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## *The Sources of the Gospels*

**F. F. Bruce, Esq., M.A.**

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The quest for Christian origins has been eagerly pursued almost from the dawn of Christianity itself. Early in the second century A.D. we find Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (in Asia Minor), gathering information about the origin and authorship of the Gospels from Christians of an earlier generation than his, men who had conversed with the Apostles themselves.<sup>1</sup> And men have pursued the quest from his days to our own, and never with such concentrated application as in the last 150 years. Whether the assured results of all this study are commensurate with the toil expended on it may be doubted, but none can doubt the perennial interest of the quest.

One danger must be guarded against. The quest for Gospel sources may prove so fascinating and their hypothetical reconstruction so engrossing that the student is apt to forget that the actual four Gospels as they have come down to us are much more important than any putative sources, if only because they are not speculatively reconstructed documents but individual works of literature which have been transmitted to us from the first century of our era. Each had its own characteristic viewpoint and its own immediate circle of readers, though it is the

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one Christ and the one Gospel that all four present. And it is these four Gospels, and not any hypothetical sources, that have come down to us from early days with the general consensus of Christians as the divinely inspired fourfold record of God's culminating self-revelation to men, when "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." While this paper deals with the production of the Gospels on the human side, it is written in full acceptance of the Christian doctrine of Holy Scripture, which acknowledges God as its *auctor primaries*.

Source-criticism, interesting as it is, is at a disadvantage as compared, for example, with Textual Criticism, in that it has necessarily to admit a much larger subjective element. The following words of caution are worth heeding by all who apply Source-criticism to the New Testament documents, the more so as they come from one who himself achieved no mean eminence in the field of New Testament criticism, the late Professor F. J. Foakes-Jackson:—

"In the New Testament, especially, scholars recognise a variety of sources for the Gospels and Acts. As their predecessors had done in regard to the Old Testament, they have realised that earlier documents were employed to produce the Hebrew and Christian books as we now have them. But what these sources were is purely a matter for conjecture; and symbols have been invented to express what each one is supposed to have been. Ingenious and even scientific as much source-criticism has undoubtedly proved, it is after all hypothetical, as it is possible only to hazard a guess as to what documents were used, and to imagine the method adopted by the writers or redactors in producing the present books of the Old and New Testaments" (*Josephus and the Jews*, p. xiii).

For purely historical purposes, however, there is this much to be said in favour of an inquiry into the sources of our Gospels. Even as they stand, they were written at no very long space of

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* iii, 39, where the fragments of Papias quoted in this paper are preserved.

time after the events they narrate. The Crucifixion of Christ took place c. A.D. 30; the four Gospels existed in Greek within 70 years from that date. Dates commonly accepted in this country for the writing of the Gospels are: Mark, A.D. 65; Luke, 80-85; Matthew, 85-90; John, 90-100. Personally, I agree with Harnack and others that there is no good reason for dating any of the three Synoptic Gospels much, if at all,

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later than A.D. 70.<sup>2</sup> The shortness of the space of time separating the events from their recording is a matter for satisfaction to the historical student. If, however, it can be shown that these records themselves depend in whole or in part on records written at a still earlier date, the position from the historian's point of view is still more satisfactory.

To begin with, we may look at the first three Gospels called, since Griesbach's day, the "Synoptic" Gospels, since they lend themselves readily to arrangement in the form of a synopsis, i.e., a form in which the three may be viewed together. It requires no very detailed study to discover that these three have a great deal of material in common, and that each pair has also a certain amount of common material not found in the other one. In particular, it appears that Matthew and Luke (1) have a large amount of material which is also found in Mark, (2) have a fairly large amount of material in common which is not found in Mark, (3) have each a fair amount of material not found in any other Gospel. On the other hand there is very little in Mark the substance of which does not appear in at least one of the other two Synoptists.

These are the phenomena; how are they to be explained? Sometimes the common material in two or more of the Synoptists is so verbally identical that the identity can hardly be accidental. In this country the explanation commonly given last century was that the similarity or identity was due to the fact that the Evangelists reproduced the language of the primitive oral Gospel as proclaimed in the early days of the Church. You will find this view, for example, in Alford's *Greek Testament* and in Westcott's *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*. It subsequently became unfashionable, because it was discovered that many of the data could be better accounted for by positing documentary sources; but the "oral theory" was by no means devoid of truth, and has reappeared in our own day in a somewhat different form in the approach known as Form Criticism.

