

*Biblical lectures.* The course on *The Background of Bible Study* given by Dr Leahy during last autumn and winter at the Newman Centre, Portman Square, London, was reasonably well attended—the average attendance being about thirty. The interest shown was good and sustained. Altogether it was an encouraging beginning of what we trust will be regular series of lectures at the Newman Centre. Other courses are at present in preparation and these will be notified to members and advertised.

## THE ORDER OF THE GOSPELS

THE object of this note is to inquire into the grounds upon which the traditional order of the Gospels is based. Is it a chronological order, or a literary one based upon the greater or lesser similarity between them? And is the testimony of tradition of such a strength as to compel us to accept the present order as a well established and indisputable fact? Let us examine as briefly as possible all the available evidence.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE. 1. *Manuscript evidence.* We have no evidence of the manner in which the original manuscripts of the Gospels, or the first copies, were collected and united into one book. During the papyrus period, which extended to the beginning of the fourth century A.D., each Gospel was written on a separate scroll; the four Gospels, or any two of them would require a roll much larger than the normal size (F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 1912, p. 35). The first complete Bibles belong to the fourth and the fifth centuries, and in them the order Matthew, Mark, Luke, John appears already fixed. We can go a century further back. In the Chester Beatty collection of biblical papyri, recently published by Sir F. G. Kenyon, there is a manuscript of the third century, in a codex form, containing fragments of the four Gospels in the order Matt. Mark, Luke, John. There is therefore evidence reaching into the third century for the present order of the Gospels.

Some MSS, however, arrange the Gospels in a different order. Thus the Codex Bezae of the fifth or the sixth century arranges the Gospels in the order which was very early adopted in the Western Church, i.e., Matt., John, Luke, Mark. In the Washington Manuscript of the Gospels (*W*) of the fifth century the order is Matt., John, Luke, Mark. In the Old Latin version they are arranged in the order Matt., John, Luke, Mark. In the Curetonian Syriac version (fifth century) the order is Matt., Mark, John, Luke.

Therefore the majority of Greek MSS of the fourth to the sixth centuries exhibit the usual order Matt., Mark, Luke, John, while the

Latin versions rearrange them thus: Matt., John, Luke, Mark. The Western order, however, lays no claim to originality as it is based upon the pre-eminence of the Apostles Matthew and John over the disciples Mark and Luke rather than upon chronological considerations. There is no manuscript evidence earlier than the third century.

2. *Patristic evidence.* The oldest document is the *Muratorian fragment*, a list, mutilated at the beginning, of the biblical books, written in Rome during the latter half of the second century. The Gospels are enumerated thus: '. . . Third, Luke; Fourth, John'. The first words of the mutilated list 'he wrote down such things as he had heard' are generally considered to refer to Mark, Peter's disciple. Therefore in that document Mark comes second, and consequently Matthew first.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (175-189), enumerates the Gospels in the order Matt., Mark, Luke, John (*Adv. haer.* III, 1, 1), but elsewhere he gives a different arrangement John, Luke, Matt., Mark (*Adv. haer.* III, 11, 8).

Tertullian, writing c. 207, places John and Matt. before Luke, Mark (*Adv. Marc.* IV, 2). But Tertullian is not concerned here with the chronological order of the Gospels, but with their veracity. He is demonstrating against Marcion the truth of the Gospel doctrine by referring it to the Apostles themselves and to their disciples who wrote what their teachers had preached.

Origen (185-255), on more than one occasion, enumerates the Gospels in the usual order. The Gospel according to 'Matthew, he says, was written first . . . that according to Mark second . . . that according to Luke third . . . that according to John last of all' (Eus. H.E. VI, 25).

During the fourth century the order Matt., Mark, Luke, John prevails. It is given by Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Amphilochius, by the Council of Laodicea, and by the Cheltenham list or Mommsen's Catalogue. Other lists arrange the Gospels in different order. The Claromontane list: Matt., John, Mark, Luke. The *Synopsis* of pseudo-Chrysostom: John, Matt., Luke, Mark. The *Constitutiones apostolicae*: Matt., John, Luke, Mark (B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, London, 1870, 501-46).

