The Gospel of St. Mathew
The position of the Gospel according to Matthew as the first of the four gospels in the New Testament reflects both the view that it was the first to be written, a view that goes back to the late second century A.D., and the esteem in which it was held by the church; no other was so frequently quoted in the noncanonical literature of earliest Christianity. Although the majority of scholars now reject the opinion about the time of its composition, the high estimation of this work remains. The reason for that becomes clear upon study of the way in which Matthew presents his story of Jesus, the demands of Christian discipleship, and the breaking-in of the new and final age through the ministry but particularly through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The gospel begins with a narrative prologue (Matthew 1:1-2:23), the first part of which is a genealogy of Jesus starting with Abraham, the father of Israel (Matthew 1:1-17). Yet at the beginning of that genealogy Jesus is designated as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). The kingly ancestor who lived about a thousand years after Abraham is named first, for this is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the royal anointed one (Matthew 1:16). In the first of the episodes of the infancy narrative that follow the genealogy, the mystery of Jesus’ person is declared. He is conceived of a virgin by the power of the Spirit of God (Matthew 1:18-25). The first of the gospel’s fulfillment citations, whose purpose it is to show that he was the one to whom the prophecies of Israel were pointing, occurs here (Matthew 1:23): he shall be named Emmanuel, for in him God is with us.

The announcement of the birth of this newborn king of the Jews greatly troubles not only King Herod but all Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1-3), yet the Gentile magi are overjoyed to find him and offer him their homage and their gifts (Matthew 2:10-11). Thus his ultimate rejection by the mass of his own people and his acceptance by the Gentile nations is foreshadowed. He must be taken to Egypt to escape the murderous plan of Herod. By his sojourn there and his subsequent return after the king’s death he relives the Exodus experience of Israel. The words of the Lord spoken through the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” are fulfilled in him (Matthew 2:15); if Israel was God’s son, Jesus is so in a way far surpassing the dignity of that nation, as his marvelous birth and the unfolding of his story show (see Matthew 3:17; 4:1-11; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16; 27:54). Back in the land of Israel, he must be taken to Nazareth in Galilee because of the danger to his life in Judea, where Herod’s son Archelaus is now ruling (Matthew 2:22-23). The sufferings of Jesus in the infancy narrative anticipate those of his passion, and if his life is spared in spite of the dangers, it is because his destiny is finally to give it on the cross as “a ransom for many” (20, 28). Thus the word of the angel will be fulfilled, “. . . he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21; cf Matthew 26:28).
In Matthew 4:12 Matthew begins his account of the ministry of Jesus, introducing it by the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12), the baptism of Jesus that culminates in God’s proclaiming him his “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:13-17), and the temptation in which he proves his true sonship by his victory over the devil’s attempt to deflect him from the way of obedience to the Father (Matthew 4:1-11). The central message of Jesus’ preaching is the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the need for repentance, a complete change of heart and conduct, on the part of those who are to receive this great gift of God (Matthew 4:17). Galilee is the setting for most of his ministry; he leaves there for Judea only in Matthew 19:1, and his ministry in Jerusalem, the goal of his journey, is limited to a few days (Matthew 21:1-25:46).

In this extensive material there are five great discourses of Jesus, each concluding with the formula “When Jesus finished these words” or one closely similar (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These are an important structure of the gospel. In every case the discourse is preceded by a narrative section, each narrative and discourse together constituting a “book” of the gospel. The discourses are, respectively, the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:3-7:27), the missionary discourse (Matthew 10:5-42), the parable discourse (Matthew 13:3-52), the “church order” discourse (Matthew 18:3-35), and the eschatological discourse (Matthew 24:4-25:46). In large measure the material of these discourses came to Matthew from his tradition, but his work in modifying and adding to what he had received is abundantly evident. No other evangelist gives the teaching of Jesus with such elegance and order as he.

Canonicity

The earliest Christian communities looked upon the books of the Old Testament as Sacred Scripture, and read them at their religious assemblies. That the Gospels, which contained the words of Christ and the narrative of His life, soon enjoyed the same authority as the Old Testament, is made clear by Hegesippus (Eusebius, *Church History* IV.22.3), who tells us that in every city the Christians were faithful to the teachings of the law, the prophets, and the Lord. A book was acknowledged as canonical when the Church regarded it as Apostolic, and had it read at her assemblies. Hence, to establish the canonicity of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we must investigate primitive Christian tradition for the use that was made of this document, and for indications proving that it was regarded as Scripture in the same manner as the Books of the Old Testament.

The first traces that we find of it are not indubitable, because post-Apostolic writers quoted the texts with a certain freedom, and principally because it is difficult to say whether the passages thus quoted were taken from oral tradition or from a written Gospel. The first Christian document whose date can be fixed with comparative certainty (95-98), is the Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians. It contains sayings of the Lord which closely resemble those recorded in the First Gospel (Clement, 16:17 = Matthew 11:29; Clem., 24:5 = Matthew 13:3), but it is possible that they are derived from Apostolic preaching, as, in chapter xiii, 2, we find a mixture of sentences from Matthew, Luke, and an unknown source. Again, we note a similar commingling of Evangelical
texts elsewhere in the same *Epistle of Clement*, in the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, in the Epistle of Polycarp, and in Clement of Alexandria. Whether these these texts were thus combined in oral tradition or emanated from a collection of Christ’s utterances, we are unable to say.

- The Epistles of St. Ignatius (martyred 110-17) contain no literal quotation from the Holy Books; nevertheless, St. Ignatius borrowed expressions and some sentences from Matthew (“Ad Polyc.”, 2:2 = Matthew 10:16; “Ephesians”, 14:2 = Matthew 12:33, etc.). In his “Epistle to the Philadelphians” (v, 12), he speaks of the Gospel in which he takes refuge as in the Flesh of Jesus; consequently, he had an evangelical collection which he regarded as Sacred Writ, and we cannot doubt that the Gospel of St. Matthew formed part of it.

