

We have had lately several modifications of old theories of the Synoptists, such as Wright's "oral" theory, Wendt's "documentary" theory, and Marshall's theory of an Aramaic fundamental gospel. These have been quietly received, though they do not tend very greatly to settle our faith.

This new theory, at first sight very startling, places the authenticity of John on an unassailable foundation, and makes the other Gospels, miscalled Synoptic, to be not mere fragmentary collections, but deliberately planned and carefully executed productions.

The Gospels and Modern Criticism.

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MR. HALCOMBE is hard on modern criticism. He never has a good word for modern critics. The Bishop of Durham he has singled out for special attack. The rest, though they are numerous and hold widely divergent opinions, he groups together and condemns without distinction.

Mr. Halcombe forgets that he is a modern critic himself. He has spent years of patient toil on the Gospels, like a critic. He has sedulously marshalled, analysed, and interrogated his facts, like a critic. He has startled us with his conclusions, like a critic. And if a modern critic is not merely one who writes at the close of the nineteenth century, but one who ruthlessly disintegrates books which the Church has always held to be perfect, Mr. Halcombe's treatment of St. Luke's Gospel makes him a very modern critic indeed.

In attempting to state briefly a few of my reasons for not agreeing with him, I have no desire to snatch a victory for the moment. My wish is to help others, if possible, in arriving at truth on this important question. I desire to do full justice to Mr. Halcombe's ability, his industry, and his earnestness, but I am unable to accept his conclusions, and I say so with sincere regret.

Mr. Halcombe's main contention is, that the Gospels were written in the following order: John, Matthew, Mark, Luke.

Now in putting St. John first, Mr. Halcombe does not stand alone. Schleiermacher advocated the same view in the early part of this century. But not even his influence had any appreciable effect on Christian belief. The common sense of the Church refused to give way. But Mr. Halcombe contends that this was the second century order, and appeals to Tertullian to support him. We will not stay to ask why we should prefer the opinion of a third century Montanist to the testimony

of the Fathers of the Church. If Mr. Halcombe's supporters had recollected the golden rule, "Verify your references," they would have been met by a more serious difficulty. Tertullian's order, according to all the manuscripts and editions which I have consulted, appears to be: John, Matthew, Luke, Mark.

Here is the Latin text: "Denique nobis fidem ex apostolis Johannes et Matthæus insinuant, ex apostolicis LUCAS ET MARCUS instaurant."

And here is Mr. Halcombe's translation: "This then is our position. From amongst apostles, John and Matthew plant in us the faith; from amongst apostolic men, MARK AND LUKE confirm this faith."

And again: "Let the Gospels, *as placed by Tertullian*—John, Matthew, MARK, LUKE—be represented by the letters W O R D."

Their meaning in this order (he argues) is plain to every child; but the common order, O R D W, or the order adopted by modern critics, R O D W, is hopelessly unintelligible.

Mr. Halcombe is fond of rearrangements. He has transposed St. Luke viii. 22—xi. 13 and xi. 14—xiii. 21, but he has written a volume to justify himself in doing so. He has discovered that the Muratorian fragment on the Canon has been tampered with by the seventh century translator, who put St. John's Gospel last, whereas the second century author had put it first; but he has given some good, if not convincing, reasons for thinking so. I cannot find, however, that he has anywhere told us on what authority he has altered the current text of Tertullian. Until he does this, I must suppose the editors of Tertullian to be right. And if so, W O D R will be as unintelligible as any of the other permutations.

Meanwhile I will give my own account of this question of the order of the Gospels.

Let us transfer ourselves in thought to the year 90 A.D. At that time, according to my belief, the Epistle of St. James had been in existence more than forty years, being the oldest of the New Testament writings. St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians come next, with an age of thirty-eight years. St. Mark's written Gospel was nearly attaining its majority; St. Matthew's was not much younger; but St. Luke's was only ten years old; and St. John's, if Mr. Halcombe will allow me to say so, was an infant.

All the books of the New Testament, except, perhaps, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, which is of doubtful canonicity, were in existence, but all had a limited circulation. Some Churches probably had none of them, being still content with the old oral teaching. St. Paul's Epistles, however, or at least the longer ones, must have been possessed by many of the Western Churches. Most Churches had one Gospel; few, I imagine, more than one. The Epistle to the Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and the Apocalypse, I cannot suppose to have been in use over a wide area at this date.