Although tradition is neither uniform nor earlier than the latter half of the third century, the order Matt., Mark, Luke, John is more common, is supported by the earliest evidence, is based upon chronological reasons by Origen, and possibly by the Muratorian fragment, and later was accepted in all the Church.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE. External evidence supports the present order of the Gospels. Let us now examine the internal evidence and see whether it confirms or contradicts the testimony of tradition.

The question may be put within narrower limits. In fact it is universally admitted that John was written last and we need not prove it again. The investigation will be restricted to a comparison between the first three Gospels taken in pairs with a view to establishing (i) the dependence between any two Gospels, and (ii) the order of priority between them.

i. *Mark—Luke*. A comparison between Mark and Luke reveals at once three important facts: (i) nearly all Mark is contained in Luke; (ii) both follow the same order; (iii) Luke very often polishes Mark's style.

As regards (i), according to Dom J. Chapman's computation, 243½ verses of Mark, i.e., roughly one third, are not in Luke (*Matthew, Mark and Luke*, London, 1937, p. 131). As some of these omissions consist of single verses, the proportion may be reduced to one fifth of Mark's Gospel. Some of these parts have been omitted because uninteresting to Luke's Gentile readers as vii, 1-23, or even unpleasant as vii, 24-37, or for the sake of brevity. For an explanation of Luke's omissions of Mark, cf. Chapman op. cit. pp. 132-40.

ii. Mark and Luke agree not only in general arrangement, but also in the order of the several episodes forming larger sections. Thus in Mark i, 21-iii, 12=Luke iv, 31-vi, 19 fifteen short episodes are arranged in exactly the same order which is different from that of Matthew. Sometimes, however, the two disagree, but whatever the reason of their disagreement, their inter-relation is obvious.

iii. In general Luke's style is more elegant than Mark's and nearer to classical standards. He is concise where Mark is rather diffuse; his construction of sentences is syntactic where Mark's is paratactic. He avoids Mark's Latinisms and, generally, improves upon his diction.

Therefore there exists a close relation between Mark and Luke. The one must have known and used the other. A dependence upon a common source cannot be admitted. It does not explain all the Mark—Luke agreements and disagreements. Moreover, the common source is either Matthew's Gospel or an unknown document, called 'Proto-Mark'; the former is excluded by the fact that Mark and Luke very often agree against Matt.; for the latter source there is not a shred of evidence.

This Mark—Luke inter-relation must be understood in the sense of a dependence of Luke upon Mark. Such a dependence adequately explains all the Mark—Luke affinities, especially the linguistic affinities. A dependence in an inverse sense would not explain Mark's omission of many of Christ's sayings and discourses recorded by Luke.

If Luke depends upon Mark, their order is Mark—Luke. Luke certainly made use of other sources, but we are not here concerned with them.

2. *Matthew—Mark*. The problem of the Matt.—Mark relation is more complicated. We know from tradition that Matthew's Gospel, though preserved in Greek, was originally written in Hebrew or, better, Aramaic. Hence the question has a two fold aspect: What is the relation of Mark (i) to Aramaic Matt. (ii) to Greek Matt.? The reason of this double aspect is the fact that Mark seems to depend on Matt. as regards the events related and, to a certain extent, their order, while linguistically Greek Matt. seems to depend on Mark. We proceed in this way: First we shall establish the literary facts suggesting or excluding a mutual relation, then we shall examine these facts in the light of the theories proposed by Catholics, namely, the dependence of Greek Matt. on Mark and the dependence of Mark on Greek Matt.

An important point must be made clear. Although we no longer possess the Aramaic original of Matthew's Gospel, its substantial identity with its Greek translation must be admitted (*Decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 19th June 1914). Substantial identity does not necessarily exclude some slight alterations introduced by the translator, such as inversion of order, the addition or omission of an episode, and other accidental details.

i. *Matt.Ar.—Mark*. Both seem to be independent of each other. Mark's freshness of descriptions, uncouthness of style, vividness and spontaneity of expression suggest that Mark is more in contact with facts than with written sources. On the other hand, Matt., though less colourful, is uniform throughout both in the conception of his plan as well as in its schematic and progressive development. Although both evangelists are aiming at demonstrating a thesis, Mark is more concerned with facts, while Matt. concentrates rather on his theme, sometimes sacrificing the chronological to the logical sequence of events.