- In the Epistle of Polycarp (110-17), we find various passages from St. Matthew quoted literally (12:3 = Matthew 5:44; 7:2 = Matthew 26:41, etc.).

- The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles (*Didache*) contains sixty-six passages that recall the Gospel of Matthew; some of them are literal quotations (8:2 = Matthew 6:7-13; 7:1 = Matthew 28:19; 11:7 = Matthew 12:31, etc.).

- In the so-called Epistle of Barnabas (117-30), we find a passage from St. Matthew (xxii, 14), introduced by the scriptural formula, *os gegrapTai*, which proves that the author considered the Gospel of Matthew equal in point of authority to the writings of the Old Testament.

- The “Shepherd of Hermas” has several passages which bear close resemblance to passages of Matthew, but not a single literal quotation from it.

- In his “Dialogue” (xcix, 8), St. Justin quotes, almost literally, the prayer of Christ in the Garden of Olives, in Matthew 26:39-40.

- A great number of passages in the writings of St. Justin recall the Gospel of Matthew, and prove that he ranked it among the Memoirs of the Apostles which, he said, were called Gospels (I Apol., lxvi), were read in the services of the Church (ibid., i), and were consequently regarded as Scripture.

- In his *Plea for the Christians* 12.11, Athenagoras (177) quotes almost literally sentences taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44).

- Theophilus of Antioch (Ad Autol., III, xiii-xiv) quotes a passage from Matthew (v, 28, 32), and, according to St. Jerome (In Matt. Prol.), wrote a commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew.

- We find in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs—drawn up, according to some critics, about the middle of the second century—numerous passages that closely resemble the Gospel of Matthew (Test. Gad, 5:3; 6:6; 5:7 = Matthew 18:15, 35; Test. Joshua 1:5, 6 = Matthew 25:35-36, etc.), but Dr. Charles maintains that the Testaments were written in Hebrew in the first century before Jesus Christ, and translated into Greek towards the middle of the same century. In this event, the Gospel of Matthew would depend upon the Testaments and not the Testaments upon the Gospel. The question is not yet settled, but it seems to us that there is a greater probability that the Testaments, at least in their Greek
version, are of later date than the Gospel of Matthew, they certainly received numerous Christian additions.

- The Greek text of the Clementine Homilies contains some quotations from Matthew (Hom. 3:52 = Matthew 15:13); in Hom. xviii, 15, the quotation from Matthew 13:35, is literal.

- Passages which suggest the Gospel of Matthew might be quoted from heretical writings of the second century and from apocryphal gospels—the Gospel of Peter, the Protoevangelium of James, etc., in which the narratives, to a considerable extent, are derived from the Gospel of Matthew.

- Tatian incorporated the Gospel of Matthew in his “Diatesseron”; we shall quote below the testimonies of Papias and St. Irenæus. For the latter, the Gospel of Matthew, from which he quotes numerous passages, was one of the four that constituted the quadriform Gospel dominated by a single spirit.

- Tertullian (Adv. Marc., IV, ii) asserts, that the “Instrumentum evangelicum” was composed by the Apostles, and mentions Matthew as the author of a Gospel (De carne Christi, xii).

- Clement of Alexandria (Stromata III.13) speaks of the four Gospels that have been transmitted, and quotes over three hundred passages from the Gospel of Matthew, which he introduces by the formula, en de to kata Matthaion euaggelio or by phesin ho kurios.

It is unnecessary to pursue our inquiry further. About the middle of the third century, the Gospel of Matthew was received by the whole Christian Church as a Divinely inspired document, and consequently as canonical. The testimony of Origen (“In Matt.”, quoted by Eusebius, Church History III.25.4), of Eusebius (op. cit., Ill, xxiv, 5; xxv, 1), and of St. Jerome (“De Viris Ill.”, iii, “Prolog. in Matt.”) are explicit in this respect. It might be added that this Gospel is found in the most ancient versions: Old Latin, Syriac, and Egyptian. Finally, it stands at the head of the Books of the New Testament in the Canon of the Council of Laodicea (363) and in that of St. Athanasius (326-73), and very probably it was in the last part of the Muratorian Canon. Furthermore, the canonicity of the Gospel of St. Matthew is accepted by the entire Christian world.

**Authenticity of the First Gospel**

The question of authenticity assumes an altogether special aspect in regard to the First Gospel. The early Christian writers assert that St. Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew; this Hebrew Gospel has, however, entirely disappeared, and the Gospel which we have, and from which ecclesiastical writers borrow quotations as coming from the Gospel of Matthew, is in Greek. What connection is there between this Hebrew Gospel and this Greek Gospel, both of which tradition ascribes to St. Matthew? Such is the problem that presents itself for solution. Let us first examine the facts.

**Testimony of Tradition**

According to Eusebius (Church History III.39.16), Papias said that Matthew collected (synetaxato; or, according to two manuscripts, synegraphato, composed) ta logia (the oracles or maxims of Jesus) in the Hebrew (Aramaic) language, and that each one translated them as best he could.
Three questions arise in regard to this testimony of Papias on Matthew: (1) What does the word *logia* signify? Does it mean only detached sentences or sentences incorporated in a narrative, that is to say, a Gospel such as that of St. Matthew? Among classical writers, *logion*, the diminutive of *logos*, signifies the “answer of oracles”, a “prophecy”; in the Septuagint and in Philo, “oracles of God” (*ta deka logia*, the Ten Commandments). It sometimes has a broader meaning and seems to include both facts and sayings. In the New Testament the signification of the word *logion* is doubtful, and if, strictly speaking, it may be claimed to indicate teachings and narratives, the meaning “oracles” is the more natural. However, writers contemporary with Papias—e.g. St. Clement of Rome (Ad Cor., llii), St. Irenæus (*Against Heresies* I.8.2), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* I) and Origen (*De Principiis* IV.11)—have used it to designate facts and sayings. The work of Papias was entitled “Exposition of the Oracles” [*logion*] of the Lord”, and it also contained narratives (Eusebius, *Church History* III.39.9). On the other hand, speaking of the Gospel of Mark, Papias says that this Evangelist wrote all that Christ had said and done, but adds that he established no connection between the Lord’s sayings (*suntaxin ton kuriakon logion*). We may believe that here *logion* comprises all that Christ said and did. Nevertheless, it would seem that, if the two passages on Mark and Matthew followed each other in Papias as in Eusebius, the author intended to emphasize a difference between them, by implying that Mark recorded the Lord’s words and deeds and Matthew chronicled His discourses. The question is still unsolved; it is, however, possible that, in Papias, the term *logia* means deeds and teachings.

