

AUTHORSHIP AND DATING OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS: A Scientific and Rational Analysis

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I Introduction

This paper is written with a perspective in agreement with Dr. John A. T. Robinson that the weight of probabilities is the overriding force with respect to authorship and dating. "Dating is almost always a matter of assessing the balance of probabilities." (R 33)

Authorship and dating of the gospels is critical to the benevolent force they can generate, sustain, and nurture in a person's life -- his soul. Always remembering the words of Dr. Robinson.

We find contemporary "scholarship" on this subject fanciful, unnecessarily complex, detached from known facts and tradition, and unrealistic in terms of how human affairs are actually conducted. Probably arising from a personal agenda.

The gospels are the underpinning of the Christian faith and practice, which guides one to abundant life here and now, and eternal life besides. Any undermining of the gospels consequently diminishes life.

Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, "Nothing makes the church and the body of Christ suffer so much as the sins of its pastors, especially those who transform themselves into 'robbers of sheep', either because they lead them astray with their private doctrines, or because they bind them in the snares of sin and death" -- quoted from Benedict's formal opening of "the Year for Priests." The same may be said of the theologians who invent private doctrines without a firm basis.

Authorship which dates nearest in time to our Savior's actual presence and whose identity is attributed to those who personally accompanied Him -- or who interviewed eyewitnesses who did -- embodies the greatest power to lead the way to salvation.

As the gospels are the soul of theology and the “source of all...moral teaching”, they are absolutely critical guides to man’s salvation. (D 115) No stone should be left unturned in the effort to determine the most accurate dating and authorship thereof. And, no lack of critical thinking should be applied to representations thereof.

The argument for authorship and dating of the Synoptic Gospels is presented below. The bases of the analyses are historical testimony, the continuous tradition of the Roman Catholic Church for 2,000 years, internal and external evidence and reason as it relates to human experience, that which is commonly called common sense.

Keeping in mind that the process of dating is a matter of assessing probabilities, not absolute proof. The following analysis is, therefore, not a proof, rather an overwhelmingly probable understanding of the true authorship and dating of the Synoptics. One which is likely to be far stronger than any alternative presentation the reader is likely to encounter.

II Authorship and Dating by Ancient Testimony and Tradition

A. Gospel of Matthew

Matthew the Apostle

Matthew was a member of a wealthy Galilean Jewish family. His father, Alpheus (probably the same Clopas, N 628), was, according to Eusebius, a brother to Joseph (E 79), husband to Mary, mother of our Lord. Therefore, Matthew was likely a first cousin to Jesus.

Matthew was highly literate, being the head of a tax collection booth (telones) at a critical location on the Damascus Road (via Maris) which offered access to roads to Jerusalem, Alexandria, Caesarea, and Antioch. In other words, he had access to the trade centers of Palestine and the Mediterranean world.

As such, Matthew was skilled at languages and accounts. Alpheus’ family was apparently wealthy and influential in order to have secured this lucrative collection booth. Very likely Matthew was the best educated of the Apostles. For his occupation he would have spoken Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek with at least a working knowledge of Latin.

No doubt he was selected by Jesus, in part, for his ability to record events as they happened and to prepare a written account later. Shorthand was a well-developed art by this time and “Levi - Matthew...would have had a working knowledge of *tachygraphy*” (shorthand). Scholars have suggested that he “was quite capable of taking down the long Sermon on the Mount verbatim”. (T 134-136)

Authorship by Ancient Testimony

Several of the early Church Fathers testify to the authorship of Matthew's Gospel.

Papias (c. 60-150), early Father and Bishop of Hierapolis, associated with and spoke personally to those who knew Jesus and those who knew the Apostles. For instance, "In his own book, Papias gives accounts of the Lord's sayings obtained...direct from the presbyter, John", who was a disciple of our Lord. (E 103) Referring to Papias, Eusebius writes: - "Of Matthew he has this to say: Matthew compiled the *Sayings* in the Aramaic language, and everyone translated them as well as they could." (E 104) It is clear that as far back as the second half of the first century that Matthew was known to author the gospel which bears his name.

Eusebius (260-340) was himself a scholar, Doctor of the Church and Bishop of Caesarea. He lived relatively close in time to the events we are considering. Eusebius had original manuscripts of the Fathers, and had access to the great libraries of the middle-east, from Alexandria to Antioch. His views are well-founded. An example, as evidence of Eusebius' extraordinary position to perform historical research: within c. 60 years *after* Eusebius' death, St. Jerome tells us he (Jerome) had access in the Caesarea library to the *original* copy of Matthew's Gospel. (M 175).

Eusebius further states his view - "of them all (Apostles and disciples who were with Our Lord) Matthew and John alone left us memoirs of the Lord's doings." "Matthew had begun by preaching to Hebrews; and when he made up his mind to go to others too, he committed his own gospel to writing in his native tongue, so that for those for whom he was no longer present, the gap left by his departure was filled by what he wrote." (E 86) Again, Eusebius is very clear that Matthew himself authored his gospel. It is likely that Eusebius himself reviewed the original copy in the Caesarea Library.

"Clement of Alexandria" (Church Father, 150-215) according to McBirnie, stated that he (referring to Matthew) "spent 15 years in this work." (M 175) The "work" refers to Matthew's Gospel. Clement clearly attributes the authorship to Matthew himself. The matter of dating will be discussed below under *Dating*.

Irenaeus (c. 140-202) another Father, stated "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect." (M 175) This again is testimony to Matthew's authorship.

St. Jerome (342-420), Doctor of the Church and translator of the original scriptural texts into the Vulgate, the authoritative Latin Bible, states that "Matthew, also called Levi, Apostle...composed a gospel of Christ and first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but was afterwards translated into Greek." Further, "the Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library of Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered." (M 175)

Further, Dr. Wenham summarizes: “The fathers are almost unanimous in asserting that Matthew, the tax-collector, was the author, writing first.” Wenham cites the following fathers “Papias (c. 60-130), Irenaeus (c. 130-200), Pantaenus (d. c. 190), Origen (c. 185-254), Eusebius (260-340), Epiphanius (c. 315-403), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386) and others write in this vein.” (W 116)

Conclusion: It is clear that the overwhelming testimony of those closest to the life of Jesus and with evidence, given orally and in writing – including many Fathers of the Church consider Matthew himself as the author of the Gospel bearing his name.

