

## The Gospels are Historical

Christians have always maintained that the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) provide accurate historical accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. The early historians all agreed that the Apostle Matthew wrote first and John last. Both had lived with Jesus. Mark and Luke were close assistants of the Apostles. It was obvious that some copying had taken place between Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Bible scholars asked themselves why there were grammatical errors in Mark's Gospel? Why does his Gospel end at chapter 16, verse 8? Why does it then continue in a different style? Did someone add these extra verses? Why did some historical authors list Luke before Mark, while others listed Mark before Luke?

Used as a basis for prayer, these questions do not matter but, when an enquirer is looking to see if Christianity is true, these questions may cause problems. Critics of Christianity say that if Mark copied verses from Matthew he would not have changed good grammatical Greek into Greek containing errors. So these critics claim Mark must have written prior to Matthew and, therefore, all the ancient historians are unreliable. Critics claim the unanswered questions throw doubt on the

Gospels. They claim the Gospels were written by people who didn't live at the time of Jesus. I was interested in these questions before I met the renowned Scripture scholar Fr. Bernard Orchard OSB. He claimed to have found the answer to the questions. He held that Matthew wrote for the Jews and then Luke wrote for the Gentiles. Luke, not having lived with Jesus, asked the Apostle Peter to show his approval of his Gospel.

Peter did so by giving a talk in which he quoted alternatively from Matthew and Luke. Peter's secretary, Mark, recorded the talk in Greek shorthand. Peter, a Jewish fisherman, didn't know and speak Greek well, so Mark's shorthand record included Peter's errors of pronunciation and grammar. This explains how Mark's Gospel came to include 'poor' Greek. Orchard's theory is supported by the ancient historians. When Peter was killed, Mark left Rome. Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons tells us: **"Mark went to Egypt to preach the Gospel which he had written down"**.

He became bishop of Alexandria. Years later, Clement of Alexandria became head of the Alexandrian Catechetical School. So he was then able to refer to the diocesan archives when he wrote his books.

Most of Clement's books have perished. But when bishop Eusebius of Caesaria

wrote: *The History of the Church*, he was able to copy detailed information from Clement's works.

This included the details of a special crowded meeting. The audience at the meeting were not satisfied with hearing Peter's talk once only. So they persuaded Mark to leave them a written version. **"And so became the cause of the Scripture called the Gospel according to Mark"**.

Later, **"Peter was pleased by the zeal of the audience, so ratified the scripture for study in the churches. The bishop of Hierapolis named Papias confirms him"**. [Papias, a child when Peter was martyred, knew the early Christians]. Clement also said that the earliest priests reported that: **"those Gospels were first written which include the genealogies"**. [I.e. Those by Matthew and Luke].

So Clement's historical account agrees with Orchard's theory. We can see that Mark published quickly. The author of a later Preface tells us that Luke didn't publish until he was back in Achaia. So Luke **wrote** prior to Mark, but **published** after him. This was the reason for variations in the listings. Jerome, in his *Vulgate*, placed them in the Matthew-Mark-Luke-John order. Yet in his: *On Illustrious Men* treats Luke before Mark.