(2) Second, does Papias refer to oral or written translations of Matthew, when he says that each one translated the sayings “as best he could”? As there is nowhere any allusion to numerous Greek translations of the Logia of Matthew, it is probable that Papias speaks here of the oral translations made at Christian meetings, similar to the extemporaneous translations of the Old Testament made in the synagogues. This would explain why Papias mentions that each one (each reader) translated “as best he could”.

(3) Finally, were the Logia of Matthew and the Gospel to which ecclesiastical writers refer written in Hebrew or Aramaic? Both hypotheses are held. Papias says that Matthew wrote the Logia in the Hebrew (*Hebraidi*) language; St. Irenæus and Eusebius maintain that he wrote his gospel for the Hebrews in their national language, and the same assertion is found in several writers. Matthew would, therefore, seem to have written in modernized Hebrew, the language then used by the scribes for teaching. But, in the time of Christ, the national language of the Jews was Aramaic, and when, in the New Testament, there is mention of the Hebrew language (*Hebrais dialektos*), it is Aramaic that is implied. Hence, the aforesaid writers may allude to the Aramaic and not to the Hebrew. Besides, as they assert, the Apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel to help popular teaching. To be understood by his readers who spoke Aramaic, he would have had to reproduce the original catechesis in this language, and it cannot be imagined why, or for whom, he should have taken the trouble to write it in Hebrew, when it would have had to be translated thence into Aramaic for use in religious services. Moreover, Eusebius (Church History III.24.6) tells us that the Gospel of Matthew was a reproduction of his preaching, and this we know, was in Aramaic. An investigation of the Semitic idioms observed in the Gospel does not permit us to conclude as to whether the original was in Hebrew or Aramaic, as the two languages are so closely related. Besides, it must be borne in mind that the greater part of these Semitisms simply reproduce colloquial Greek and are not of Hebrew or Aramaic origin. However, we believe the second hypothesis to be the more probable, viz., that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic.

Let us now recall the testimony of the other ecclesiastical writers on the Gospel of St. Matthew. St. Irenæus (Adv. Haer., III, i, 2) affirms that Matthew published among the Hebrews a Gospel which he wrote in their
own language. Eusebius (Church History V.10.3) says that, in India, Pantænus found the Gospel according to St. Matthew written in the Hebrew language, the Apostle Bartholomew having left it there. Again, in Church History VI.25.3-4, Eusebius tells us that Origen, in his first book on the Gospel of St. Matthew, states that he has learned from tradition that the First Gospel was written by Matthew, who, having composed it in Hebrew, published it for the converts from Judaism. According to Eusebius (Church History III.24.6), Matthew preached first to the Hebrews and, when obliged to go to other countries, gave them his Gospel written in his native tongue. St. Jerome has repeatedly declared that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew (“Ad Damasum”, xx; “Ad Hedib.”, iv), but says that it is not known with certainty who translated it into Greek. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Epiphanius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, etc., and all the commentators of the Middle Ages repeat that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew. Erasmus was the first to express doubts on this subject: “It does not seem probable to me that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, since no one testifies that he has seen any trace of such a volume.” This is not accurate, as St. Jerome uses Matthew’s Hebrew text several times to solve difficulties of interpretation, which proves that he had it at hand. Pantænus also had it, as, according to St. Jerome (“De Viris Ill.”, xxxvi), he brought it back to Alexandria. However, the testimony of Pantænus is only second-hand, and that of Jerome remains rather ambiguous, since in neither case is it positively known that the writer did not mistake the Gospel according to the Hebrews (written of course in Hebrew) for the Hebrew Gospel of St. Matthew. However all ecclesiastical writers assert that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, and, by quoting the Greek Gospel and ascribing it to Matthew, thereby affirm it to be a translation of the Hebrew Gospel.

Examination of the Greek Gospel of St. Matthew

Our chief object is to ascertain whether the characteristics of the Greek Gospel indicate that it is a translation from the Aramaic, or that it is an original document; but, that we may not have to revert to the peculiarities of the Gospel of Matthew, we shall here treat them in full.