Authorship by Tradition

The fact that Matthew is the author of his gospel has always been the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and was reaffirmed as recently as the Council of Vatican II. (1963-1965)

One of the earliest English translations of the Latin New Testament (Vulgate) the Douay-Rheims version (1582), includes a preface to Matthew’s Gospel stating - “He was the first of the Evangelists that wrote the Gospel, and that in Hebrew or Syro-Chaldaic which the Jews of Palestine spoke at the time.” (DR 3) The “first” is also significant and is referred to in *Dating by Tradition*, below.

The Vatican II document on Sacred Scripture (“*Dei Verbum*”) states that “the Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four Gospels”... according to “Matthew, Mark, Luke and John”, were “handed to us in writing” and “are of apostolic origin.” By apostolic origin, the Church means written by “the apostles”, “they themselves” and by “apostolic men.” They “themselves” refers to Matthew and John. “Apostolic men” refers to “Mark and Luke” who were “contemporary with the apostles, but younger.” (D 123)

Conclusion: The Church has, and continues to hold, that Matthew the Apostle is the author of the gospel bearing his name.

Dating by Ancient Testimony

In his History, Eusebius identifies the chronological order of the four gospels as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (E 86) -- thus attributing the earliest gospel written to Matthew. Dr. Wenham provides an extensive list (cited above) of other Fathers who confirm this order. That is, “that Matthew the tax - collector was the author, *writing first.*” (W 116)

According to Dr. Wenham, Eusebius additionally *provides the year of the gospel’s completion.* “In his *Chronicon* Eusebius places the writing of the gospel (Matthew’s) in the third year of the reign of Caligula, that is, 41.” (W 239) As discussed earlier, Clement of Alexandria by inference dates the gospel

completion by 42-45. Eusebius being definite on the date of 41, does not vary greatly from Clement and is accepted as the accurate authority.

Dr. Wenham further states "There was a widespread belief that the apostles were dispersed from Jerusalem 12 years after the crucifixion", i.e., in 42. (W 239) That seems reasonable because James, son of Zebedee, was martyred by Herod Agrippa I in c. 41. Agrippa ruled Judea from 41 to 44. Peter had, subsequent to James' murder, been jailed for the purpose of execution by Agrippa, but was miraculously released. At this time the danger to the Apostles, of remaining in Palestine, increased dramatically. Thus, added creditability is warranted to the testimony of Eusebius that Matthew had prepared his gospel and left the Palestine area by about 41. It is a reasonable deduction that Matthew would have been well advised to depart the area as did St. Peter in about 42. (Acts 12: 1-17)

Conclusion: The early Church Fathers all identify Matthew as the author of the first gospel -- including Bishop Papias, Eusebius, Clement, Pantaenus, Origen, Epiphanius, Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Jerome. (The only possible exception is statements by Irenaeus which Dr. Wenham discounts -- W 239-243). Eusebius also tells us that Matthew (in addition to being the first gospel written) was written specifically in the year 41. Relying on Papias, he tells us it was written in Palestine. Wenham's sources place Matthew's departure from Palestine at c. 42. Treacherous conditions in Palestine support that idea and therefore, support the early dating of 41.

Dating by Tradition

The Douay-Rheims NT translation of the Vulgate into English in 1582, with revisions in 1749-52, states that Matthew was "first of the evangelists" to write a gospel and that it was written "six years after our Lord's ascension." (DR 3) The Douay-Rheims dates the ascension in 33, therefore, by their reasoning Matthew's authorship is dated in 39. The DR date is not exactly that of Eusebius, of 41, but it approximates it. Moreover each source regards Matthew's Gospel as *first* and with *early dating*.

The contemporary Catholic Study Bible states that "the position of the Gospel according to Matthew as the first of the four gospels in the New Testament reflects both the view that it was the first to be written, a view that goes back to the late second century AD, and the esteem in which it was held by the Church and no other was so frequently quoted in the non-canonical literature of the earliest Christianity." (CSB NT 2)

Conclusion: The tradition of the Catholic Church has, and continues to regard, Matthew's Gospel as the *first written*. The Douay-Rheims tradition further suggests Matthew's Gospel was written as early as 39.

Conclusion to the Gospel of Matthew

With respect to authorship - ancient testimony of the Fathers of the Church, and by tradition through the centuries, and to the contemporary witness of Vatican II -- the Church believes Matthew to be the author of the gospel bearing his name. That he was the first to author a gospel and that he did so in Aramaic.

With respect to dating - the Fathers and tradition date the gospel between 39 and 41. We are convinced, as is Dr. Wenham, that "Eusebius' *Chronicon* is the most precise," in dating "the publication of Matthew's gospel in 41." (W 241)

B. Gospel of Mark

Mark the Evangelist

John Mark was a young man living in Jerusalem in c. 42 when St. Peter escaped prison and found safety in his (and his Mother Mary's) house. (Acts 12:12)

No doubt John Mark was a Roman citizen as he carried names of two cultures. His Jewish name "John" (in other words, Jonah) and the Roman praenomen "Marcus". The latter name is the one he was identified by in Acts and subsequently. (CE Gospel of Mark 1)

The family of John Mark was likely a priestly and influential Jewish family, as Mark was a cousin to Barnabas, a Levite. (Col. 4:10, Acts 4:36) However, they were apparently early and prominent followers of The Way as "many" of the brethren were "gathered together praying" in John Mark's house at the time of Peter's arrival. (Acts 12:12) "Rhode", in fact, recognized Peter's voice when he came to the house gate, suggesting Peter was a frequent visitor. (Acts 12:12-17)

Mark was involved with Peter, in Rome, in the mid 40's (as is discussed below). Mark was in Jerusalem in 47 (Acts 12:25). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on a mission as far as Perge (Acts 12:25 -13:13) in 47. Later he traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts 15:39).

