

## How the Synoptic Problem was solved (The Clementine Gospel Tradition)

Traditionally, it was presumed that the order of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as used by Jerome, had been the order in which the Gospels had been written. It was recognised that some borrowing had taken place between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke (The synoptic Gospels), but there had been little interest of how it had occurred. Then in **1764 Henry Owen**, an Anglican vicar, made a revolutionary suggestion. He based it on the internal evidence within the Gospels and claimed the order of writing had been: Matthew, Luke, Mark. His idea was ignored in England, but it sparked a new line of research in Germany. In **1838 Christian Weisse** said that a borrower would not deliberately turn the good quality Greek in Matthew and Luke, into the poor quality to be found in Mark. So Weisse concluded that Mark had written prior to the others. His opinion became known as the **Markan priority theory**.

**However, the early historians had unanimously reported Matthew as being the first** to write, Christians had always held that the Gospel writers and the early historians were reliable authorities. It was realised that the acceptance of the Markan priority theory, would destroy the reliability of the ancient historians and the Gospel writers and thereby undermine Christianity.

In **1893 Pope Leo XIII** condemned the theory and called for more study. He provided resources for historical and linguistic research.

In 1901 he established the Papal Biblical Commission (PBC) to guide the teaching of Scripture. But by 1912 the PBC, had come under the authority of **Pope Pius X**. It forbade Catholics to deny the opinion that Matthew, Mark and Luke had been composed in that order. By imposing the sequence used by Jerome the PBC stifled Catholic research. Catholics interested in developing Owen's theory, such as the English Benedictine monks John Chapman and Christopher Butler, had to restrict themselves to criticising Markan priority and upholding the priority of Matthew.

Following a century of debate by Protestant and secular scholars, the Markan priority theory came to dominate the English speaking world. But, by the Vatican Council of 1962-5, Butler had become president of the English Benedictines and an influential figure. As a former Anglican, he was better informed regarding the Synoptic Problem than most Catholics. He influenced the wording of Dei Verbum and the abolishing, in all but name, of the PBC. However, as a CDF member and active in promoting the reforms of Vatican II, he was unable to spend time on Scriptural research.

The new opportunity for research was taken up by Butler's colleague, **Bernard Orchard OSB**. He had been a founder and first chairman of the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain and of the World Federation. In 1953 he was joint editor of the pioneering: A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. In 1956 he produced a Catholic edition of the

Protestant: 'Revised Standard Version'. It was refused an Imprimatur till 1966, after the Council. The CTS edition of this RSVCE version became widely read. Known today as the Ignatius Bible, it is used for the English Scriptural quotations in translations of Vatican publications.

Orchard was keen to develop Owen's theory and, in: The Order of the Synoptics (1987), he showed that **Clement of Alexandria** had stated clearly that the Gospels were written in the **Matthew-Luke-Mark sequence**. Orchard also pointed out how other pre-Jerome historians, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine and Priscillian had agreed with Clement. Orchard's Anglican co-author, Harold Riley, showed how the historical-critical method could be used to vindicate Owen's theory.

Orchard was puzzled why Mark's two misquotations from the Hebrew Scriptures had not been corrected. This triggered his **ground breaking hypothesis that Peter had given a talk in kione (common) Greek, merging together Matthew and Luke**. This was Peter's way of endorsing Luke's Gospel. **Peter's secretary, Mark had used shorthand to record the talk exactly**, which included Peter's poor Greek style and memory slips.

Mark's 'poor' Greek was soon criticised. In reply bishop Papias, who may have met members of the audience, wrote that Mark recorded exactly. Using the word 'exactly' may be seen as him accepting both that the talk had been delivered in poor Greek and that it had been recorded in shorthand. (In 1991 E. R. Richards confirmed the widespread use of Greek shorthand at public meetings during that period). When Papias added that recorders of Matthew had had to rely on less accurate methods, he could have been alluding to Hebrew not having a form of shorthand.