, probably quite unconsciously, the phraseology of Mt comes constantly to his lips as he recollects the incidents in the life of Jesus now being brought before him vividly by the same stories being retold by Luke. Nevertheless Peter, being an authentic eye-witness, in no way feels himself bound to follow the exact wording either of Luke or of Matthew. Hence he retells each incident with complete confidence and independence while automatically acknowledging the restraints imposed by his knowledge of Mt's contents and Lk's order. And this procedure accounts very well for the many vivid asides and other details that Peter is able to introduce into his retelling the same stories. It also explains why Peter supplies from his own memory and Mt's account such long Lukan omissions as that of Mt 14:22-16:11.

In fact, Peter, while discoursing, probably was holding only one document in his hands, that of Luke, the document presented to him by Paul for verification. Of course he would have had the Gospel of Matthew at hand while making the necessary advance preparations for his discourses; but he would not have needed to refer to it while speaking. It is a cardinal error of modern scholars to imagine that Peter had to refer in turn to all three written Gospels, as they themselves do when seeking to unravel the

relationships between them. (14). Being the chief eye-witness, Peter had everything under control; and the famous 'zigzag*' effect is simply the result of his being able to visualise effortlessly and at will both his own vivid memory of Matthew's wording as well as Luke's words then in front of him, while simultaneously formulating his own words of each particular event, sometimes being closer to Matthew's, sometimes to Luke's text.

At the end of his fifth discourse Peter had covered all the main stories Matthew and Luke had in common (except the Centurion's Slave) from the Baptism of John to his personal discovery of the Empty Tomb (Mk 16:8); and whilst he had been speaking in front of his audience, the shorthand writers noted every one of his words. But at this point there is an abrupt change of style (15) that suggests that there was no longer a live audience and that the shorthand reporting had ceased. In fact, these last twelve verses (Mk 16:9-20) read like the notes for a sixth discourse that was for some reason never delivered.

Those who had listened to Peter were delighted with everything they had heard and demanded from Mark copies of what he had said. The tradition relates that when Peter was shown the transcript of his discourses he 'exerted no pressure either to forbid it or to promote it' (16). This indicates that Peter saw no particular advantage in promoting his own discourses since in Matthew there was already a complete Gospel available to his listeners, and thus indicates further that he had simply given his approval to the new work. In the light of this public commendation, Paul was able to

14 The critics who have hitherto attacked and derided the view that Peter, as the author of Mk. both knew and used the Gospels of Mt and Lk during the course of composition, have often based their opposition on the imaginary difficulty that Peter must have had to 'juggle*' with three Gospels at the same time, 'zigzagging*' in fact from one to the other. But given Peter's competence it is highly unlikely that it should have happened that way at all.

15 cf. W.R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, SNTS Monograph Series 25. 1974.

16 cf. Eusebius, E.H. VI, 14, 5-7; tr. G.A. Williamson, *Eusebius, The History of the Church*, Penguin Classics 1965.

publish the text of Luke's Gospel in the Churches of Achaia and Asia Minor without further delay or question.

The same tradition also expressly affirms that the transcript of Peter's Roman discourses came to be known as the Gospel according to Mark, and that it was composed not only after the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but also with their aid. However, despite the fact that it was highly prized by the Church as the personal reminiscences of Peter, it did not at first enjoy a universal circulation because it was not intended to supersede either Matthew or Luke. Indeed, it is rarely quoted by the Early Fathers, and the first commentary on Mk dates only from the fifth century. This is because its process of composition was quite unlike that of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and because Peter had never had any intention of rivalling those two Gospels.

But what explanation can be given for how the Last Twelve Verses (Mk 16:9-20) got tacked onto the Gospel? For the fact is, that while about one half of the best manuscripts record these verses, the other half either omit them altogether or give a much shorter ending. One plausible explanation is that after Mark had satisfied the immediate demand of those who wanted copies of the five discourses, which ended at Mk 16:8, the matter rested there until Mark's departure to Alexandria (AD 67-69) after the martyrdom of Peter. As an act of piety to the memory of Peter, his Father-in-God, Mark then decided to publish an edition of the text that would include the necessary sequel to the passion and death of the Master.

The attentive reader will discover for himself that these verses form a summary catalogue of references to the resurrection stories of both Matthew and Luke, and could well be Peter's notes for an intended sixth discourse, preserved by Mark and added by him to round off the transcript of the first five discourses. But as the first private edition of Mk, which lacked these verses, had already been in circulation for some years, the textual tradition has remained divided to this day, suggesting an equal authority for both endings. The Council of Trent in fact decided that these Last Twelve Verses are authentic and part of the inspired text of the Gospel of Mark.