But the death of St. John, and the rapid removal of the last of the eye-witnesses, must have had a potent effect in creating or stimulating the desire to possess apostolic writings. During the next hundred years the books of the New Testament penetrated everywhere. They were translated into Latin and Syriac. False Gospels, like the newly-discovered Gospel according to St. Peter, or Marcion's edition of St. Luke, or the Ebionite edition of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, competed with them in certain Churches. Tatian's *Dia tessarôn* was beginning to supplant them in Edessa. But a healthy scepticism arose. Questions were asked. Was a book, which claimed admission into the Church, written by an apostle? If not, where did it circulate? Who was its sponsor? And so the wheat was separated from the chaff, and the Canon was gradually closed; though some books, like the Epistles of Barnabas and Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Acts of St. Paul, and the Revelation of St. Peter, were read as Scripture in some Churches for two or three centuries longer.

It is plain that many years must have elapsed before the scattered books of the New Testament were collected into one or (more usually) two volumes. For whenever a Church desired to secure some Gospel or Epistle which it had not used hitherto,

the booksellers would make a copy of the work, bind it in a separate volume, and send it in that condition, in which it would remain. For there was precedent for doing so. In the synagogues the books of the Old Testament were kept in a series of rolls. Possibly the New Testament was at first kept in rolls also, for the art of binding into a *codex* had been but recently brought into use. And it may be that the sacred books were kept secret amongst the Christians; in which case they would be copied and bound by such of the brethren as could undertake the work.

The small size of the volumes, the cheap paper, the poor binding, accounts for the loss of these primitive books. In less than a century papyrus would be rubbed to pieces. And no books of the New Testament appear to have been written on vellum until the conversion of Constantine. The poor and persecuted Churches could not afford such luxuries, and hence their service-books have perished.

Now it is clear that when the twenty-seven books—more or less; for the number was not exactly fixed at first—began to be collected into one or two volumes, some decision must have been made about their relative order.

And it would be contrary to experience for any great pains to be taken at first to fix the order. We cannot suppose a Church Council to have been held for the purpose, or even a local Synod. It is possible that the choice was left to the purchaser or to the scribe. But in the course of years a few principles for arranging the books would become established.

The Gospels almost invariably stand first in existing manuscripts. And this was right; for though written last, they had been composed first, and had circulated in an oral form from very early times. Committing them to writing was indeed for us a matter of the highest moment, but to the primitive Church it had not been so. To the Christians who learned them by heart, and not merely heard them read, it mattered little whether the catechist dictated the lesson from a book or from his memory. Hence the Fathers, in speaking of the Gospels, fail to distinguish between their oral stage and the written stage. They regard them as a product of the first days. And, at least in the case of the synoptic Gospels, they are right in doing so, though many changes and additions were made during the oral period.

There was another reason for putting the Gospels first. In the Old Testament the Law stood first, the Prophets next, the Psalms and writings last. Now the Gospels corresponded to the Law, the Acts of the Apostles to the earlier Prophets (Joshua, Judges, etc.), the Epistles and Apocalypse to the later Prophets. Psalms and poetical writings the New Testament has none, so fully does the ancient Psalter suffice for devotional needs.

But in what order were the Gospels arranged with respect to one another? Different Churches took, as we should have expected, different views. Most of the Western Churches—by which term Rome and the North African Churches are principally meant—seem to have put the Gospels which were written by apostles first, and then those which were written by the followers of apostles. In nearly all other Churches the order, as far as we can ascertain it, was that which we adopt now.

But which of these two arrangements was the older? I cannot positively say; but let us look at some early authorities. 1. The Muratorian fragment of the Canon (about 170 A.D.) is imperfect; its testimony concerning SS. Matthew and Mark has been lost, except the last six words, which appear to apply to St. Mark; but it expressly states that St. Luke stood third and St. John fourth. Mr. Halcombe thinks that the seventh century translator has reversed the second century author's order. I wish to do justice to his reasons, but I do not think that the learned will agree with him. 2. Irenæus (about 180 A.D.) says that the true *chronological* order was—(1) the Aramaic edition of St. Matthew; (2) St. Mark; (3) St. Luke; (4) St. John. He does not, however, say that the books were thus placed in his manuscript. Perhaps they were not. Perhaps with him they still formed separate volumes. 3. Tatian's *Dia tessarôn* opens with St. John i. 1 ff. This creates a slight presumption that Tatian's New Testament put St. John first, but nothing more; the nature of his harmony almost necessitated this commencement. 4. Tertullian (about 200 A.D.) gives the order John, Matthew, Luke, Mark, and argues for it as the necessarily true chronological order. Tertullian was an advocate. I have had occasion to lecture on him several times, and I have formed a poor opinion of his literary honesty. He was a plagiarist, who copied without acknowledgment, sometimes without understanding his authority. If St. John stood first