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Form Criticism aims at recovering the oral "forms" in which the Apostolic preaching and teaching were originally cast, even before the circulation of such documentary sources as may lie behind our Gospels. This method of approach has won much favour since the War of 1914-18, and its value has been exaggerated in some quarters, but at least two conclusions of importance emerge from it. The first is that the universal tendency in ancient times to stereotype the "forms" in which religious preaching and teaching were expressed is clearly to

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<sup>2</sup> A. Harnack *Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels* (1911), pp. 116 ff.; F. Blass, *Philology of the Gospels* (1898), pp. 21 ff.; W. C. Allen, *International Critical Commentary on Matthew* (1907), pp. lxxxiv f., etc. More sweeping still is the verdict of C. C. Torrey: "At the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in New York City, in December, 1934, I challenged my New Testament colleagues to designate even one passage, from any of the Four Gospels, giving clear evidence of a date later than 50 A.D., or of origin outside Palestine. The challenge was not met, nor will it be, for there is no such passage." (*Our Translated Gospels*, p. x.)

be traced in our Gospel material<sup>3</sup>; and this in itself would help to preserve the original record and guarantee its accuracy. The second is that this classification of the Gospel material according to "form," while not perhaps the most useful classification, does at least provide us with a fresh cross-section of this material, showing it to be pervaded by a consistent picture of Jesus as the Christ—the same picture as we find no matter what groupings of the Gospel-material we examine.<sup>4</sup> Thus Form Criticism has added its contribution to the overthrow of the "liberal Jesus" of pre-1914 theology—a figment of humanist imagination, essentially different from the Figure of the Son of God portrayed for us in all four Gospels.

The Gospel of Mark, because it was shorter than the others, and contained little that was not to be found in them, was unduly neglected in ancient times. Augustine, for example, calls Mark "as it were the abbreviator and lackey of Matthew"<sup>5</sup>—a description which can be corrected by anyone who looks at a synopsis of the Gospels in parallel columns, for in most of the passages which Matthew and Mark have in common, it is Matthew and not Mark who does the abbreviating. Closer study of the linguistic and literary details of the Gospels in more recent times has, on the other hand, led many to the conclusion that Mark was actually the earliest of our three Synoptic Gospels in their present form, and that it was a source, if not the principal source, of Matthew and Luke. This "Markan hypothesis," as it is called, was first set on a stable basis by Lachmann in 1835, when in the review *Studien and Kritiken* he showed that the common order of the Synoptists was the order of Mark. The Markan hypothesis is still the regnant

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hypothesis, though it has been assailed by several writers of ability, notably by Dom John Chapman, who in his able and scholarly work *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (1937) turns the hypothesis on its head and argues for the dependence of Mark on the Greek Matthew. The strength of the Markan hypothesis cannot be conveyed in a sentence or two; the evidence is cumulative, and can best be appreciated by studying it with the help of a good Greek synopsis, together with the linguistic data as marshalled in Sir John Hawkins' *Horae Synopticae* (2nd ed., 1909). The late Professor J. H. Ropes calls it "the only assured result of the vast amount of incessant labour which has been expended on the so-called Synoptic Problem in the whole of the past hundred years and more."<sup>6</sup>

Whether we accept this conclusion or not, it is not so surprising as some might think to find Mark—or something very like it—as a source of the two other Synoptists, when we consider what Mark is. The earliest statement we have on the composition of Mark is a fragment of Papias, preserved by Eusebius:—

"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he [Peter] mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not however in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the Sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake, writing down in this way some

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<sup>3</sup> See E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (1913); F. W. Grosheide, "The Synoptic Problem," in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Jan., 1931, pp. 57 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (1931), p. 162 ff.; C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (1938), pp. 91 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *De Comenm Evangelistarum* 2.

<sup>6</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels* (1934), p. 93.

things as he [Peter] mentioned them; for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, nor to include any false statement among them."