In c. 61, Mark is again in Rome with Paul during his imprisonment. (Col 4: 10) Mark apparently was evangelizing in or near Ephesus afterward when Paul requests his presence in Rome, during Paul's last imprisonment, c. 67. (2 Tim 4:8, 11)

At some point, according to Eusebius, "Mark is said to have been the first man to set out for Egypt and preach there the gospel which he himself had written down, and the first to establish churches in

Alexandria itself.” (E 50) Eusebius relates “the tradition that Anianus, a convert of Mark, succeeded him as the pastor of the Church of Alexandria.” (M 254) Thus making him the first bishop of Alexandria.

Apparently he traveled and evangelized extensively. Mark was companion at various times, including that of the great trial in Rome, with Peter and Paul, as well as with evangelists in the early church such as Barnabas and Timothy. He traveled to Jerusalem, Rome, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Alexandria, and perhaps, to other locations to help spread the faith.

Authorship by Ancient Testimony

Several ancient sources attest to Mark as the author/recorder of the gospel which bears his name.

Below Eusebius quotes from Papias’ “own book”, information which Papias received directly from John the Presbyter, who we have seen was a firsthand disciple of Our Lord.

“I must now follow up...with a piece of information which he (Papias) sets out regarding Mark, the writer of the gospel -- this, too, the presbyter used to say: ‘Mark, who has been Peter’s interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord’s sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, (had been) one of Peter’s’ “.

Peter used to adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord’s sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only—“to leave out nothing that he had heard and to make no misstatement about it.” (E 103, 4)

Four points can be drawn from above. One, Papias was informed by John the Presbyter, a disciple with firsthand knowledge of our Lord. Two, that Mark, the disciple of Peter, wrote the gospel bearing his name. Three, that he did so by recording the words of Peter himself. The fourth point is made by Dr. Wenham - “Eusebius contrasts the orderly arrangement of Matthew with the less-structured oral teaching of Peter.” (W 136)

St. Clement, Bishop of Alexandria (c. 150-211), in his “Outlines, Book VI,” provides information which Eusebius presents. “So brightly shone the light of true religion on the minds of Peter’s hearers (in Rome) that, not satisfied with a single hearing or with the oral teaching of the divine message, they resorted to appeals, of every kind to induce Mark (whose gospel we have), as he was a follower of Peter, to leave them in writing a summary of the instruction they had received by word of mouth. . . nor did they let him go till they had persuaded him, and thus became responsible for the writing of what is known as the Gospel according to Mark.” (E 49, additional reference W 141).

So we have from the writings of Clement, who was a successor Bishop of Mark in Alexandria, within c. 100 years that again, Mark wrote the gospel bearing his name, from oral instruction given to the

Romans by Peter himself. And it is important to note as well that Eusebius further advises - "his (Clement's) statement is confirmed by" the writings of "Bishop Papias of Hierapolis", as was stated by Eusebius, and presented above. (E 49) (W 141)

One further statement of Clement's is important to present - "It is said that, on learning by revelation of the spirit what had happened, the apostle (Peter) was delighted...and authorized the reading of the book in the churches." (E 49)

Thus Clement states the gospel was not only written by Mark from Peter's preaching to the Romans, but was reviewed by the rock of the Church himself who enthusiastically endorsed its contents and authorized its dissemination.

Eusebius, later in his text conveys other confirming information from Clement. "Mark's (gospel) originated as follows. When at Rome, Peter had openly preached the word and by the spirit had proclaimed the gospel, the large audience urged Mark...to write it all down. This he did, making his gospel available to all who wanted it." (E 192) (W 141) Thus, confirming once again the authorship by Mark from Peter's preaching to the Romans.

"When Peter heard about this, he made no objection and gave no special encouragement." (E 192).

We can each decide whether Peter "gave no special encouragement" or "was delighted...and authorized the reading of the book in the churches." Perhaps the two statements are not contradictory. We conclude Peter enthusiastically endorsed The Gospel of Mark but made no special effort to persuade others to use it.

Elsewhere Clement informs that "Mark the follower of Peter, while Peter was preaching the gospel publicly in Rome in the presence of Caesar's knights and was putting forth the many testimonies concerning Christ, being requested by them (Romans) that they might be able to commit to memory the things which were spoken, wrote from the things which were spoken of by Peter (in) the Gospel which is called According to Mark." (W 141, 142 with original sources cited) This quote is included to demonstrate that on several occasions Clement reiterated the same story.

Irenaeus (c.140-202), great defender of Christianity, according to Dr. Wenham says - "of Mark, he says...also has himself handed on to us in writing the things proclaimed by Peter." (W 138) (Wenham's source--*Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses* 3.1.2)

Origen (185-254) in his Commentary on Matthew says, "I accept the traditional view of the four gospels." After Matthew "Next came that of Mark, who followed Peter's instructions in writing it." (E 201) (Additional references W 142)

Again, we have two additional and esteemed early Fathers, Irenaeus and Origen, who confirm their view (and the common view) that Mark himself (follower/scribe and companion of Peter), wrote the gospel which bears his name.

Eusebius, attesting to Mark's authorship, states Mark set out for Egypt to "preach there the gospel which he himself had written down." (E 50)

Conclusion: According to ancient testimony, from Papias (60-130) to Eusebius (260-339), Mark wrote his gospel himself and composed it according to Peter's preaching and at the urging of Peter's followers in Rome.

Authorship by Tradition

The Douay-Rheims (published under the imprimatur of James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore 9/1/1899) relying on the testimony of St. Jerome states, "St. Mark the disciple and interpreter of St. Peter...wrote in Rome a brief Gospel at the request of the Brethren...according to what he heard from Peter himself". "When Peter had heard, he approved of it, and with his authority published it to the Church to be read." (DR 41) Thus, authorities in the Church held in 1582 (the date of the translation of the Douay-Rheims from the NT Vulgate) that the tradition of the early Fathers, attributing authorship to Mark the disciple of Peter was upheld.

The Roman Catholic Church through the Biblical Commission on June 26, 1913 reaffirmed centuries of tradition, "Mark ... and Luke ... are really the authors of the Gospels respectively attributed to them." (CE Gospel of Luke 16) Thus, the Commission reaffirms centuries of tradition that Mark authored his gospel.