The language of the Gospel

St. Matthew used about 1475 words, 137 of which are apax legomena (words used by him alone of all the New Testament writers). Of these latter 76 are classical; 21 are found in the Septuagint; 15 (battologein biastes, eunouchizein etc.) were introduced for the first time by Matthew, or at least he was the first writer in whom they were discovered; 8 words (aphedon, gamizein, etc.) were employed for the first time by Matthew and Mark, and 15 others (ekchunesthai, epiousios, etc.) by Matthew and another New Testament writer. It is probable that, at the time of the Evangelist, all these words were in current use. Matthew’s Gospel contains many peculiar expressions which help to give decided colour to his style. Thus, he employs thirty-four times the expression basileia ton ouranon; this is never found in Mark and Luke, who, in parallel passages, replace it by basileia tou theou, which also occurs four times in Matthew. We must likewise note the expressions: ho pater ho epouranions, ho en tois ouranois, sunteleia tou alonos, sunairein logon, eipein ti kata tinos, mechri tes semeron, poiesai os, osper, en ekeino to kairo, egeiresthai apo, etc. The same terms often recur: tote (90 times), apo tote, kai idou etc. He adopts the Greek form Ierisiluma for Jerusalem, and not Ierousaleu, which he uses but once. He has a predilection for the preposition apo, using it even when Mark and Luke use ek, and for the expression uiios
David. Moreover, Matthew is fond of repeating a phrase or a special construction several times within quite a short interval (cf. ii, 1, 13, and 19; iv, 12, 18, and v, 2; viii, 2-3 and 28; ix, 26 and 31; xiii, 44, 4.5, and 47, etc.). Quotations from the Old Testament are variously introduced, as: *outos, kathos gegrapTai, ina, or opos, plerothe to rethen uto Kuriou dia tou prophetou*, etc. These peculiarities of language, especially the repetition of the same words and expressions, would indicate that the Greek Gospel was an original rather than a translation, and this is confirmed by the paronomasias (*battologein, polulogia; kophontai kai ophontai*, etc.), which ought not to have been found in the Aramaic, by the employment of the genitive absolute, and, above all, by the linking of clauses through the use of *men . . . oe*, a construction that is peculiarly Greek. However, let us observe that these various characteristics prove merely that the writer was thoroughly conversant with his language, and that he translated his text rather freely. Besides, these same characteristics are noticeable in Christ’s sayings, as well as in the narratives, and, as these utterances were made in Aramaic, they were consequently translated; thus, the construction *men . . . de* (except in one instance) and all the examples of paronomasia occur in discourses of Christ. The fact that the genitive absolute is used mainly in the narrative portions, only denotes that the latter were more freely translated; besides, Hebrew possesses an analogous grammatical construction. On the other hand, a fair number of Hebraisms are noticed in Matthew’s Gospel (*ouk eginosken auten, omologesei en emoi, el exestin, ti emin kai soi*, etc.), which favour the belief that the original was Aramaic. Still, it remains to be proved that these Hebraisms are not colloquial Greek expressions.

**General character of the Gospel**

Distinct unity of plan, an artificial arrangement of subject-matter, and a simple, easy style—much purer than that of Mark—suggest an original rather than a translation. When the First Gospel is compared with books translated from the Hebrew, such as those of the Septuagint, a marked difference is at once apparent. The original Hebrew shines through every line of the latter, whereas, in the First Gospel Hebraisms are comparatively rare, and are merely such as might be looked for in a book written by a Jew and reproducing Jewish teaching. However, these observations are not conclusive in favour of a Greek original. In the first place, the unity of style that prevails throughout the book, would rather prove that we have a translation. It is certain that a good portion of the matter existed first in Aramaic—at all events, the sayings of Christ, and thus almost three-quarters of the Gospel. Consequently, these at least the Greek writer has translated. And, since no difference in language and style can be detected between the sayings of Christ and the narratives that are claimed to have been composed in Greek, it would seem that these latter are also translated from the Aramaic. This conclusion is based on the fact that they are of the same origin as the discourses. The unity of plan and the artificial arrangement of subject-matter could as well have been made in Matthew’s Aramaic as in the Greek document; the fine Greek construction, the lapidary style, the elegance and good order claimed as characteristic of the Gospel, are largely a matter of opinion, the proof being that critics do not agree on this question. Although the phraseology is not more Hebraic than in the other Gospels, still it not much less so. To sum up, from the literary examination of the Greek Gospel no certain conclusion can be drawn against the existence of a Hebrew Gospel.
of which our First Gospel would be a translation; and inversely, this examination does not prove the Greek Gospel to be a translation of an Aramaic original.

**Quotations from the Old Testament**

It is claimed that most of the quotations from the Old Testament are borrowed from the Septuagint, and that this fact proves that the Gospel of Matthew was composed in Greek. The first proposition is not accurate, and, even if it were, it would not necessitate this conclusion. Let us examine the facts. As established by Stanton (“The Gospels as Historical Documents”, II, Cambridge, 1909, p. 342), the quotations from the Old Testament in the First Gospel are divided into two classes. In the first are ranged all those quotations the object of which is to show that the prophecies have been realized in the events of the life of Jesus. They are introduced by the words: “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet,” or other similar expressions. The quotations of this class do not in general correspond exactly with any particular text. Three among them (ii, 15; viii, 17; xxvii, 9, 10) are borrowed from the Hebrew; five (ii, 18; iv, 15, 16; xii, 18-21; xiii, 35; xxi, 4, 5) bear points of resemblance to the Septuagint, but were not borrowed from that version. In the answer of the chief priests and scribes to Herod (ii, 6), the text of the Old Testament is slightly modified, without, however, conforming either to the Hebrew or the Septuagint. The Prophet Micheas writes (5:2): “And thou Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda”; whereas Matthew says (ii, 6): “And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda”. A single quotation of this first class (iii, 3) conforms to the Septuagint, and another (i, 23) is almost conformable. These quotations are to be referred to the first Evangelist himself, and relate to facts, principally to the birth of Jesus (i, ii), then to the mission of John the Baptist, the preaching of the Gospel by Jesus in Galilee, the miracles of Jesus, etc. It is surprising that the narratives of the Passion and the Resurrection of Our Lord, the fulfilment of the very clear and numerous prophecies of the Old Testament, should never be brought into relation with these prophecies. Many critics, e.g. Burkitt and Stanton, think that the quotations of the first class are borrowed from a collection of Messianic passages, Stanton being of opinion that they were accompanied by the event that constituted their realization. This “catena of fulfilments of prophecy”, as he calls it, existed originally in Aramaic, but whether the author of the First Gospel had a Greek translation of it is uncertain. The second class of quotations from the Old Testament is chiefly composed of those repeated either by the Lord or by His interrogators. Except in two passages, they are introduced by one of the formula: “It is written”; “As it is written”; “Have you not read?” “Moses said”. Where Matthew alone quotes the Lord’s words, the quotation is sometimes borrowed from the Septuagint (v, 21 a, 27, 38), or, again, it is a free translation which we are unable to refer to any definite text (v, 21 b, 23, 43). In those Passages where Matthew runs parallel with Mark and Luke or with either of them, all the quotations save one (xi, 10) are taken almost literally from the Septuagint.