This information Papias says he received from one whom he calls "the Elder," possibly the same person as he elsewhere calls the Elder John. It has received welcome illumination from a new angle in recent years. Some Form Critics, attempting to get behind the postulated documentary sources, have envisaged Mark as consisting simply of independent stories and sayings which had been orally transmitted in the Church, fitted together by a sort of editorial cement in the form of generalizing summaries possessing no historical value of their own. This, for example, was maintained by Professor K. L. Schmidt in 1919 in *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* ("The Framework of the Story

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of Jesus"). In an acute examination of this thesis, Professor C. H. Dodd pointed out that these "generalizing summaries," far from being mere editorial inventions, proved when read together to be a consecutive outline of the Gospel narrative, comparable to those Gospel outlines which we find in some of the sermons in Acts and in one or two places in the Pauline Epistles.<sup>7</sup> These outlines in the Acts and Epistles cover the period from the preaching of John the Baptist to the Resurrection of Christ, exactly the period covered by Mark. The outlines in Acts are probably summaries of what the early preachers actually said. At any rate, it appears that Mark is, by and large, a statement of the Gospel story as it was proclaimed in the earliest days of the Church; and in view of Papias's reference to Mark as the interpreter of Peter, it is noteworthy that the chief preacher of the Gospel in the early chapters of Acts is Peter. The view that Mark underlies the other two Synoptic Gospels is thus not so very different after all from the older view that the common element in the three is the oral preaching current in the early Church. Oral it certainly was at first, and no doubt the language in which it was couched became stereo typed at an early date both in Aramaic and in Greek; but the form in which it underlies Matthew and Luke seems to be the form given to it by Mark, who not only acted as Peter's interpreter (from Aramaic into Greek), but also wrote down the substance of the Gospel story as he heard it from the lips of Peter. Probably some of the material in our Mark was derived from another source, but of this more anon.

The Gospel as preached in those early days emphasized what Jesus *did* more than what He *said*. The message that proved effectual in the conversion of Jews and Gentiles was the Good News that by His death and rising again He had procured remission of sins for all believers. But once they were converted, they learned much more, and in particular they were taught the wonderful Sayings of Jesus. Now it is striking that the greater part of the material common to Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark, consists of Sayings of Jesus. This has led to the conjecture of another early document on which Matthew and Luke drew for their common non-Markan material, the document usually referred to as "Q." But it is safer to regard "Q" not as the name of a hypothetical document, but as a convenient symbol for the non-Markan material common

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<sup>7</sup> *The Expository Times*, June, 1932, pp. 396 ff.

to Matthew and Luke. There is evidence in the Greek of this material that it has been translated from Aramaic,<sup>8</sup> the language which our Lord and His Apostles seem to have habitually spoken, and which in the New Testament is not distinguished from the sacred language of the Jews, both being called "Hebrew." Now we have evidence of an early Hebrew or Aramaic document in another fragment of Papias:—

"Matthew compiled the Logia in the Hebrew tongue [i.e., most probably Aramaic], and every one translated them as he was able."

Various theories have been put forward in explanation of this term "Logia," which literally means Sayings or Oracles; but the most probable is that suggested by Schleiermacher in *Studien and Kritiken* for 1832 and 1834, that the reference is to a collection of our Lord's Sayings, lying behind much of the common non-Markan material of Matthew and Luke. Sir William Ramsay<sup>9</sup> argued that this collection was made during Christ's lifetime; Professor B. S. Easton<sup>10</sup> suggests, that He Himself directed that His discourses should be memorized. In another connection, the suggestion that shorthand notes were taken of our Lord's addresses was made by Dr. Rendel Harris.<sup>11</sup> All this fits in with the evidence of Papias, for among the Twelve Apostles none was more likely to act as the Master's shorthand reporter than Matthew the former tax-collector; and the internal evidence that these Sayings were first written down in Aramaic accords not only with the high probability that this was the language that our Lord normally spoke, but also with Papias's statement that Matthew compiled the Logia in the Hebrew or Aramaic tongue. Papias's further statement, that every man translated these Logia as he was able, suggests that more than one Greek translation of the Logia was current, and this serves to account in part for some of the differences in the Sayings of Jesus preserved in the First and Third Gospels; for in many places where the Greek of these Gospels differs, it can be shown that one and the same Aramaic original lies behind the variant Greek renderings. I am persuaded myself that a study of Aramaic origins will reveal more about the background of our

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Gospels than either Source or Form Criticism, though this may be simply the prejudice of one who is by training and inclination a philologist rather than a literary critic.