Indeed, in 1965, nineteen centuries after the founding of the Church, Vatican II in Documents, continued to reaffirm the view expressed by the preparers of the Douay-Rheims New Testament and the Commission of 1913 that Mark, an "apostolic" man, wrote the Gospel which "bears his name". "The Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin." They were "handed to us in writing" by the "apostles...they themselves and apostolic men."

"Mark" is identified as one of the "Apostolic men", i.e., a "generation partly contemporary with the apostles but younger." Mark and the three other evangelists "they themselves" "handed to us in writing...the fourfold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John." (D 123)

Conclusion: Church tradition has always assigned and continues to assign the authorship of the Gospel of Mark to Mark himself.

Dating by Ancient Testimony

As has been seen with respect to authorship by ancient testimony, the Church Fathers have clearly identified Mark's Gospel as written from Peter's preaching in Rome, by John Mark (whom Peter called his "son"), at the request of Peter's Roman audiences. (1 Pet 5:13)

The questions to be answered for dating are:

- a. Do the Fathers testify to a date?
- b. Was Peter likely in Rome during the period in question and is there evidence of a Christian community being established during that time?

a. Do the Fathers testify to a date?

Origen's position is here stated in full - "I accept the traditional view of the four gospels which alone are undeniably authentic in the Church of God on earth. First to be written was...Matthew; it was published for believers of Jewish origin and was composed in Aramaic. Next came Mark, who followed Peter's instruction in writing it." (E 201)

When Origen states "next came Mark", he identifies Mark as the second gospel written. In so saying, he echoes the views of the many Church Fathers. That dates Mark after 41, the date of Matthew's Gospel as determined in the *Gospel of Matthew* section above.

More specifically, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states that, in his "Chronicle", Eusebius places authorship of Mark's Gospel in "the third year of Claudius (AD 43)." (CE Gospel of Mark 7)

This argument is further verified by review of ancient copies of Mark's Gospel. The Catholic Encyclopedia states, "The subscription of many of the later uncial and cursive manuscripts states that it was written (Mark's Gospel) in the tenth or twelfth year after the Ascension". (CE Gospel of Mark 7) Thus, 40-45 depending on the date assumed for the Ascension.

Conclusion: We have testimony from Origen and other Fathers that Mark was written after Matthew -- before Luke and John. Furthermore, Eusebius dates the Gospel *specifically* in 43 and subscriptions from manuscripts of Mark's Gospel date it around 40-45.

b. Is there evidence that Peter could have been in Rome in the 40s and is there evidence a Christian community was established then?

"Irenaeus...in Book I of his Against Heresies" states that "in the...reign of Claudius the all-gracious and kindly providence of the universe brought to Rome...the strong and great apostle...Peter himself..."

"preaching the good news." (E 47, 49) Thus, Irenaeus and Eusebius place Peter in Rome during Claudius' reign, 41-54.

We can further define Peter's visit to Rome during the years 41-54. "Eusebius writes that he (Peter) came to Rome about 44..." (HE II, 14, 61) (M 62)

We know that Peter fled Jerusalem in c. 42 after the murder of James, son of Zebedee, by Agrippa I, and after Peter's own imprisonment and escape. (Acts 12: 1-11) We also know that Peter returned to Jerusalem in c. 47 (Gal 2:1-10) and later attended the Council in Jerusalem in c. 49. (Acts 15:7)

For four reasons (in addition to the testimony of Irenaeus and Eusebius) the evidence is that Peter's escape from Jerusalem was to Rome and that Peter evangelized there in the 40's. The additional evidence from ancient sources includes: one, comments from the Roman historian Suetonius; two, information from Acts 18:2; three, Paul's *Letter to the Romans*; and four, the situation existing in and around Rome in 60 when Paul arrived as a prisoner. (The latter is discussed in *Internal Evidence*).

Suetonius provides external evidence which supports Peter's evangelization in Rome in the 40s. He states that "Claudius expelled the Jews (from Rome) in 50 because they were growing agitated at the prompting of the Chrestos". (M 62) This presupposes the existence of a significant Christian community by 50.

Suetonius' testimony is additionally supported by internal evidence from Acts 18:2, where Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. They have "lately come from Italy" because "Claudius had commanded all Jews depart Rome." This meeting in Corinth took place under the well-documented proconsul of Gallio 51-52, and supports Suetonius' testimony. i

Paul's Letter to the Romans in the middle 50s presupposes the existence of a well-developed Christian community by the time of his writing. The likely evangelist to the Romans was St. Peter himself in the 40s.

McBirnie, reviewing much of the evidence above, concludes - speaking "of St. Peter in Rome" - "It seems certain that Rome was evangelized during this period 42-49." (M 62) McBirnie agrees the evangelization of Rome took place in the 40s. More likely, as stated above, the evangelization was accomplished by 47, when Peter had returned to Jerusalem. (2 Gal: 1-10)

Conclusion: Strong evidence from direct testimony from Irenaeus and Eusebius, words of Suetonius, evidence from Acts (including the fact that Peter escaped Jerusalem in c.42, confirmed in Acts 18:2) all suggest that Peter evangelized Rome in 42-47 before resurfacing in Jerusalem in 47 and attending the Council in 49.

One final issue needs to be discussed. It is true that Peter made a second and well-documented visit to Rome in the mid to late 60s, during the great persecution of Nero, which as we know resulted in his crucifixion in c. 68.

It is far more probable that Mark recorded Peter's preaching to the Romans during the 40s than during Peter's last visit in the mid to late 60s. (1) The removal of Jews from Rome in 50 suggests a significant community of Christians (Chrestos) by that time. (2) By the mid-to-late 60s Christians had already become a populated community in Rome, numerous enough to be persecuted. (3) On Peter's last visit to Rome, during the great persecution, conditions were not conducive to preaching and converting those being hunted and slaughtered. (4) Finally, Peter could do little preaching (and Mark not much recording) during this visit, as Peter was jailed in the Mamertine, Rome's horrible fetid prison, for nine months before being crucified. (M 65, 66)

Dating by Tradition

The Douay-Rheims holds a traditional view. St. Mark "wrote his gospel 10 years after Our Lord's Ascension." (DR 41) The Douay-Rheims dates the Ascension at 33; therefore, it dates Mark's Gospel at 43.