**Analogy to the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke**

From a first comparison of the Gospel of Matthew with the two other Synoptic Gospels we find
that 330 verses are peculiar to it alone; that it has between 330 and 370 in common with both the others, from 170 to 180 with Mark’s, and from 230 to 240 with Luke’s;

that in like parts the same ideas are expressed sometimes in identical and sometimes in different terms; that Matthew and Mark most frequently use the same expressions, Matthew seldom agreeing with Mark. The divergence in their use of the same expressions is in the number of a noun or the use of two different tenses of the same verb. The construction of sentences is at times identical and at others different.

That the order of narrative is, with certain exceptions which we shall later indicate, almost the same in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

These facts indicate that the three Synoptists are not independent of one another. They borrow their subject-matter from the same oral source or else from the same written documents. To declare oneself upon this alternative, it would be necessary to treat the synoptic question, and on this critics have not yet agreed. We shall, therefore, restrict ourselves to what concerns the Gospel of St. Matthew. From a second comparison of this Gospel with Mark and Luke we ascertain:

that Mark is to be found almost complete in Matthew, with certain divergences which we shall note;

that Matthew records many of our Lord’s discourses in common with Luke;

that Matthew has special passages which are unknown to Mark and Luke.

Let us examine these three points in detail, in an endeavour to learn how the Gospel of Matthew was composed.

(a) Analogy to Mark

Mark is found complete in Matthew, with the exception of numerous slight omissions and the following pericopes: Mark 1:23-28, 35-39; 4:26-29; 7:32-36; 8:22-26; 9:39-40; 12:41-44. In all, 31 verses are omitted.

The general order is identical except that, in chapters 5-13, Matthew groups facts of the same nature and sayings conveying the same ideas. Thus, in Matthew 8:1-15, we have three miracles that are separated in Mark; in Matthew 8:23-9:9, there are gathered together incidents otherwise arranged in Mark, etc. Matthew places sentences in a different environment from that given them by Mark. For instance, in 5:15, Matthew inserts a verse occurring in Mark 4:21, that should have been placed after 13:23, etc.

In Matthew the narrative is usually shorter because he suppresses a great number of details. Thus, in Mark, we read: “And the wind ceased: and there was made a great calm”, whereas in Matthew the first part of the sentence is omitted. All unnecessary particulars are dispensed with, such as the numerous picturesque features and indications of time, place, and number, in which Mark’s narrative abounds.
Sometimes, however, Matthew is the more detailed. Thus, in 12:22-45, he gives more of Christ’s discourse than we find in Mark 3:20-30, and has in addition a dialogue between Jesus and the scribes. In chapter 13, Matthew dwells at greater length than Mark 4 upon the object of the parables, and introduces those of the cockle and the leaven, neither of which Mark records. Moreover, Our Lord’s apocalyptic discourse is much longer in Matthew 24-25 (97 verses), than in Mark 13 (37 verses).

Changes of terms or divergences in the mode of expression are extremely frequent. Thus, Matthew often uses *eutheos*, when Mark has *euthus*; men . . . de, instead of *kai*, as in Mark, etc.; the aorist instead of the imperfect employed by Mark. He avoids double negatives and the construction of the participle with *eimi*; his style is more correct and less harsh than that of Mark; he resolves Mark’s compound verbs, and replaces by terms in current use the rather unusual expressions introduced by Mark, etc.

He is free from the lack of precision which, to a slight extent, characterizes Mark. Thus, Matthew says “the tetrarch” and not “the king” as Mark does, in speaking of Herod Antipas; “on the third day” instead of “in three days”. At times the changes are more important. Instead of “Levi, son of Alpheus,” he says: “a man named Matthew”; he mentions two demoniacs and two blind persons, whereas Mark mentions only one of each, etc.

Matthew extenuates or omits everything which, in Mark, might be construed in a sense derogatory to the Person of Christ or unfavourable to the disciples. Thus, in speaking of Jesus, he suppresses the following phrases: “And looking round about on them with anger” (Mark 3:5); “And when his friends had heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him. For they said: He is beside himself” (Mark 3:21), etc. Speaking of the disciples, he does not say, like Mark, that “they understood not the word, and they were afraid to ask him” (ix, 3 1; cf. viii, 17, 18); or that the disciples were in a state of profound amazement, because “they understood not concerning the loaves; for their heart was blinded” (vi, 52), etc. He likewise omits whatever might shock his readers, as the saying of the Lord recorded by Mark: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (ii, 27). Omissions or alterations of this kind are very numerous. It must, however, be remarked that between Matthew and Mark there are many points of resemblance in the construction of sentences (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Matthew 26:47 = Mark 14:43, etc.); in their mode of expression, often unusual. and in short phrases (Matthew 9:16 = Mark 2:21; Matthew 16:28 = Mark 9:1; Matthew 20:25 = Mark 10:42); in some pericopes, narratives, or discourses, where the greater part of the terms are identical (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 26:36-38 = Mark 14:32-34; Matthew 9:5-6 = Mark 2:9-11), etc.