Beside the discourses in Matthew which have some parallel in Luke, there are others occurring in the First Gospel only. These also betray an Aramaic origin, and are ascribed by B. H Streeter in *The Four Gospels* (1924) to another source, which he calls "M." It seems to me unnecessary to ascribe them to a different source from "Q"; I incline rather to follow the view expressed over 30 years ago by W. C. Allen,<sup>12</sup> and more recently by Professor Easton,<sup>13</sup> that both "M" (the discourse-material peculiar to Matthew) and "Q" belong to the same collection of Logia. Luke's omission of "M" may be sufficiently explained by the more definitely Jewish references of "M," which would not serve the wider purpose for which the Third Gospel was written. On such evidence as is available, the "Logia" document may, be envisaged as consisting of Sayings of Jesus set in a narrative framework, and perhaps

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<sup>8</sup> See Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus* (1908), p. 247; T. W. Manson in *The Expository Times*, Oct., 1935, pp. 7 ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Luke the Physician* (1908), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> *Christ in the Gospels* (1930), p. 41

<sup>11</sup> *The Expository Times*, Jan., 1937, p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (1911), pp. 233 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *The Gospel before the Gospels* (1928), p. 26; *Christ in the Gospels*, p. 16.

including the Old Testament quotations characteristic of the First Gospel. Professor Easton and others have pointed out that Mark drew on these Matthaean Logia for part of his Gospel, and has shown that while most of Mark—the Petrine material—is abridged in Matthew, where Mark depends on the Logia it is Mark who abridges. This suggested dependence of Mark on the Aramaic Matthew (or "Proto-Matthew," as I should like to call it), and again of the Greek Matthew on Mark, presents, to quote Easton, "a problem of great complexity that certainly will always defy final solution; but we should not forget that the problem exists."<sup>14</sup>

The First Gospel in its present Greek dress is an expansion of this "Proto-Matthew," through the incorporation of the substance of the Apostolic preaching as preserved by Mark, along with some other material. The plan of Matthew is clearly based on the distribution of the discourse-material, which is divided into five main sections, each ending with some such phrase as, "And it came to pass, when Jesus ended these words..." (cf. Matt. 7, 28; 11, 1; 13, 53; 19, 1; 26, 1). Dr. P. P. Levertoff explains this arrangement by the view that Matthew circulated among the Jewish Christians as a new

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Torah, divided like the Mosaic one into five parts; "the sequence of events as described in Matthew corresponds chronologically with the Jewish liturgical seasons."<sup>15</sup>

While some of the Sayings preserved by Luke are almost verbally identical with their Matthaean counterparts (cf. Luke 10, 21f, with Matt. 11, 25-27), others show considerable differences, and it is unnecessary to suppose that these depend on the same document. For example, it is unlikely that the Matthaean and Lukan versions of the Beatitudes are drawn from one and the same written source. We have Luke's own statement that many had undertaken to draw up a narrative of the Gospel story,<sup>16</sup> and it is unnecessarily narrowing the field to suppose that all the non-Markan material common to Matthew and Luke must have been derived from one source. To all appearances Luke was acquainted at a relatively early date with the Matthaean Logia, apparently in one or more of its Greek versions. But he had other sources of information, from some of which he derived the material peculiar to his Gospel, the material which gives the Third Gospel its special charm and beauty. This peculiarly Lukan material may be conveniently designated "L."

If Luke was, as early tradition asserts, a native of Antioch,<sup>17</sup> he had opportunities of learning many things from the founders of the Church there; he may even have met Peter during his visit there (Gal. 2, 11ff). He shows a special interest in the Herod family; was this due to Manaen, foster-brother of Herod Antipas and one of the teachers in the Church of Antioch (Acts 13, 1)? Then he must have learned much from Paul. Though Paul had not followed Jesus in the days of His flesh, he must have made it his business later to learn as much about Him as he could. What did Peter and Paul talk about during the fortnight they spent together about A.D. 35 (Gal. 2, 1)? As Professor Dodd says, "we may presume they did not spend all the time talking about the weather."<sup>18</sup> Again, Luke seems to have spent two years in Palestine

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<sup>14</sup> *Christ in the Gospels*, pp. 19 f.

<sup>15</sup> Gore's *New commentary: New Testament*, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> Luke i, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke (c. A.D. 170); Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, 4.