But if the two are independent of each other, how are we to account for their complete agreement in the order of events from Matt. xiv, 13=Mark vi, 31 onwards?

It is generally assumed that the agreement in subject-matter and arrangement is due to the evangelists' use of a common source, the apostles' teaching or *catechesis*, which was the common stock of biographic information about Christ, and from which the apostles and their disciples drew the material for their preaching according to the different needs of their hearers. By force of repetition the apostolic catechesis became more or less crystallized in form and contents, and it was from this crystallized form that the evangelists drew their material.

This, however, may be a misrepresentation, or a partial representation of the origin and growth of the Apostles' teaching. We readily admit that the primitive catechesis, traces of which have been preserved in Acts (cp ii, 14-36; iii, 12-26; xiii, 16-41, etc), consisted mainly in the exposition of a few facts and sermons from the life of Christ with

the purpose of proving his divinity. In course of time this bare exposition of isolated facts grew up into a well-defined outline of Christ's life, more or less fixed as regards its contents and their general arrangement. But we must not imagine that the Apostles repeated the *whole* story of Christ on every occasion. It is more likely that they simply selected one point, illustrating it by means of some facts, sayings or sermons of Christ, and another day they selected another point, or perhaps repeated the same point, illustrating it by other facts and sermons. Therefore if the Apostles' oral teaching is the main source of the contents of the Gospels and their general arrangement, it can hardly explain the complete agreement on such matters as the order of events which are not logically connected together. We must therefore admit that either the Apostles, in our case Matthew and Peter, eye-witnesses of most of the events of Christ's life, selected the illustrative facts and sermons according to a chronological plan, which was later reproduced with slight variations in Matthew's and Mark's Gospels, or Mark made use of a copy of Aramaic Matthew which he or Peter had brought to Rome. The latter alternative does not seem probable. An Aramaic Gospel could serve no useful purpose outside Palestine. It would certainly be a poor compliment to Peter if we say with Dom Chapman (op. cit., p. 91), that the Apostle needed to refresh his memory.

There are no conclusive arguments in favour of Mark's dependence on Aramaic Matthew. The matter that is common to both, and their partial agreement in order, can well be referred back to the Apostles' oral teaching. Mark's order, is more chronological than Matt.'s. And we cannot discount the hypothesis that Matt's original order has been slightly retouched by the Greek translator. Matt's priority cannot therefore be convincingly proved by internal criteria.

ii. Matt.Gr.—Mark. A direct Matt.Ar.—Mark relation cannot be proved by internal criteria, but a Matt.Gr.—Mark relation is generally admitted. It is proposed in two forms: (i) the Greek translator of Matt. made use of Mark; (ii) Mark depends indirectly on Matt.Gr.

(i) The first form of Matt.Gr.—Mark relation is widely adopted by Catholics. It is based on these arguments: 1. The style of Matt.Gr. is more elegant than Mark's, and in the parallel passages Matt.Gr. seems to be correcting or polishing Mark's less refined style. 2. Matt.Gr. avoids the verbosity and diffuseness of Mark's style. 3. There are in Matt.Gr. some duplicate sayings of Christ, one of which is embedded in a suitable context, the other out of its context and having its parallel in Mark. Thus Christ's words in Matt. v, 29f. *If thy right eye scandalize thee*, etc, which are in their proper context, recur in xviii, 8f, where they have no connection with the context, but are parallel with Mark ix, 43, 45, 47, where they stand in a logical connection with the context. Matt. xviii, 8f, therefore, is probably taken from Mark and added to Matt.

by the Greek translator. 4. There occur in the common sections of Matt.Gr. and Mark some rare words which clearly suggest a literary dependence. It may be added that some characteristic Marcan words and expressions occur in the parallel passages of Matt., but hardly elsewhere. It is clear that these words have found their way into Matt.Gr. through Mark.