Vatican II Documents suggests the traditional order of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Thus it identifies Mark as the second gospel written, which supports early dating. (D 123)

Conclusion to the Gospel of Mark

Papias, contemporary with eyewitnesses to Our Lord, testifies that Mark wrote his gospel from teaching given by Peter to the Romans. Mark, companion and interpreter of Peter, was "asked by the Romans to record these teachings so that when Peter departed Rome they would have a record of his eyewitness testimony". And Mark did so. The Church Fathers of the second and third centuries unanimously identified Mark as the author of the gospel which bears his name. Nearly two thousand years of tradition also attest to Mark's authorship.

St. Peter escaped Jerusalem in c. 42. He is said by Irenaeus to have arrived in Rome between 41 and 54, and by Eusebius specifically by 43.

According to Suetonius, suggested in Paul's letter to the Romans and confirmed in Acts 18:2, a thriving Christian community existed in Rome by 50.

St. Peter is known to have returned to Jerusalem in 47 and is also present in 49 at the Council. His Gospel was therefore written in Rome between 42 and 47. The likely date to settle on is 45, as it satisfies all evidence, Tradition and reason.

C. Gospel of Luke

Luke the Evangelist

Luke (Lucas, Lucanes) was “by birth an Antiochene.” (E 67) A gentile and “a Greek.” (CE Gospel of Luke) He was by profession a “physician” (Col 4: 14) and “a companion of St. Paul and was closely associated with the other apostles as well.” (E 67)

As a companion to Paul, Luke accompanied him on missions and remained with Paul during his imprisonments in Caesarea (c. 58-60) and in Rome (c.60-62) (Acts 21:15-28, 31) as well as during Paul’s final imprisonment in Rome c. 67. (2 Tim 4:6-11)

In fact, “Paul was in the habit of referring to Luke’s Gospel whenever he said as if writing of some gospel of his own: ‘According to my gospel.’ ” (Rm 2:16, 16:25) (E 67)

Authorship by Ancient Testimony

Dr. Wenham sums up the view of the Fathers regarding authorship - “The unanimous testimony of the early Christian writers attributes the gospel to Luke...the companion of Paul.” (W 184) “This is found in Irenaeus, the Muratorian fragment, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and in those who come after, and is never disputed.” (W 184)

Those who came after are listed as “Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Ephraem, Syrus, Adamantius”, and also those in “(the) Monarchian Prologue, and the Prologue to Vulgate.” (W 289) Justin, one of the early Fathers (c.110-165) in his Apology refers to the authors of the Gospels as “Apostles (Matthew, John) and disciples of the Apostles (Mark, Luke).” (CE Gospel of Luke 7)

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* further reinforces this: “The many passages in St. Jerome, Eusebius, Origen, ascribing the books (Gospel of Luke and Acts) to St. Luke, are important not only as testifying to the belief of their own, but also of earlier times. St. Jerome and Origen...were omnivorous readers” and “they had access to practically the whole Christian literature of preceding centuries,” i.e., from great literature of the Greek speaking world. (CE Gospel of Luke 6, 7)

Conclusion: The fact that Luke is the author of the gospel bearing his name “is never disputed” by “the early Christian writers”, and is “unanimous”. (W 184)

Authorship by Tradition

The Douay Rheims Bible refers to Luke as the author of his Gospel -- "Luke" wrote "in Greek" and the Douay Rheims continues with a date, offered below. (DR 64)

The Biblical Commission of the Roman Catholic Church on June 26, 1913 affirmed the tradition of Luke's authorship: "That Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, and Luke...the assistant and companion of Paul, are really the authors of the Gospels respectively attributed to them. (This) is clear from Tradition, the testimony of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, by quotations in their writings, the usage of early heretics, by versions of the New Testament in the most ancient and common manuscripts, and by intrinsic evidence in the texts of the Sacred Books." (CE Gospel of St. Luke 16)

As stated earlier in this paper, Luke the "apostolic man" is affirmed by the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, in the Document on Sacred Scripture, "Dei Verbum", to be the author of the Gospel bearing his name.

Dating by Ancient Testimony

Eusebius dates the sequence of the gospels in this order - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with Luke being third. (E 86) By Eusebius's reckoning (and evidence of dating presented earlier in the *Gospel of Matthew and Mark*), this dates Luke after the mid 40s, when Mark is believed to have been written.

Eusebius further states, "Paul was in the habit of referring to Luke's Gospel when he said as if writing of some Gospel of his own: 'According to my gospel'." (E 67) (Rom 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8) Thus, Eusebius dates Luke's Gospel not later than c. 68, the year of Paul's death.

Conclusion: By ancient testimony *alone*, we can identify Luke's Gospel not earlier than 45 and not later than 68.

Dating by Tradition

The Douay Rheims states, Luke wrote in Greek "about twenty-four years after our Lord's Ascension" (DR 64), which by this reckoning determines a date of 57.

"It is according to most ancient and constant tradition that after Matthew, Mark wrote his Gospel second and Luke third... It is not lawful to put the date of the Gospels of Mark and Luke as late as the destruction of Jerusalem (c. 70 AD) or after the siege had begun (67 AD)." (CE Gospel of Luke 16) Here is the logic behind that statement. "The Gospel of Luke preceded his Acts of the Apostles and was, therefore, composed before the end of (Paul's) Roman imprisonment, when the Acts was finished (Acts

28:30-31)". (CE Gospel of Luke 16) The "Roman imprisonment" referred to, ended in 62. Therefore, the Gospel was written before *Acts* which was completed by 62.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, refining their date further, suggests a later date for the authorship of Luke's Gospel as 60. "We may be assured that he (Luke) was a constant visitor to St. Paul during the two years of the latter's imprisonment at Caesarea." "It is held by many writers that the Gospel was written (by Luke) during this time." (CE Gospel of Luke 2) The time of imprisonment was 58-60 in Caesarea.