(b) Analogy to Luke

A comparison of Matthew and Luke reveals that they have but one narrative in common, viz., the cure of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13 = Luke 7:1-10). The additional matter common to these Evangelists, consists of the discourses and sayings of Christ. In Matthew His discourses are usually gathered together, whereas in Luke they are more frequently scattered. Nevertheless, Matthew and Luke have in common the following discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, the Sermon in the Plain, Luke 6); the Lord’s exhortation to His disciples whom He sends forth on a mission (Matthew 10:19-20, 26-33 = Luke 12:11-12, 2-9); the discourse on John the Baptist (Matthew 11 = Luke 7); the discourse on the Last Judgment (Matthew 24; Luke 17). Moreover,
these two Evangelists possess in common a large number of detached sentences, e.g., Matthew 3:7b-19:12 = Luke 3:7b-9, 17; Matthew 4:3-11 = Luke 4:3-13; Matthew 9:37-38 = Luke 10:2; Matthew 12:43-45 = Luke 11:24-26 etc. (cf. Rushbrooke, “Synopticon”, pp. 134-70). However, in these parallel passages of Matthew and Luke there are numerous differences of expression, and even some divergences in ideas or in the manner of their presentation. It is only necessary to recall the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12 = Luke 6:20b-25): in Matthew there are eight beatitudes, whereas in Luke there are only four, which, while approximating to Matthew’s In point of conception, differ from them in general form and expression. In addition to having in common parts that Mark has not, Matthew and Luke sometimes agree against Mark in parallel narratives. There have been counted 240 passages wherein Matthew and Luke harmonize with each other, but disagree with Mark in the way of presenting events, and particularly in the use of the same terms and the same grammatical emendations. Matthew and Luke omit the very pericopes that occur in Mark.

(c) Parts peculiar to Matthew

These are numerous, as Matthew has 330 verses that are distinctly his own. Sometimes long passages occur, such as those recording the Nativity and early Childhood (i, ii), the cure of the two blind men and one dumb man (ix, 27-34), the death of Judas (xxvii, 3-10), the guard placed at the Sepulchre (xxvii, 62-66), the imposture of the chief priests (xxviii, 11-15), the apparition of Jesus in Galilee (xxviii, 16-20), a great portion of the Sermon on the Mount (v, 17-37; vi, 1-8; vii, 12-23), parables (xiii, 24-30; 35-53; xxv, 1-13), the Last Judgment (xxv, 31-46), etc., and sometimes detached sentences, as in xxiii, 3, 28, 33; xxvii, 25, etc. (cf. Rushbrooke, “Synopticon”, pp.171-97). Those passages in which Matthew reminds us that facts in the life of Jesus are the fulfilment of the prophecies, are likewise noted as peculiar to him, but of this we have already spoken.

These various considerations have given rise to a great number of hypotheses, varying in detail, but agreeing fundamentally. According to the majority of present critics—H. Holtzmann, Wendt, Jülicher, Wernle, von Soden, Wellhausen, Harnack, B. Weiss, Nicolardot, W. Allen, Montefiore, Plummer, and Stanton—the author of the First Gospel used two documents: the Gospel of Mark in its present or in an earlier form, and a collection of discourses or sayings, which is designated by the letter Q. The repetitions occurring in Matthew (v, 29, 30 = xviii, 8, 9; v, 32 xix, 9; x, 22a = xxiv, 9b; xii, 39b = xvi, 4a, etc.) may be explained by the fact that two sources furnished the writer with material for his Gospel. Furthermore, Matthew used documents of his own. In this hypothesis the Greek Gospel is supposed to be original. and not the translation of a complete Aramaic Gospel. It is admitted that the collection of sayings was originally Aramaic, but it is disputed whether the Evangelist had it in this form or in that of a Greek translation. Critics also differ regarding the manner in which Matthew used the sources. Some would have it that Matthew the Apostle was not the author of the First Gospel, but merely the collector of the sayings of Christ mentioned by Papias. “However”, says Jülicher, “the author’s individuality is so strikingly evident in his style and tendencies that it is impossible to consider the Gospel a mere compilation”. Most critics are of a like opinion. Endeavours have been made to reconcile the information furnished by tradition with the facts resulting from the study of the Gospel as follows: Matthew was known to have collected in Aramaic the sayings of Christ, and, on the other hand, there existed at the beginning of the second century a Gospel containing the narratives found in Mark and the sayings gathered by Matthew in Aramaic. It is held that the Greek Gospel ascribed to
Matthew is a translation of it, made by him or by other translators whose names it was later attempted to ascertain.

To safeguard tradition further, while taking into consideration the facts we have already noted, it might be supposed that the three Synoptists worked upon the same catechesis, either oral or written and originally in Aramaic, and that they had detached portions of this catechesis, varying in literary condition. The divergences may be explained first by this latter fact, and then by the hypothesis of different translations and by each Evangelist’s peculiar method of treating the subject-matter, Matthew and Luke especially having adapted it to the purpose of their Gospel. There is nothing to prevent the supposition that Matthew worked on the Aramaic catechesis; the literary emendations of Mark’s text by Matthew may have been due to the translator, who was more conversant with Greek than was the popular preacher who furnished the catechesis reproduced by Mark. In reality, the only difficulty lies in explaining the similarity of style between Matthew and Mark. First of all, we may observe that the points of resemblance are less numerous than they are said to be. As we have seen, they are very rare in the narratives at all events, much more so than in the discourses of Christ. Why, then, should we not suppose that the three Synoptists, depending upon the same Aramaic catechesis, sometimes agreed in rendering similar Aramaic expressions in the same Greek words? It is also possible to suppose that sayings of Christ, which in the three Synoptic Gospels (or in two of them) differed only in a few expressions, were unified by copyists or other persons. To us it seems probable that Matthew’s Greek translator used Mark’s Greek Gospel, especially for Christ’s discourses. Luke, also, may have similarly utilized Matthew’s Greek Gospel in rendering the discourses of Christ. Finally, even though we should suppose that Matthew were the author only of the Logia, the full scope of which we do not know, and that a part of his Greek Gospel is derived from that of Mark, we would still have a right to ascribe this First Gospel to Matthew as its principal author.

