

not belong to the genuine Gospel of Luke.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

4. *The Magnificat* - Whether those very rare and altogether singular documents in which the Cantic *Magnificat* is attributed not to the Blessed Virgin Mary, but to Elizabeth, can and should at all prevail against the harmonious testimony of nearly all the codices both of the original Greek text and of the versions, as well as against the interpretation clearly required no less by the context than by the mind of the Virgin herself and constant tradition of the Church.

*Answer:* In the negative.

5. *Chronological Order* - Whether, with regard to the chronological order of the Gospels, it is lawful to abandon the opinion, supported as it is by the most ancient as well as constant testimony of tradition, which testifies that, after Matthew, who first of all wrote his Gospel in his native language, Mark wrote second and Luke third; or is this opinion to be regarded as opposed to that which asserts that the second and third Gospels were composed before the Greek version of the first Gospel.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

6. *Date of Composition* - Whether it is lawful to set the date of the composition of the Gospels of Mark and Luke as late as the destruction of the city of Jerusalem; or whether, from the fact that in Luke the prophecy of our Lord concerning the overthrow of this city seems to be more definite, it can at least be held that his Gospel was written after the siege had been begun.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

7. *Date of Composition of the Third Gospel* - Whether it is to be affirmed that the Gospel of Luke preceded the book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1-2); and since this book of which the same Luke is author, was finished at the end of the Roman imprisonment of the Apostle (Acts 28:30-31), his Gospel was composed not after this date.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.

8. *Sources* - Whether, in view both of the testimony of tradition and of internal arguments, with regard to the sources which both Evangelists used in writing their Gospels, the opinion can prudently be called in question which holds that Mark wrote according to the preaching of Peter and Luke according to the preaching of Paul, and

which at the same time asserts that these Evangelists had at their disposal other trustworthy sources, either oral or already written.

9. *Historical Truth* - Whether the sayings and doings which are accurately and almost graphically narrated by Mark, according to the preaching of Peter, and are most faithfully set forth by Luke, having diligently learned all these things from the beginning from eminently trustworthy witnesses, viz., "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2-3), have a just claim to the full historical credence which the Church has ever given them; or whether, on the contrary, the sayings and doings are to be regarded as devoid of historical truth at least in part, either because the writers were not eyewitnesses, or because in both Evangelists lack of order and discrepancy in the succession of facts are not infrequently found, or because, since they came and wrote later, they must necessarily have related conceptions foreign to the mind of Christ and the Apostles, or facts more or less infected by popular imagination, or, finally because they indulged in preconceived dogmatic ideas, each according to the scope he had in view.

*Answer:* In the affirmative to the first part; in the negative to the second.  
June 26, 1912.

Source: James J Megivern, *Official Catholic Teachings: Bible Interpretation*, 1978, pp. 242-245

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Pamphlet 240

# Pontifical Biblical Commission on the Four Gospels

## On the Author and Historical Truth of the Fourth Gospel

*The Biblical Commission answers the following questions:*

1. *External Evidence for Authenticity* - Whether from the constant, universal, and solemn tradition of the Church coming down from the second century, as it is gathered chiefly: a. from the testimonies and allusions of the holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, nay even those of heretics, which since they must have been derived from the disciples or first successors of the Apostles, are joined by a necessary connection to the very origin of the book; b. from the fact that the name of the author of the Fourth Gospel was received always and everywhere in the canons and catalogues of the sacred books; c. from the most ancient manuscripts, codices and their versions in various languages of the same books; d. from the public liturgical use obtaining throughout the whole world from the very beginnings of the Church; leaving aside the theological argument, it is proved by such a solid historical argument that the Apostle John and no other must be acknowledged as the author of the Fourth Gospel, that the reasons to the contrary, brought forward by the critics, in no wise weaken this tradition.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.

2. *Internal Evidence for Authenticity* - Whether also the internal reasons, which are drawn from the text of the Fourth Gospel considered separately, and from the testimony of the writer and the manifest kinship of the Gospel itself with the First Epistle of the Apostle John, must be considered to confirm the tradition which unhesitatingly attributes the Fourth Gospel to the same Apostle. And whether the difficulties which are drawn from the comparison of the same Gospel with the other three, bearing in mind the diversity of time, of scope, and of the hearers for whom or against whom the author wrote, can be reasonably solved, as the holy Fathers and Catholic commentators have done at some times.

*Answer:* In the affirmative in both parts.

3. *Historical Character* - Whether, notwithstanding the practice which has constantly obtained in the whole Church

from the first ages, of arguing from the Fourth Gospel as from a strictly historical document, and considering moreover the peculiar character of the same Gospel and the author's manifest intention of illustrating and vindicating the divinity of Christ from His own deeds and words, it can be said that the facts narrated in the Fourth Gospel are wholly or in part invented to serve as allegories or doctrinal symbols, and that discourses of our Lord are not properly and truly the discourses of our Lord Himself, but the theological compositions of the writer, albeit they are placed in the mouth of our Lord.