Conclusion to the Gospel of Luke

By unanimous testimony of the early Church Fathers and by tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, reiterated as recently as Vatican II in 1965, Luke is the author of the gospel bearing his name.

In Eusebius' writing he dates Luke's gospel between the years 45 and 68. Those dates are further refined by (1) the tradition from the Douay Rheims which suggests the year 57, and (2) by the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which suggests a date of 60 written while Luke was stationed in Caesarea with Paul (and before 62 when Luke completed his *Acts* in Rome). The 60 date we agree with; we will present further support of that date in an *Internal Evidence* section later in this paper.

III. Internal Evidence of Authorship and Dating

There exists within the subject Gospels and other New Testament writings information to assist in identifying both authorship and dating of the Synoptic Gospels - *internal evidence*.

A. Authorship of Luke

With respect to authorship, it is no secret that Luke claims authorship of the gospel which bears his name. He states that "many...have taken in hand" (that is, put in writing) "...to set forth narratives of events relating to Jesus' life and teaching and have delivered them unto us." Those who have done so were "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." It seemed well for Luke to "write" also in his narrative those things which he verified through those eyewitnesses. (Lk 1-3) Therefore, Luke declares himself to be the author of his gospel and the receiver of information, both in writing and from the perspective of an eyewitnesses personally.

Critical evidence supporting his claim to eyewitness testimony is found within his gospel. For instance, in Chapters 1 and 2 (and in particular verses 2:19, 2:33 and 2:51). Information from these citations almost certainly was garnered in personal conversations with Mary, mother of Our Lord.

Luke writes - "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." (2:19) "And his father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him." (2:33) "And his mother kept all these words in her heart." (2:51)

From what source could Luke have obtained such information other than from Jesus' mother directly? These are the words of a mother.

Unique information contained only in Luke's Gospel with respect to Jesus' march from Galilee to Jericho en route to Jerusalem for his last Festival of Tabernacles (29 AD) speaks to the likelihood that Luke sought out, as he said, eyewitnesses in the Decapolis towns across the Jordan, which Jesus visited on that journey. This supports his preliminary statement in Lk 1:1, 2 as having gathered information both in writing and verbally from those who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." An example of such unique information is the story of the Good Samaritan. (Lk 10:30-37)

Another example of unique eyewitness testimony from Luke is presented early in his Gospel - Lk 7:1-16 - recounting an incident in Galilee. Luke here relates the story of Jesus' raising of the dead man at Nain.

Much of the information unique to Luke was likely accumulated from eyewitnesses whom he interviewed during the two years he accompanied St. Paul during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea c. 58-60. This imprisonment Luke relates in Acts 21:15-26. It is likely Luke personally visited the same towns that Jesus had evangelized, to seek out eyewitnesses.

Luke provides a unique recording of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for His last Booth's Festival along with many teachings of Jesus' on that journey that are not found in the other synoptic gospels.

Reason and probability suggests that Luke traveled from Caesarea north to Galilee and followed Jesus' route through the Decapolis to Jerusalem, interviewing eyewitnesses in each of the towns along the way.

Conclusion: By recounting some of the events and teachings exclusive to Luke, and testimony only eyewitnesses could have given, evidence and validation is given to *his claim* of authorship.

There is no reason to question Luke's claim to authorship and eyewitness testimony. In fact, to do so without strong justification would lay open the entire Gospel to rejection--and for what purpose and based on what reason or evidence?

B. Dating

Several examples of internal evidence provide in varying degrees of probability the information needed in dating the synoptic gospels.

1. Dating Mark and Mark - Caesarea Philippi

First consider the name of the city chronologically known as Balinas, Panias, Caesarea Philippi, Neronias, Panias and Banias -- and the fact that the city is identified as Caesarea Philippi in the Gospels of both Matthew and Mark. (Mt 16:13, Mk 8:27)

Originally named Balinas, this was a pagan holy city (at the headwater of the Jordan River in a spectacular mountain/ grotto setting) for the worship of Baal. (B 170) After the Greeks conquered the area in c. 330 BC the name was changed to Panias in honor of "the Greek god Pan." (170) Rome conquered the area in 63 BC and later (prior to 14 AD) the name was changed to Caesarea "because it was the city where Caesar was worshipped." (B 170) That is, Augustus Caesar.

The city was gifted to Herod by Augustus Caesar "in 20 BC" and "Herod the Great...built a great white temple of gleaming marble with the bust of Caesar in it for the worship of Caesar." (B 169) (NBD 154)

"Herod's son, Philip (d. 34), inherited the area and the city", upon the death of Herod the Great, variously dated between 1 and 3 BC. (B 169). "Philip in the same emperor's reign (i.e., Augustus, therefore, NLT 14) further adorned the town, renaming it Caesarea in the emperor's honor." (NBD 154) "He changed the name from Panias to Caesarea; 'the City of Caesar', and to the name of Caesarea he added his own name, Philippi, 'Philip's city of Caesar'." (B 169)

Later Herod Agrippa II (great grandson of Herod the Great), ruled the region beginning in 50. "When Nero (54-68) succeeded Claudius (d. 54) he increased Agrippa's kingdom. Agrippa's capital was Caesarea Philippi. "As a mark of gratitude for this imperial bounty Agrippa renamed his capital Neronias" about 54, shortly after Nero's gift was made, as was common practice. (BR 341)

After the suicidal death of Nero in c. 68, the name Neronias was changed and, understandably, "was soon forgotten." (NBD 154) It never again reverted to the name of Caesarea Philippi. Rather, after Neronias the name reverted to its "ancient name Panias". Later, after Muslim conquest, Panias became "Banias, since Arabic does not have the sound of letter 'p'." (B 170)

Timetable of City Names

- Balinas -- ancient era to c. 330 BC
- Panias -- from c. 330 BC to the reign of Augustus c. NLT 14 AD
- Caesarea Philippi -- sometime after Herod's death c. 1 BC and before Augustus' death in 14 AD

until c. 54, after Nero became emperor.

- Neronias -- from c. 54, when Nero increased Agrippa II's kingdom to NLT 68, the date of Nero's suicide.
- Panias/Banias thereafter.