<sup>18</sup> *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (1936), p. 26.

during Paul's last visit to Jerusalem and detention in Caesarea. These years afforded him unique opportunities of increasing his knowledge of the

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story of Jesus and of the early Church. In particular, Harnack<sup>19</sup> and others have argued convincingly that much of the information in the Third Gospel and Acts was received from Philip and his family in Caesarea; Eusebius<sup>20</sup> tells us on the authority of Polycrates, Proclus and Papias that Philip's four daughters were later famed in the Church as authorities for the history of its earliest days. The Nativity story in Luke, told as plainly from Mary's point of view as Matthew's Nativity story is told from Joseph's point of view, may have been received from the Virgin Mother herself, or perhaps from the beloved disciple who took her to his own house after the Crucifixion. Of the three Synoptists, it is Luke who shows most points of contact with the Fourth Gospel, as has been shown especially by G. W. Broomfield in *John, Peter and the Fourth Gospel* (1934); this is best accounted for if he was indebted for some of his information to the Apostle John.<sup>21</sup>

Then, after these two years in Palestine, we find Luke in Rome along with Mark (Col. 4, 10, 14), a fact sufficient to explain his evident indebtedness to Mark's narrative. This summary of the way in which the Third Gospel may have been built up accords very well with the internal evidence based on literary criticism which, as presented in the writings of B. H. Streeter and Dr. Vincent Taylor, suggests that Luke first expanded his version of the Logia by means of the additional information acquired from various sources and especially in Palestine (i.e., Q "was amplified by "L"), and that later this first draft; or "Proto-Luke," was amplified by material derived from Mark, especially where the Markan narrative did not overlap the material he had already gathered.<sup>22</sup>

As for the Fourth Gospel, though the problems which it raises have given scope for endless debate, the question of its sources is relatively simple. It presupposes the existence of the first three, but is not dependent on them, though here and there it may have borrowed a phrase or a turn of words. The predominant source of information behind the Fourth Gospel is the personal reminiscence of the beloved disciple, who is described in John 21, 24 as "the disciple which beareth witness of these

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things, and wrote these things," and who, in spite of all the controversy that has raged over the authorship of this Gospel, is by far most satisfactorily identified with the Apostle John. Some of the difficulties which have been felt in this traditional ascription of authorship may be removed if, as Professors C. F. Burney<sup>23</sup> and C. C. Torrey<sup>24</sup> have shown weighty grounds for believing, the Fourth Gospel was originally composed in Aramaic. If John the Apostle wrote it in Aramaic, then the work of turning it into Greek may perhaps be ascribed to his namesake John the Elder. The question of the historic truth of this Gospel does not strictly fall within the

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<sup>19</sup> *Luke the Physician* (1907), pp. 153 ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, 31, 39.

<sup>21</sup> See also J. A. Findlay, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (1937), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (1924), pp. 199 ff.; Taylor, *Behind the Third Gospel* (1926); see also D. M. McIntyre, "The Building of the Third Gospel," in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, April, 1929, pp. 130 ff.

<sup>23</sup> *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (1922).

<sup>24</sup> *The Four Gospels* (1933); *Our Translated Gospels* (1936).

purview of this paper; suffice it to say that if the wonderful words preserved in this Gospel are not the words of Jesus, then a greater than Jesus is here. We believe rather with the Archbishop of Canterbury that "the mind of Jesus Himself was what the Fourth Gospel disclosed,"<sup>25</sup> and with John Calvin that "this Gospel is the key, which opens the door to the understanding of the others."<sup>26</sup>

Though fashions in criticism change from age to age, the Gospels themselves are ever with us. We have suggested that behind them we can trace several lines of transmission, derived from first-hand evidence, independent and trustworthy, agreeing in their presentation of the historic facts upon which the Christian faith is founded. But spiritual discernment has always penetrated behind even these, to see as their ultimate Source the Spirit of Him whom all four Evangelists proclaim, by whose inspiration the selecting, recording and interpreting of the narratives and sayings were controlled with a view to the special purpose of each Gospel. And therefore our Gospels provide much more than first-rate material for historical study; the words of the last are true of all four, that "these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John 20, 31).<sup>27</sup>

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### WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Air Commodore P. J. WISEMAN Wrote: Our thanks are due to the author for his scholarly and reverent paper. The quest for the sources of the gospel narratives have been interminable; they have been subjected to a minute and continuous scrutiny by "Form critics" and "Source critics," much of it on the assumption that the Spirit of God was not concerned either with their compilation or transmission. It is good, therefore, to read in this paper such a statement as that in the final paragraph, "the ultimate source is the Spirit of Him whom all four evangelists proclaim." If the promise made by their Master immediately before His death means anything, it surely implies that the Spirit of Truth would, in such a matter, guide these men into all truth. As human agents they would have to use all normal and proper means available to them of ascertaining and verifying the material at their disposal, but it is not sufficient to assume that they were left to the trustworthiness of their own or other people's memories. He had promised to bring all things to their remembrance.