Other hypotheses have been put forth. In Zahn’s opinion, Matthew wrote a complete Gospel in Aramaic; Mark was familiar with this document, which he used while abridging it. Matthew’s Greek translator utilized Mark, but only for form, whereas Luke depended upon Mark and secondary sources, but was not acquainted with Matthew. According to Belser, Matthew first wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, a Greek translation of it being made in 59-60, and Mark depended on Matthew’s Aramaic document and Peter’s preaching. Luke made use of Mark, of Matthew (both in Aramaic and Greek), and also of oral tradition. According to Camerlynck and Coppieters, the First Gospel in its present form was composed either by Matthew or some other Apostolic writer long before the end of the first century, by combining the Aramaic work of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

**Plan and contents of the First Gospel**

The author did not wish to compose a biography of Christ, but to demonstrate, by recording His words and the deeds of His life, that He was the Messias, the Head and Founder of the Kingdom of God, and the promulgator of its laws. One can scarcely fail to recognize that, except in a few parts (e.g. the Childhood and the Passion), the arrangement of events and of discourses is artificial. Matthew usually combines facts and precepts of a like nature. Whatever the reason, he favours groups of three (thirty-eight of which may be counted)—three divisions in the genealogy of Jesus (i, 17), three temptations (iv, 1-11), three examples of justice (vi, 1-18), three cures (viii, 1-15), three parables of the seed (xiii, 1-32), three denials of Peter (xxvi, 69-75), etc.; of five (these are less numerous)—five long discourses (v-vii, 27; x; xiii, 1-52; xviii; xxiv-xxv), ending with the same
formula (Kai egeneto, ote etelese fan lesous), five examples of the fulfilment of the law (v, 21-48), etc.; and of seven—seven parables (xiii), seven maledictions (xxiii), seven brethren (xxii, 25), etc. The First Gospel can be very naturally divided as follows:-

Introduction (1-2)

The genealogy of Jesus, the prediction of His Birth, the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, the Massacre of the Innocents, the return to Nazareth, and the life there.

The public ministry of Jesus (3-25)

This may be divided into three parts, according to the place where He exercised it.

In Galilee (3-18)

(a) Preparation for the public ministry of Jesus (3:1 to 4:11)

John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, the Temptation, the return to Galilee.

(b) The preaching of the Kingdom of God (4:17 to 18:35)

(1) the preparation of the Kingdom by the preaching of penance, the call of the disciples, and numerous cures (iv, 17-25), the promulgation of the code of the Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount (v, i-vii, 29);

(2) the propagation of the Kingdom in Galilee (viii, i-xviii, 35). He groups together:

- the deeds by which Jesus established that He was the Messias and the King of the Kingdom: various cures, the calming of the tempest, missionary journeys through the land, the calling of the Twelve Apostles, the principles that should guide them in their missionary travels (viii, 1-x, 42);

- various teachings of Jesus called forth by circumstances: John’s message and the Lord’s answer, Christ’s confutation of the false charges of the Pharisees, the departure and return of the unclean spirit (xi, 1-xii, 50);

- finally, the parables of the Kingdom, of which Jesus makes known and explains the end (xiii, 3-52).

(3) Matthew then relates the different events that terminate the preaching in Galilee: Christ’s visit to Nazareth (xiii, 53-58), the multiplication of the loaves, the walking on the lake, discussions with the Pharisees concerning legal purifications, the confession of Peter at Cæsarea, the Transfiguration of Jesus, prophecy regarding the Passion and Resurrection, and teachings on scandal, fraternal correction, and the forgiveness of injuries (xiv, 1-xviii, 35).
Outside Galilee or the way to Jerusalem (19-20)

Jesus leaves Galilee and goes beyond the Jordan; He discusses divorce with the Pharisees; answers the rich young man, and teaches self-denial and the danger of wealth; explains by the parable of the labourers how the elect will be called; replies to the indiscreet question of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and cures two blind men of Jericho.

In Jerusalem (21-25)

Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem; He curses the barren fig tree and enters into a dispute with the chief priests and the Pharisees who ask Him by what authority He has banished the sellers from the Temple, and answers them by the parables of the two sons, the murderous husbandmen, and the marriage of the king’s son. New questions are put to Jesus concerning the tribute, the resurrection of the dead, and the greatest commandment. Jesus anathematizes the scribes and Pharisees and foretells the events that will precede and accompany the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus (26-28)

The Passion (26-27)

Events are now hurrying to a close. The Sanhedrin plots for the death of Jesus, a woman anoints the feet of the Lord, and Judas betrays his Master. Jesus eats the pasch with His disciples and institutes the Eucharist. In the Garden of Olives, He enters upon His agony and offers up the sacrifice of His life. He is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Peter denies Christ; Judas hangs himself. Jesus is condemned to death by Pilate and crucified; He is buried, and a guard is placed at the Sepulchre (xxvi, 1-xxvii, 66).

The Resurrection (28)

Jesus rises the third day and appears first to the holy women at Jerusalem, then in Galilee to His disciples, whom He sends forth to propagate throughout the world the Kingdom of God.

Object and doctrinal teaching of the First Gospel

Immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, Peter preached that Jesus, crucified and risen, was the Messias, the Saviour of the World, and proved this assertion by relating the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord. This was the first Apostolic teaching, and was repeated by the other preachers of the Gospel, of whom tradition tells us that Matthew was one. This Evangelist proclaimed the Gospel to the Hebrews and, before his departure from Jerusalem, wrote in his mother tongue the Gospel that he had preached. Hence the aim of the Evangelist was primarily apologetic. He wished to demonstrate to his readers, whether these were converts or
still unbelieving Jews, that in Jesus the ancient prophecies had been realized in their entirety. This thesis includes three principal ideas:

- Jesus is the Messias, and the kingdom He inaugurates is the Messianic kingdom foretold by the prophets;
- because of their sins, the Jews, as a nation, shall have no part in this kingdom
- the Gospel will be announced to all nations, and all are called to salvation.