THE JOHANNINE SUPPLEMENT

The tradition of the Christian Church names John the son of Zebedee, the Apostle and Beloved Disciple, as the Fourth Evangelist, and there is no solid reason to reject it. John wrote in Greek like the other Evangelists and according to the tradition knew all three Synoptic Gospels, making use especially of Luke. Although the final chapter (ch. 21) seems to be an afterthought the manuscript tradition shows that the author published the whole Gospel as one work. As to its date the first twenty chapters may have been written quite soon after the appearance of Luke and Mark, about AD 62/63, but the final chapter was not written until after the martyrdom of Peter in AD 65/67. The date of publication, probably from Ephesus, may have been at any time between then and the death of John at the end of the century.

The purpose of John was to supplement in several ways the account about the ministry of Jesus provided by the Synoptic Gospels:

- 1) John thought it right to set his Gospel in an eternal perspective by commencing with the heavenly pre-existence of the Son of God (Jn 1:1-18).
- 2) Whilst Matthew assumes Jesus to be the Messiah (Mt 1:1) he does not explain that Jesus asserted his claim at the commencement of his ministry at the Cleansing of the Temple because Matthew's plan was to place all the Jerusalem activities of Jesus in the last section of his Gospels (Mt 21-28). John stresses that Jesus staked his claim to be the Messiah in categorical terms throughout his public ministry (Jn 2:1-25).
- 3) John alone makes it clear that the public ministry of Jesus extended over two years (three Passovers) and that only part of it was spent in Galilee. The Galilean ministry was really an interlude forced upon Jesus by the hostility of the high priests. Nonetheless, John records that he made some four major visits to the Holy City to secure the recognition of his Messiahship before the final visit that resulted in his passion and death.

4) John alone records that during those visits there took place a number of intimate dialogues with hostile theologians that uniquely reveal the mind and heart of Jesus and his relationship to his Father and to the Holy Spirit.

To sum up, the author of the Fourth Gospel shows a knowledge of the milieu of Palestine at that time which none but a contemporary Jew could have described. Without the Gospel of John our knowledge of Jesus would have been greatly and irretrievably impoverished.

CONCLUSION

Matthew is the fundamental Gospel and the most important, but each Gospel was published in response to a particular need of the Church in a particular historical situation. The real importance of the Gospel of Mark lies in the fact that it was Peter's guarantee that Lk was fit to be read beside Mt in the Churches of both Peter and Paul. Mk is therefore to be viewed as the bridge between Mt and Lk, as an enabling document for Lk to be freely used in all the churches to which the authority of Peter, the chief eye-witness, extended; it stands furthermore as a recognition of the equality of the Gentiles in all the Churches; it can also be seen as incidentally harmonising the various minor discrepancies between Mt and Lk; it may also be looked on as judging Lk in relation to Mt, e.g. it suggests, by restoring the passage, that Luke would have done well not to omit what is known to us as the Great Lukan Omission of Mt 14:22-16:12.

We are now also able to see why the Universal Church from a very early date, perhaps from as early as the beginning of the 2nd century, placed Mark's Gospel between those of Matthew and Luke. For by doing so, it signalled the Church's acceptance of the tradition that the principal function of Mk was to introduce Lk to the Christian public and to confirm the latter's equality with Mt; the middle position of Mk had nothing to do with the chronological order of the Gospels. For Lk was written before Mk was even thought of, but its publication was delayed until its merits had

been approved by Peter, who actually spoke the words that Mark recorded for him and for the Church, and which have come to be known as the Gospel of Mark. We may therefore now summarize the relationships between the Gospels as follows:

- 1) Matthew was composed to meet the urgent needs of the Mother Church of Jerusalem (the Church set up by Peter), which needed a manifesto defending its integrity and its right to exist in the earliest days.
- 2) Luke was written at the behest of Paul to meet the urgent need of his Churches to have their own manifesto to prove their full equality with Jewish Christians.
- 3) Mark was the result of the collaboration of Peter and Paul to make sure that the spiritual and doctrinal unity of the Universal Church was not impaired as a result of the appearance of Lk beside Mt in the Churches of both.
- 4) The purpose of the Gospel of John was to make clear that the primary objective of Jesus throughout his public ministry was the winning over of the spiritual authorities in Jerusalem; at the same time it had the further purpose of readjusting the chronological sequence of his ministry which had been somewhat distorted by the literary sequence of the three Synoptic Gospels.

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