*Answer:* In the negative.  
May 29, 1907.

Source: James J Megivern, *Official Catholic Teachings: Bible Interpretation*, 1978, pp. 231-232

### **On the Author, Date of Composition, and Historical Truth of the Gospel According to St. Matthew**

*The Biblical Commission answers the following questions:*

1. *Author* - Whether, bearing in mind the universal and constant tradition of the Church dating from the first centuries, which explicit testimonies of the Fathers, the inscriptions of the codices of the Gospels, the oldest version of the sacred books as well as their catalogues transmitted to us by the holy Fathers, ecclesiastical writers, Supreme Pontiffs and the Councils, and finally, the liturgical usages of the Eastern and Western Church clearly record, it may and must be affirmed with certainty that Matthew, an Apostle of Christ, is in truth the author of the Gospel published under his name.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.

2. *Order of Composition and Language* - Whether the opinion must be considered as sufficiently supported by the testimony of tradition, which holds that Matthew wrote before the other Evangelists and that he wrote the first Gospel in the native dialect then in use by the Jews of Palestine, for whom this work was intended."

*Answer:* in the affirmative to both parts.

3. *Date of Composition* - Whether the publication of this original text may be deferred beyond the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, so that the prophecies which are therein recorded concerning that event, were written after the destruction and whether the frequently quoted testimony of St. Irenaeus, the interpretation of which is uncertain and controverted, must be considered of such

authority as to necessitate the rejection of the opinion of those who consider it more in conformity with tradition that the first Gospel was completed even before the arrival of St. Paul at Rome.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

4. *Compilation* - Whether the opinion of certain moderns may be held as probable according to which Matthew is said to have composed the Gospel not exactly as it has been transmitted to us, but only a collection of the sayings and discourses of Christ, which an anonymous author, whom these moderns call the compiler of the Gospel, has used as sources.

*Answer:* In the negative.

5. *Identity of Hebrew and Greek* - Whether, from the fact that the Fathers, all ecclesiastical writers, and even the Church herself, from the very beginning, have used only the Greek text of the Gospel known under the name of Matthew as canonical, not even excepting those who have explicitly testified that Matthew, the Apostle, wrote in the native dialect, it can be proved with certainty that the Greek Gospel is identical in substance with the Gospel written in the vernacular by the same Apostle.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.

6. *Historical Character* - Whether, from the fact that the purpose of the author is principally dogmatic and apologetic, demonstrating to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets and a descendant of the House of David, and that, moreover, the author does not always follow the chronological order in arranging the deeds and sayings which he narrates and records, it is consequently lawful to conclude that they are not to be considered as true; and whether it may also be affirmed that the narration of the deeds and words of Christ, which is contained in the Gospel, has been subjected to changes and adaptations under the influence of the prophecies of the Old Testament and the more developed status of the Church, and that, consequently, this narration is not in conformity with historical truth.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

7. *Integrity* - Whether in particular the opinion of those ought to be considered devoid of solid foundation, who call in question the historical authenticity of the first two chapters, in which the genealogy and the infancy of Christ are narrated, as also certain passages of great importance in

dogma, such as those referring to the primacy of Peter (16:17-19), the form of Baptism given to the Apostles together with the universal mission of teaching (29:19-20), the Apostles' profession of faith in the divinity of Christ (14:33), and others of this character, which are expressed in a manner peculiar to Matthew.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.  
June 19, 1911.

Source: James J Megivern, *Official Catholic Teachings: Bible Interpretation*, 1978, pp. 240-242

### **On the Author, Time of Composition and Historical Truth of the Gospels According to St. Mark and St. Luke**

*The Biblical Commission answers the following questions:*

1. *Authenticity* - Whether the clear evidence of tradition, wonderfully harmonious from the earliest ages of the Church and supported by numerous arguments, viz., by the explicit testimonies of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, by the citations and allusions occurring in their writings, by the usage of the ancient heretics, by the versions of the books of the New Testament, by the most ancient and almost universal manuscript codices, and also by intrinsic arguments from the text itself of the sacred books, certainly compels us to affirm that Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, and Luke, a physician, the assistant and companion of Paul, are really the authors of the Gospels which are respectively attributed to them.

*Answer:* In the affirmative.

2. *Integrity of the Second Gospel* - Whether the reasons by which some critics endeavor to prove that the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark (16:9-20) were not written by Mark himself but added by another hand, are of a kind to justify the statement that these verses are not to be received as inspired and canonical, or at least prove that Mark is not the author of said verses.

*Answer:* In the negative to both parts.

3. *Integrity of the Third Gospel* - Whether likewise it is lawful to doubt of the inspiration and canonicity of the narrations of Luke on the infancy of Christ (chapter 1-2) or on the apparition of the Angel comforting Jesus and on the bloody sweat (22:43-44); or whether at least it can be shown by solid reasons-as ancient heretics used to think and certain more recent critics hold-that these narrations do