The literature on this subject has grown to immense proportions, and a great deal of it assumes that the writers are competent to judge the motives of our Lord, and to state with almost infallible certainty that this or that saying or action, could not have taken place in the circumstances or at the time stated in the gospels. There is also a tendency to assert that if two gospels record an action taken or words spoken, and one gospel gives a different setting to the other, one must be in error. Is it not possible that similar acts were done and words spoken on more than one occasion?

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<sup>25</sup> W. Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (1940), p. xxxii.

<sup>26</sup> *Argumentum in evangelium Ioannis*.

<sup>27</sup> Considerations of space and time have made it necessary in this paper to state several conclusions without detailing the arguments leading up to them. This gives some statements an air of dogmatism as unintended as it is unwarranted. For a fuller treatment of most of the questions reviewed here I may perhaps be permitted to refer to a series of articles entitled "Some Aspects of Gospel Introduction" which I have contributed to *The Evangelical Quarterly* for July, 1942, and subsequent numbers.

There are very few words in the gospels which date them. Dr. Hart considers that Mark x, 38, indicates that this gospel was written by A.D. 43, when the martyrdom of James took place. In all that has been written of late about the date of Luke's gospel, there is no better evidence of date than that the last dated event in Acts, his second work, is A.D. 59. As the second part of a work is later than the first, this date implies an even earlier date for the Gospel. Jerome's argument still holds good, that had Luke written later than A.D. 59, he would not have ended the Acts where he did. May I mention one piece of evidence as illustrative of the selective and guiding process of the Spirit of God in the compilation of the

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four Gospels. It is that the apocryphal or excluded "gospels" place an unnatural emphasis on the childhood of our Lord. They record at great length false and meaningless miracles which they allege that He performed. The four Gospels have been delivered from this error.

Mr. W. E. LESLIE Wrote: With the unfortunate methods employed by literary critics of the Old Testament before them, some may be disinclined to consider sources in the Gospels. But it is for us to ask how it has pleased God to reveal Himself, rather than to lay, it down that He must have done so in this or that manner. We find several copies of letters from kings and others included in the scriptures. God could have revealed the text of these letters to the writers of the different books; but are we justified in supposing that He did for them what, with proper diligence, they could do for themselves? So with the genealogies and many of the "Songs." There has been an inspiration of selection and record as truly edifying and instructive as the revelation of matter which could not be known to the writers. It is, then, for us to use our best judgment as to the mode of inspiration employed in each case.

I suggest that the five groups of Logia mentioned on page 9 are arranged as follows. The first contains the proclamation of the Laws of the Kingdom in the hearing of the multitude. After its rejection its future history is revealed in private in the last group. The second group concerns the Disciples in their relation to those to whom they were sent; the fourth gives their relation to each other. The middle group contains both public and private teaching concerning the Kingdom in a veiled form. This is an excellent example of the inspiration of selection, not an artificial attempt to imitate the Pentateuch.

Major R. B. WITHERS wrote: This is a temperate and useful summary of the available information regarding the dates of the Gospels.

I think, however, it is a pity that the author did not take more notice of the verdict of C. C. Torrey, which he quotes in a footnote. We are all too timid! The Paraclete brought these things to the remembrance of the disciples. What could be more natural than that some of them should commit their remembrance to writing

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forthwith? If so, we can date Matthew immediately after Pentecost, Mark with the Apostle Peter's ministry some time before the call of the Apostle Paul, Luke shortly after, and John at about the same time.

"Mere subjective preference," someone may say. Well, when few objective data exist, we have to fall back on subjective preference; and we might as well hold an opinion which is, at any rate, in accord with human nature and common sense. There is a tendency to forget that these people were civilised, and quite as intelligent as ourselves.

The objection that the disciples were expecting the immediate end of the world and would therefore not bother about written records, cannot be sustained. It depends on a mistranslation—the end of the *Age* is the expression used.

"Proto-Matthew" need be no more than Matthew's personal contribution to the common tradition. Why should not Matthew and Mark have done the same as Luke, whose account is certainly a unity and equally certainly dependent on a number of sources, as clearly stated in the preface?

Finally, I would suggest that this laborious search for sources leads us nowhere. Even if we could reach the goal, we would be no better off. The time thus spent would be far better devoted to minute synthetic comparison of the accounts themselves, the study of each author's special contribution to the whole of the information we have, and the harmony of each account with the special aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ which it was designed to portray.