in his New Testament, and that order favoured his argument at the moment, he was not the man to inquire why it stood first. He would flout the fact in the face of his adversary, as if it were irrefutable truth. Now in arguing, as he was, against Marcion, who accepted St. Luke's Gospel only, it was important to maintain the superiority of SS. John and Matthew. We must therefore discount his language. He argues the question tediously through four long chapters, bringing after his wont plenty of positive assertion and plenty of abuse against his opponents, but he never quotes an authority. If he had been able to do so, he would not have lost the opportunity. He practically confesses that he has no information. The kind of *a priori* reasons which he presses, though they were the common stock-in-trade of rhetoricians of his stamp, vanish before a single fact, and cannot stand against the statements of Irenæus.

I infer, however, from his testimony that in the Churches of Rome and North Africa, with which he was connected, the order of the Gospels in his time was what he states it to be—John, Matthew, Luke, Mark. Nay, I infer that this order had prevailed at Rome from the day when the Gospels had first been bound into one volume. Otherwise the conviction that this was the true order, could hardly have prevailed so decidedly as Tertullian's arguments prove it to have done.

But I do not believe that the Roman Christians had any good authority for putting the Gospels in that order, even if they had originally intended it to be the chronological order, and not—as on the surface it appears to be—an order according to the dignity of the writers. They knew the date of St. Mark's Gospel, which had probably been written in their city, and they inferred that the other Gospels must be earlier than St. Mark from what they heard of their circulation elsewhere in an oral form.

For notice what follows. Although the pressure of external opinion did not for more than a century alter the rule that apostles should stand first, it did vindicate the priority of St. Matthew to St. John. It had been easy to put St. John first. It must have been very difficult, after he had occupied that post for thirty years or more, to exalt St. Matthew over his head. Nevertheless this was done. All existing manuscripts of the Western Church testify to the order Matthew, John, Luke, Mark. So

stand the Gospels in the uncial *Codex Bezae*, so are they found in the manuscripts of the Old Latin version, in the Gothic version, and in the Apostolical Constitutions.

The instincts of religious people are intensely conservative. St. John could not have been deposed from the post of honour, if the reasons for putting him first could bear examination. Many persons were living who recollected the adoption of the order. If there had been good cause for its retention, their voices could not have been silenced. They did succeed in retaining for him the second place, but not the first.

Meanwhile the common arrangement—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—prevailed throughout the East; but before we discuss it, two slightly different orders are worthy of notice. In the *Codex Claromontanus* of St. Paul's Epistles there is bound up a page which contains an exceedingly ancient list of the books of the New Testament (including certain apocryphal authors now rejected), with the number of lines in each. In this list the order of the Gospels is Matthew, John, Mark, Luke.

Finally, in the Memphitic and Sahidic versions, the late Bishop Lightfoot detected three stages. In the first the common order—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—prevailed. Next, St. John was transferred from the last place to the first, Mr. Halcombe's order being thus at last obtained. Soon afterwards the original order was restored.

Meanwhile the practice of putting St. John's Gospel last was becoming general. When St. Jerome revised the Old Latin versions, or possibly before this, the Eastern order was introduced at Rome, and from thence gradually spread over Christendom, though two centuries passed before the Vulgate drove out the old Latin versions.

St. Jerome could hardly have succeeded, if the arguments had not been on his side. Irenæus was not the only one who knew something about the relative dates of the Gospels. Others whose names have perished must have given their testimony. For Origen was convinced; so were Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, and the other Fathers. The Eastern order is adopted by a canon of the Council of Laodicea (363 A.D.), and in later Councils, in which Western bishops were present to plead for the Western order. I cannot imagine any arguments to have been used against them except those derived from chronology. The Western order appears to me to have been based

on the precedence of the authors, the Eastern order on the dates of the writing.

