

Catholic Identity: A service of Brisbane Catholic Education

Who wrote the Gospels and when?

Introduction

There are four accounts of the life, ministry and death of Jesus that make up the Gospel. Each account brings a richness and diversity of concerns, while telling essentially the same story. However, there is one Gospel of salvation and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell it in four different ways. Hence, we say, "the Gospel according to..." Each Gospel account bears the name of a male; therefore, many people assume that each book's author was a significant first century Palestinian male of that name. Some biblical scholars hold to this belief and focus on which Mark, Matthew, Luke or John wrote the text. Conversely, it is held by other biblical scholars that each gospel account demonstrates significant authorship on the part of one author and subsequent authorship of smaller sections by others. Such scholars suggest the minor authors of each gospel account frequently belonged to a scholarly group or school of similar thought, lead possibly by the major author. It is mostly this difference in style within and between gospel accounts that evidences the work of several authors.

Mark

The authorship of the Gospel which bears the name of Mark is unknown. The Gospel writer/s was influenced by the stories, wisdom and leadership of Peter until his martyrdom sometime between 64 and 67 CE. Internal evidence suggests that the Gospel of Mark was probably written between 65 and 70 CE, after the death of Peter and towards or at the end of the four-year war between Israel and Rome. This war resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, as evidenced in Mark 13.

According to tradition, the Gospel was written in Rome; however, some believe it was written in a more rural location because of the lack of urban imagery. The Gospel of Mark was predominately written for a gentile community. This is evidenced by the lack of intertextuality with the Hebrew Scriptures. This means there is little evidence of connection with words phrases and ideas from the Hebrew Scriptures in Mark's Gospel. It seems he is writing for people who knew and used Latin.

Matthew

The authorship of the Gospel which bears the name of Matthew is also uncertain. It is generally accepted that the author is not the apostle Matthew. The author was probably a Jewish convert who was familiar with the Law, Prophets, Jewish traditions and Messianic expectations. Matthew's frequent reference to Hebrew Scriptures and

traditions suggest that his audience were predominantly converts from Judaism. Some argue that because of his missionary outlook and openness to gentiles that the gospel was written for a gentile audience as well. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written between 85 and 90 CE.

Luke

The authorship of the Gospel which bears the name of Luke is also uncertain. However according to Fitzmyer (Joseph Augustine Fitzmyer SJ was an American Catholic priest and scholar who taught at several American and British universities. He was a member of the Society of Jesus. He was considered an important scholar of biblical studies, particularly the New Testament. 1920-2016 [Wikipedia](#)

and other scholars, the author of this gospel is quite likely a Syrian of Antioch, a physician, and a supporter of the poor named Luke. He was clearly writing to a gentile Christian audience. The Gospel of Luke was probably written between 80 and 90 CE.

John

The authorship of the Gospel which bears the name of John remains a mystery. Irenaeus, who wrote at the end of the second century, identified the apostle John with the evangelist John and others have speculated that the Gospel was written by disciples of John the apostle. John's primary audience seems to have been a group of Jewish Christians who were in a situation of increasing tension with the Jewish synagogue. The Gospel of John was probably written in the 90's CE.

For further information, see the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) The Gospel of by Felix Just, S.J.

Relationships between the synoptic gospels

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is comparatively distinct. The term synoptic comes via Latin from the Greek, synopsis, i.e. "seeing all together, synopsis"; the sense of the word in English, the one specifically applied to these three gospels, of "giving an account of the events from the same point of view or under the same general aspect" is a modern one.

For further information, see The Synoptic Problem, by Felix Just, S.J.