Rev. Principal H. S. CURR wrote: I wish to add some footnotes to Mr. Bruce's admirable survey of a problem which, as he reminds us, has engrossed an enormous amount of attention from New Testament scholars since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The points, to which attention will be called, are mentioned in the paper, but they seem to be worthy of a little more emphasis and explanation.

One concerns the paucity of literature in the Apostolic Age. I do not dispute that there was a great deal of writing done, but we are very apt to transfer to these distant days the conditions with which we are so familiar at the present hour. For one thing, it is

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certain that the percentage of illiterates in Palestine was very much larger than with us. Again, the poverty of the peasants made the purchase of books, which had all to be prepared by hand, prohibitive. In these circumstances the life and work and teaching of Our Lord would have to be made known by oral channels and methods alone, in the same way as is followed on the modern mission field. That would inevitably result in the stereotyping of such reports by sheer force of repetition.

In addition, the retentiveness and accuracy of the ancient Oriental memory must be kept in view. A great deal that Our Lord said and did must have been transmitted so effectively as it has been by reason of this factors Further, His words and works would make an indelible impression on all who heard and saw them. They must have been unforgettable.

A third point is concerned with the comparatively slight quantity of information regarding Jesus Christ which has survived in view of the famous statement in the last verse of the Fourth Gospel, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written everyone, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (xxi, 25). Making full allowance for the somewhat hyperbolic form of

this statement, it may still be regarded as furnishing adequate evidence that the reminiscences of Our Lord's public ministry were voluminous in extent. In the same strain we find Luke referring in his preface to many chronicles of Our Lord's sayings and doings (1, 1). In these conditions it seems strange that the permanent sediment is so small as it is. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

Still another reflection prompted by Mr. Bruce's discussion is concerned with the words of Our Lord in regard to the mission of the Holy Spirit, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John, xiv, 26). This declaration is, perhaps, our best guarantee that we have received all that we need for Christian faith and practice, nothing more, and nothing less, and nothing else.

Col. A. VAN STRAUBENZEE wrote: The Companion Bible shows us clearly that the Four Gospels are four distinct presentations of

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the Messiah, and together form one perfect whole. In these Gospels the Ministry of Our Lord is divided not into years, but into four subjects: Proclamation of the Kingdom, v. 306; Proclamation of the King, v. 964; Rejection of the King, v. 901; Rejection of the Kingdom, v. 782.

Mr. LAURANCE D. FORD wrote: Mr. Bruce very ably introduces us to the phenomenon of "common" and "special" material present in the three Synoptic Gospels and attempts an explanation. The basic idea in his explanation seems to be that there was a reservoir of pre-existing written or oral material, and that the three Synoptic Evangelists drew their matter from this reservoir, and, with certain additions which varied with each evangelist, presented the results to their immediate circle of readers in the form of their respective Gospels.

Personally I do not like this theory as it makes these precious Writings too much like the writings of you and me.

Mr. Bruce adduces the authority of Papias in support of his theory and claims that Papias' reference to Mark being the interpreter and amanuensis of Peter suggests that Mark's writings enshrined the oral teaching of the early Church and became the basis for Matthew's and Luke's Gospels.

For myself I am unable to accept Mr. Bruce's theory. My reading of Papias as quoted by Eusebius (Book III, chapter xxxix) does not go beyond the fact that Mark was the interpreter of Peter and was an accurate writer. Papias does not state that these writings of Mark were used by the other Evangelists as their raw material, and I do not see why this should be asserted. The orthodox view which has appertained from the beginning, I take to be, that the Gospels are the work of Divine inspiration, the Holy Spirit bringing to the Apostles' remembrance all things that the Lord had said to them (John xiv, 26). If it be objected that Mark was not an Apostle and had never heard the Lord's words, then the comment of Papias may (or may not) apply, when he says that Mark received his matter from Peter, who was an Apostle and had heard the Lord's words.

With regard to Matthew we know that he was one of the twelve and therefore is within the scope of Our Lord's statement above quoted.

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The case of Luke is special, he not being an Apostle, but happily here we have from his own pen the largest bibliographical reference found in the Gospels. I refer to Luke, i, 1-4.

So far from these verses being in agreement with Mr. Bruce's suggestions, I feel that they demolish the whole structure of editors, redactors, sources, etc., of the moderns.