The first and second arguments are not conclusive. The more refined style of Matt.Gr., its conciseness in contrast with Mark's verbosity, may be due to the translator's natural skill and literary tendencies. But it must not be forgotten that Matt.Gr. is a translation, and it is difficult to explain certain verbal agreements between a translation and the original Greek Mark without admitting a certain dependence of the translation on Mark, unless we are to believe that Matt.Ar. was translated into Greek by Matthew himself or by another Apostle or disciple who was well familiar with the primitive catechesis in its Greek form. Arguments 3 and 4 possess, at least in certain cases, a greater probative force. Although Christ may have repeated the same saying on several occasions, the lack of connection of any saying with its immediate context seems to be a clear indication that the saying does not belong to the original composition but has been inserted from another source.

The problem of the Matt.Gr.—Mark dependence is not easy to solve. Some of the arguments that are usually brought in favour of such dependence are not conclusive. But on the whole the balance of evidence seems to be rather in favour of this dependence, and once it is admitted many literary affinities between Matt.Gr. and Mark will get an easy explanation.

(ii) The second form of Matt.Gr.—Mark relation is proposed thus by Dom Chapman: 'St Peter . . . in addressing Gentile converts, gives only what he himself remembers, and omits whatever he thinks unsuitable to Gentiles. He uses our actual Greek Matt. as his textbook, reads out of it, in his own wording, whatever he has chosen, in conversational language, with much addition, with many verbal repetitions and all the vividness of personal recollection. Mark is present, and takes the lectures down as far as possible word for word, in shorthand. He preserves carefully the redundancies . . . and the freshness, without actually admitting any bad Greek' (p. 90). It must in all fairness be added that Dom Chapman apologizes for 'this effort of the imagination, which gives at least a possible explanation of some curious data' (p. 92).

Leaving aside the more or less fanciful details of this theory let us examine briefly the grounds upon which it is based.

Mark, writes Dom Chapman, is abbreviating Matt. both by omitting and summarizing many of his narratives and discourses. Therefore Mark is later than, and depends on, Matt. But as the comparison is made between Mark and the Greek text of Matt., it follows that Mark depends on Matt.Gr.

Dom Chapman seems to mix up two questions or two aspects which we have kept distinct, namely Mark's relation to Matt.Ar. and Mark's relation to Matt.Gr. The examples adduced by him to prove that Mark is abbreviating Matt. may well apply to both Matt.Ar. and Matt.Gr. If Peter is really reading Matt.Gr. *in his own wording*, how are the verbal agreements between Matt.Gr. and Mark to be accounted for? Why has Peter in some cases employed a less common word for the easier one used by Matt.? And is it likely that Peter's recollection had faded away to such an extent that he continually needed the use of his *textbook* to refresh his memory? What did he preach and how did he preach before he had Matt's Greek translation?

Another objection against Dom Chapman's theory is the date of Matt's translation. We do not know when the translation was made, but it is assumed in Dom Chapman's theory that it already existed when Peter left Palestine for Rome. The date of Peter's arrival in Rome is not known, nor do we know when Mark joined Peter in Rome. Peter was in Palestine in the year 50 when he attended the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv, 6-14). Therefore Peter must have left Palestine shortly after 50, perhaps in 51-2, carrying with him Matthew's Greek translation, an indispensable help to his short memory. If Peter had a copy of Greek Matthew at that time, the translation must have been made at least about the year 50. This is quite possible. But it was at that time that the first Gospel was originally written, that is, about 45-50, or even, according to some interpreters, shortly after the year 50. It is, therefore, difficult, though not impossible to imagine a Gospel written and translated almost at the same time. Moreover, there is some probability that Matt.Gr. depends on Luke, that is, that Matt.Gr. is later than Luke. Now if we admit that Mark is later than Matt.Gr. we should also admit with the same degree of probability that Mark is later than Luke, an inversion which is contradicted by internal and external evidence.

Summing up the results of this enquiry, we may say that the order Matthew, Mark, Luke is supported by external evidence reaching into the second half of the second century. Internal criteria show that Luke is later than Mark and that Matt.Gr. is very probably later than Mark. The priority of Matt. cannot be proved with absolute certainty, but the priority of a Judaic Gospel over the other Gentile Gospels is more in conformity with the 'Jews first' principle followed by the Apostles and solemnly proclaimed by Paul. The decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, dated 19th June 1911, declaring the priority of Matthew's Gospel, is based on solid traditional grounds.

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