Conclusion: The purpose of the above chronology of the ancient city of Balinas is to illuminate the dating of the gospels of Matthew and Mark. Since both gospels refer to the city as Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:13, Mk 8:27), this must have been the name in use when their gospels were written.

Therefore, it is probable that Matthew and Mark were written in *similar time periods* -- and *before 54*. Certainly they were written before 68, the date of Nero's death. Thus supporting the evidence and probability of the early dating of 41 and 45 presented earlier in this paper.

2. Dating Luke - Acts of the Apostles

The five years 57-62 AD, are particularly well documented by Luke and by secular records. They offer much fruit in dating the Gospel of Luke.

Chapters 21:15 to 28:31 of *Acts* describe a period of time when St. Paul returned to Jerusalem. He was placed in confinement for about two years in Caesarea before being sent to Rome on appeal to Caesar, an entitlement of Paul's as a Roman citizen. (Acts 23:27, 25:12) The time sequence given by Luke for the two years of captivity in Caesarea, plus the availability of historical records dating the rule of Felix and Festus in Caesarea, provide great accuracy in dating Paul's stay in Caesarea and, therefore, his subsequent stay in Rome. Thus, we support dates of 58-60 within Caesarea, and 60-62 within Rome. [1]

Luke dates the completion of *Acts* after the completion of Paul's two year confinement in Rome, which is 62, and he identifies *Acts* as having been preceded by his Gospel (Acts 1:1). Therefore, we have internal verification that the Gospel of Luke was completed before 62.

He ends his *Acts* with the following comment: "And he (Paul) remained two whole years in his own hired lodging in Rome." (Acts 20:30) Thus, Luke closes *Acts* and his two years with Paul in Rome in 62, having written *Acts* sometime during that two year period, 60-62, and completing them by 62.

[1] To be quite precise, we date the Caesarea captivity mid-57 to mid-59. The voyage to Rome which followed, six months later, coincides with the Roman captivity from early 60 - early 62.

As said, we are told by Luke that his Gospel was written prior to *Acts*. He begins *Acts* with:

“The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, of all things which Jesus began to do and teach...until the day...he was taken up.” (1:1,2) This former “treatise” which was also written to Theophilus (Lk 1:3), refers to the Gospel of Luke, which precedes *Acts*.

Conclusion: The Gospel of Luke, consequently, is dated prior to the 60-62 period. It was probably completed by 60 or earlier while Luke was accompanying Paul during his imprisonment in Caesarea (58-60) where Luke could also interview eyewitnesses. Probability and reason date the completion of the Gospel of Luke at 60.

3. Dating Mark - Acts of the Apostles

When St. Paul was transferred from Caesarea to Rome (c. 60), as he landed in Italy in route to Rome we have the following information: at “Puteoli (on the coast of Italy), where finding brethren (Christians) we were want to tarry with them seven days; and so we went to Rome.” (Acts 28: 13, 14)

Upon Paul’s continuing toward Rome Luke says, “when the brethren had heard of us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii Forum (25 miles south of Rome) and the Three Taverns” (50 miles south). (Acts 28:15).

A sufficient, vibrant and committed Christian community existed in Rome and around the coast of Italy by 60 AD, when Paul arrived. The inhabitants were practiced enough in the faith to know Paul was a guiding light of *the Way*. In Puteoli, they were committed enough to request a week’s instruction. Moreover, the community in Rome couldn’t wait for Paul’s arrival. Instead they traveled 25 and 50 miles to meet him before he could arrive in Rome. All this occurred by 60 AD before Paul the Evangelist had visited Rome.

Conclusion: Rome and apparently many other parts of Italy had been effectively evangelized well prior to Paul’s arrival in 60 AD. All evidence, laboriously presented above in the *Gospel of Mark*, points to St. Peter’s evangelizing of Rome in c. 42-47, at which time Mark recorded that preaching in the text known as the Gospel of Mark.

4. Possible Evidence for Dating Matthew and Mark: Sea of Galilee/Genesareth

The lake known as the “Sea of Galilee” underwent several name changes over the years. On Old Testament maps it was identified as “Lake Chinnereth” (N 191), for example. St. John refers to the lake as the “Sea of Tiberius” but is careful to acknowledge the new name when he states - “The sea of Galilee which is that of Tiberius.” (6:1) John’s quote is careful to indicate that the sea/lake had undergone a name change.

The NAB states, the name "Sea of Tiberius" came later. "It was only considerably later than Jesus' time that the name was given to the lake." (NAB, NT 112) This simply validates the understanding that the Sea of Galilee underwent name changes.

The lake is referred to in Matthew (15:24) and Mark (7:3) as the "Sea of Galilee." In Luke 5:1 it is referred to as "the Lake of Genesareth."

Conclusion: The above information suggests:

- (1) The authorship of Matthew and Mark occur in similar time periods.
- (2) That Luke's Gospel antedates both.

5. Dating the Synoptics--Destruction of Jerusalem/Temple

Predictions by Jesus of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (contrary to contemporary teaching), are in fact evidence of early dating.

In the year 30, Jesus foresaw the destruction of the Temple. (Mt 24) (Mk 13) (Lk 21)

Interpretation of the destruction, which happened in 70 AD, as proof of later dating as many contemporary authorities do, suggests the authors of Matthew, Mark and Luke were duplicitous in writing in information after-the-fact. Further, it calls into question the veracity of Jesus' prophecy and the veracity of the many miracles, even the resurrection. (Mk 16). Finally, it suggests that the Synoptic Gospels were written after 70 AD. (The hypothesis that promotes Matthew and Luke as having been copied from Mark involves too many contradictions of both tradition and reason and is, therefore, completely rejected).

Conclusion: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke which prophesied the destruction of the Temple, constitute strong evidence, near proof, that they were written before the destruction in 70.

To suggest otherwise infers serious duplicity in the authorship of the Gospels. All the evidence suggests the opposite. They speak of accuracy and fidelity. As Vatican II *Dei Verbum* states, the "Gospels. . . faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught." (D 124)

Internal Evidence Conclusion: Internal Evidence from the New Testament reinforces the evidence presented earlier and the conclusions reached from ancient testimony and tradition -- that the authorship and early dating of the Synoptics is: Matthew c. 41, Mark c. 45 and Luke c. 60.