Luke refers (i, 1) to uninspired writers (the many) who have attempted ἐπεχειρήσαν to set in order a relation of the things most fully believed amongst us, as the Apostles (the eye-witnesses and ministers of the word) had delivered them to us (the non-inspired writers, the Church and Luke himself). There is no reference to these "attempters" drawing their matter from a body of oral tradition, but of receiving the matter direct from the apostolic eye-witnesses. The "many" writers were deficient in that they lacked Divine inspiration and also were only able to give a partial record in each case. St. Luke comes along next with no reference to any previous inspired Evangelist (which incidentally does not support the notion that Mark was first in the field) and informs us of his intention of writing in order καθεξῆς, that is, without gaps and with due regard to the proper sequence of narrative, though not necessarily pledging himself to an exact chronological consecution which might defeat his purpose of moral instruction.

He tells us the grounds for his superior performance are that he has followed everything accurately from the start. This does not mean that he was present all through but that he became perfectly acquainted with everything through the "ministers of the word" before referred to, and disposes of the notion that he was indebted to a common oral tradition current in the early Church (if such existed). His access to special and inspired sources for his information is the qualification for his purpose, which is that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things concerning which he hitherto had only received oral instruction.

So far is St. Luke from being indebted to oral tradition that he is writing so that Theophilus can be independent of oral tradition. For my part I am perfectly satisfied to rest in the Divine origin of the Gospels and feel that the phenomena of the striking similarities between them and the no less striking differences are only fully explained by the fact of a common origin, and that being the Holy

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Ghost, who dictated down to the last jot and tittle (or their Greek equivalents) the words we now possess and treasure as the Four Gospels.

The fact that Papias states that Matthew compiled his history in the Hebrew dialect may be (1) untrue, (2) no reference to his Gospel. If his statement is true, and it is also true as he states, that every one translated it as he was able, I am quite satisfied that the Hebrew original is utterly lost and in its place we have one only Greek translation, which as far as I have heard never had a rival or rivals either for a part of it or the whole. In this case I am satisfied that the Hand of Inspiration is as much in our present Greek Matthew's Gospel as in the other three

Gospels, and a watchful Providence has safeguarded it from all dubiety and rivalry as in the case of the other three. Else, what should the righteous do?

Mr. Bruce touches great things and holy things, and as the Book of Job says: "For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing" (Job viii, 9).

### **AUTHOR'S REPLY**

The contributors to this discussion have dealt with my paper more leniently than it deserves, and have emphasised several important points.

I am in entire agreement with Group-Captain Wiseman on the date of Luke's writings.

Mr. Leslie's illuminating remarks on the Matthaean groups of Logia add force to the suggestion I quoted from Dr. Levertoff. I am glad he drew attention to this example of "inspiration of selection"; for it is chiefly this form of inspiration that gives each Gospel its individual character.

It is interesting to compare the communications of Major Withers and Principal Curr, and to note how they present the case for early written documents and early oral transmission respectively. We have to combine both views in order to get a clear picture of the circumstances in which our Gospels took shape. I should explain that my reason for not taking more notice of Professor Torrey's dating was because his dating is closely bound up with his view that all four Gospels as such were originally written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. There was no room to go into this

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question at length, though I consider the study of Aramaic origins to be more interesting and fruitful than the usual lines of source and form criticism.

The division of the contents of the Gospels quoted by Col. van Straubenzee is interesting; our estimate of its value will perhaps depend on our opinion of the special viewpoint of the learned Editor of the Companion Bible.

Mr. Ford's communication shows how different readers can attach quite different meanings to the same documentary data, *e.g.*, the Prologue of Luke and the fragments of Papias. The relation between the Aramaic original of Matthew and the Gospel according to the Hebrews has not yet been cleared up and demands further study. In a study such as this we each need to remember Cromwell's exhortation to the Presbyterians and think it possible that we may be mistaken. Happily, while we may differ in our apprehension of the means by which the Gospels were inspired, we are at one with regard to the fact of their inspiration.

The Gospels, like the rest of the Bible, have both a Divine and a human authorship. The Divine authorship is assumed in this discussion; it is the major premiss of all who have taken part in it. Our subject has been the production of the Gospels on the human side. Those who believe most firmly in the Divine authority of these writings will welcome most confidently the application to them of all reasonable tests, just as the Apostles invited the closest scrutiny of the truth of their message. The man who knows that an article is pure gold will not hesitate

to have it tested. So, no matter how searchingly we analyse, compare, cross-divide and classify our Gospel material, we may be sure that the more accurately we trace the course of all things, the greater will be our certainty regarding those things wherein we have been instructed.

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