Mr. Halcombe appeals to the Lectionaries of the Greek Church, which, though themselves not earlier than the sixth century, he rightly regards as resting on older usage. It is true that the Eastern Church selected the "Gospels for the day" at Easter and in the weeks immediately following from St. John, as a general rule. And it is true that Easter was reckoned the commencement of the ecclesiastical year. Hence, in the volume which was prepared for the sole use of the "Gospeller," selections from St. John come first, and except two "Gospels" from St. Mark and two from St. Luke, he is read daily until Whitsunday. But this fact does not prove much. Perhaps the men who arranged the services put St. John first because of his apostolic rank, more probably because the truths which he proclaims are best suited to the most triumphant period of the Church calendar. Certainly, while the *Evangelisterium* held the broken fragments of the Gospels in this order, the Bible on the lectern held them unbroken in the common order. And if this is so, it only confirms my contention that there were two ways of arrangement, one according to dignity, the other according to dates.

Mr. Halcombe will retort, that modern critics do not agree with the early Fathers, but strike out for themselves a new and unheard of order—Mark, Matthew, Luke, John. I reply, that I fully accept the order of Irenæus, who was brought up in Asia Minor, where he had often seen and heard Polycarp, the pupil of St. John. But I have shown that our Greek edition of St. Matthew is a slightly later work than the Aramaic edition of St. Matthew to which Irenæus alludes. And thus it becomes a little later than St. Mark.

If, however, we go beyond the date of writing to the time when the oral Gospel was first composed, then the discrepancy becomes greater, and St. Mark is much older than St. Matthew. I rejoice to have Irenæus on my side, and Papias and Origen and others who have a right to be heard. But I do not, any more than Mr. Halcombe, undertake to follow them blindly. Church Councils are not infallible guides in solving literary problems. Take a parallel case. The Catholic Epistles, after some vicissitudes, fell into the order—James, Peter, John, Jude. I should arrange them—James, Jude, Peter, John. St. Paul's Epistles are given in the

Muratorian fragment in this order—Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, Timothy. Gradually they settled down into their present order. But modern scholars place them—Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy. Would Mr. Halcombe propose to go back to the old order? If he did, would any one support him?

The ancients did their best. Their proximity to

the events gave them certain advantages. Direct testimony, like that of Irenæus, must not lightly be set aside. But we claim the right to review the whole question, and decide it according to the evidence. In this paper I have endeavoured impartially to review the external witness, and I have not found it favourable to Mr. Halcombe's view. In a future paper I may deal with the internal evidence. My prayer is that the reverential study of the Gospels may be promoted by these investigations.

The Teaching of our Lord as to the Authority of the Old Testament.

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OUR LORD'S REFERENCES TO HISTORY AND PROPHECY.

WE now pass to the consideration of our Lord's teaching in regard of the historical and the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament, and to the inferences which may be drawn from His teaching as to the trustworthiness of the writers.

Before, however, we enter into the details of this teaching, it will be necessary to make a few preliminary comments.

1. We have now before us two classes of references; the one to certain facts and events to which our Lord makes brief allusions in His addresses to His disciples and to the Jews; the other, to prophecies relating to Himself and to His Messianic work. From the former of these no very conclusive inferences can be drawn. The historical references, or, to speak more correctly, the historical allusions are not in any respect of a critical nature. The twelve or thirteen separate incidents to which our Lord refers seem all specified with the simple view of defining, illustrating, or emphasising the subject-matter of the addresses in which they are found. They are not thus necessarily substantiated or authenticated by the fact that reference is made to them, but, as will be seen hereafter in detail, the manner in which the greater part are alluded to is such as to make it improbable that our Lord regarded them as otherwise than as veritable events of veritable and trustworthy history.

It is, however, otherwise with our Lord's references to prophecy. From almost all of these it will be seen that inferences may be drawn as to our Lord's recognition of the inspiration of the writers and the reality of their predictions. It may be often doubtful whether the words of the prophecy admit of a primary reference, or whether we are justified in admitting a typical view of the words or incidents, and in believing that our Lord did the same. This, however, will not be doubtful,—that our Lord *did* regard the writers to whom He refers as inspired by God, and as speaking predictively. In fact, the words of the first evangelist, "spoken by the Lord through the prophet," represent the view which was entertained by the apostles, and also by our Lord Himself. This there seems no reason to doubt. It is, however, just what is doubted by some of the more advanced writers of the Analytical school. The authorship of the prophetic books has been for the most part left unchallenged. The dates also at which the different books were written have been in a few instances—as in the case of the Book of Daniel, and in the second portion of the Books of Isaiah and Zechariah—the subjects of vigorous controversy, but in the great majority of cases have not been seriously called in question. What has been called in question is the predictive element, whether in reference to national events, or to the Messianic dispensation. Writers like Professor Kuenen do not hesitate to regard the