IV. External Evidence

Papyrologists, with expertise in dating ancient manuscripts, offer scientific evidence to assist in dating Matthew and Mark. The expert papyrologist examines letter form, stroke, letter spacing, spelling and written and spoken language of the times, as well as the vast archives of comparable documents. For this work “there are now some 100 New Testament papyri at museums and libraries all over the world.” (T 101).

Dating the Gospel of Matthew

Dr. Carsten Thiede, a leading authority on ancient manuscripts, “Director of the Institute for Basic Epistemological Research in Paderborn, Germany”, discovered in 1994, that three papyrus fragments from a codex of the Gospel of Matthew which had been on display at Magdalen College, Oxford, England, and were believed by a 1953 dating to be from the second-century were actually (by Thiede’s analysis) of “early origin, dating from the mid-first century AD”. (T 1,2) So Matthew’s gospel can be dated by Thiede using forensic evidence—in particular, evidence relating to the type of Greek writing used.

The fragments were originally discovered in 1901 by Rev. Charles Huleatt in Upper Egypt and donated to Magdalen College. (T 3) Until 1994 neither the College nor others were aware that the three scraps of paper (papyrus fragments) written in Greek, were from a codex of “the twenty-sixth chapter” of the Gospel of Matthew. (T 1)

By a particular form of analysis - of “comparable material” – the samples were shown to reflect “... a date of c. AD. 66”, “with a distinct tendency toward an even slightly earlier date.” (T 125)

Specifically, Dr. Thiede’s analysis of the *actual* “fragments at Oxford” demonstrated they “belong to a particular type of uncial writing that flourished in the mid-first century AD, with precursors at the beginning of the century.” (T 125) Thus, Thiede dates these fragments of Matthew’s Gospel to “the mid-first century AD.” (T 2)

Conclusion: Thiede, considered an expert in the field, in conformity with other experts concludes that a *Codex* copy of Matthew’s Gospel was in circulation by mid-century. One presumes the likelihood that the original *scroll* was written considerably earlier, to have been copied and distributed in Greek and in codex as far as Upper Egypt by the 60s.

Thus, from external evidence we encounter more evidence of early dating. This is in contradiction to frequent contemporary dating of Matthew’s gospel, which suggests a timeframe as late as the mid 80s. It is in no conflict with, and supportive of, the date of 41 arrived at earlier in this paper, in the dating of Matthew’s Gospel.

Dating the Gospel of Mark

Professor Jose O'Callaghan, an "eminent Jesuit papyrologist" (W 177) . . . a Spanish scholar at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome," (M 251) in 1972 wrote an article ("In *Biblica* 53 (1972) 91-109") (W 177) dating fragments of Mark's gospel definitely before 68 and likely before 50.

O'Callaghan identified 18 fragments of papyrus found in the Cave 7 at Qumran in 1947, as from New Testament texts. The fragments were "exclusively in Greek and exclusively on papyrus" and "are scroll fragments." (T 30, 31) The cave is understood to have been sealed by 68. (T 30, W 177) Fragment 7Q5 O'Callaghan identified as originating from "Mark 6:52ff". (W 178) "The fragments date from AD. 50" (N 51)

A 1972 UPI article by Louis Cassels, reporting on O'Callaghan's article in *Biblica* says this: "O'Callaghan's papyrus fragments established by scientific methods as having been in a Palestinian library in 50 AD, indicates Mark's gospel may well have been in circulation within a dozen years of the time of Jesus' death." By Cassels' reckoning that would be 45, since he dates the crucifixion of Jesus around 33 AD. (M 251)

Also, "long before O'Callaghan had identified fragment 7Q5" the style of Greek writing of this fragment had been identified by Colin H. Roberts, "acting on behalf of the editorial team" as "Zierstil" (a decorated style) which peaked in popularity at the turn of the first century. "Regarding 7Q5 as a late example of the style, one would say, with Roberts, that it could be no later than AD 50." (T 31)

Thiede writes (supporting the early dating of Mark): "the fragments in Cave 7 are scroll fragments" which implies early dating. This is in contrast to the later codex form, which came into use as "early as AD. 62", replacing the earlier scroll form. (T 51) Thus, Thiede supports O'Callaghan's and Roberts' analysis.

Conclusion: More evidence (this time external, scientific) has been provided, which is said to date Mark's Gospel as having circulated in Palestine, certainly before the date of the sealing of Cave 7 at Qumran (i.e., in 68), and by expert analysis around 50 or earlier. Thus, adding evidence to, and in conformity with, the date of 45 for Mark's Gospel, expressed earlier in this paper.

Summary

Based on the earliest testimony of the Church Fathers, nineteen centuries of tradition, the teaching of the Church itself, words of the evangelists, internal evidence, external evidence, reason, common sense, the scientific method and Occam's Razor: the overwhelming *probability* is that:

(1) Matthew the Apostle wrote his gospel in Palestine about 41 AD.

(2) Mark authored his gospel from St. Peter's words to the Romans, for the Romans, at their request, in c. 45.

(3) Luke, the companion of St. Paul, authored his gospel *as he himself states* -- likely in Palestine, from his headquarters in Caesarea -- from prior interviews with eyewitnesses by 60 AD.

Consider the foregoing analysis compared to alternative contemporary presentations of authorship and dating. The presenters of this paper remain confident that no more *probable* explanation can be found than the one herein contained.

The conclusion reached as to the accurate authorship and dating of the Gospels *profoundly affects our ability to appropriate the life-giving force of the Gospels*. Therefore, accuracy is critically important.

Have "absolute" confidence, therefore, that the Gospels "faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught" for our "eternal salvation". (D 124) Know that the Gospels are "the source of all saving truth and moral teaching". (D 115) "Those apostles and apostolic men committed the message of salvation in writing" and the Gospels, therefore, offer the Way to abundant life on earth, as well as to eternal life. (D 115)

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