**Jesus as Messias**

St. Matthew has shown that in Jesus all the ancient prophesies on the Messias were fulfilled. He was the Emmanuel, born of a Virgin Mother (1:22-23), announced by Isaias (7:14); He was born at Bethlehem (ii, 6), as had been predicted by Micheas (v, 2), He went to Egypt and was recalled thence (ii, 15) as foretold by Osee (11:1). According to the prediction of Isaias (40:3), He was heralded by a precursor, John the Baptist (iii, 1 sqq.); He cured all the sick (viii, 16 so.), that the Prophecy of Isaias (53:4) might be fulfilled; and in all His actions He was indeed the same of whom this prophet had spoken (xiii, 1). His teaching in parables (13:3) was conformable to what Isaias had said (6:9). Finally, He suffered, and the entire drama of His Passion and Death was a fulfilment of the prophecies of Scripture (Isaiah 53:3-12; Psalm 21:13-22). Jesus proclaimed Himself the Messias by His approbation of Peter’s confession (16:16-17) and by His answer to the high priest (26:63-64). St. Matthew also endeavours to show that the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ is the Messianic Kingdom. From the beginning of His public life, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (4:17); in the Sermon on the Mount He promulgates the charter of this kingdom, and in parables He speaks of its nature and conditions. In His answer to the envoys of John the Baptist Jesus specifically declares that the Messianic Kingdom, foretold by the Prophets, has come to pass, and He describes its characteristics: “The blind see, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them.” It was in these terms, that Isaias had described the future kingdom (35:5-6). St. Matthew records a very formal expression of the Lord concerning the coming of the Kingdom: “But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you” (xii, 28). Moreover, Jesus could call Himself the Messias only inasmuch as the Kingdom of God had come.

**Exclusion of Jews from messianic kingdom**

The Jews as a nation were rejected because of their sins, and were to have no part in the Kingdom of Heaven. This rejection had been several times predicted by the prophets, and St. Matthew shows that it was because of its incredulity that Israel was excluded from the Kingdom, he dwells on all the events in which the increasing obduracy of the Jewish nation is conspicuous, manifested first in the princes and then in the hatred of the people who beseech Pilate to put Jesus to death. Thus the Jewish nation itself was accountable for its exclusion from the Messianic kingdom.
Universal proclamation of the Gospel

That the pagans were called to salvation instead of the Jews, Jesus declared explicitly to the unbelieving Israelites: “Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof” (xxi, 43); “He that soweth the good seed, is the Son of man. And the field is the world” (xiii, 37-38). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come” (xxiv, 14). Finally, appearing to His Apostles in Galilee, Jesus gives them this supreme command: “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, teach ye all nations” (xxviii, 18, 19). These last words of Christ are the summary of the First Gospel. Efforts have been made to maintain that these words of Jesus, commanding that all nations be evangelized, were not authentic, but in a subsequent paragraph we shall prove that all the Lord’s sayings, recorded in the First Gospel, proceed from the teaching of Jesus.

Destination of the Gospel

The ecclesiastical writers Papias, St. Irenæus, Origen, Eusebius, and St. Jerome, whose testimony has been given above (II, A), agree in declaring that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews. Everything in this Gospel proves, that the writer addresses himself to Jewish readers. He does not explain Jewish customs and usages to them, as do the other Evangelists for their Greek and Latin readers, and he assumes that they are acquainted with Palestine, since, unlike St. Luke he mentions places without giving any indication of their topographical position. It is true that the Hebrew words, Emmanuel, Golgotha, Eloi, are translated, but it is likely that these translations were inserted when the Aramaic text was reproduced in Greek. St. Matthew chronicles those discourses of Christ that would interest the Jews and leave a favourable impression upon them. The law is not to be destroyed, but fulfilled (v, 17). He emphasizes more strongly than either St. Mark or St. Luke the false interpretations of the law given by the scribes and Pharisees, the hypocrisy and even the vices of the latter, all of which could be of interest to Jewish readers only. According to certain critics, St. Irenæus (Fragment xxix) said that Matthew wrote to convert the Jews by proving to them that Christ was the Son of David. This interpretation is badly founded. Moreover, Origen (In Matt., i) categorically asserts that this Gospel was published for Jews converted to the Faith. Eusebius (Church History III.24) is also explicit on this point, and St. Jerome, summarizing tradition, teaches us that St. Matthew published his Gospel in Judea and in the Hebrew language, principally for those among the Jews who believed in Jesus, and did not observe even the shadow of the Law, the truth of the Gospel having replaced it (In Matt. Prol.). Subsequent ecclesiastical writers and Catholic exegetes have taught that St. Matthew wrote for the converted Jews. “However,” says Zahn (Introd. to the New Testament, II, 562), “the apologetical and polemical character of the book, as well as the choice of language, make it extremely probable that Matthew wished his book to be read primarily by the Jews who were not yet Christians. It was suited to Jewish Christians who were still exposed to Jewish influence, and also to Jews who still resisted the Gospel”.

The Gospel of St. Mathew

Alpha Institute
BTh Course Study Material
Date and place of composition

Ancient ecclesiastical writers are at variance as to the date of the composition of the First Gospel. Eusebius (in his Chronicle), Theophylact, and Euthymius Zigabenus are of opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was written eighty years, and Nicephorus Callistus fifteen years, after Christ’s Ascension—i.e. about A.D. 38-45. According to Eusebius, Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew when he left Palestine. Now, following a certain tradition (admittedly not too reliable), the Apostles separated twelve years after the Ascension, hence the Gospel would have been written about the year 40-42, but following Eusebius (Church History III.5.2), it is possible to fix the definitive departure of the Apostles about the year 60, in which event the writing of the Gospel would have taken place about the year 60-68. St Irenæus is somewhat more exact concerning the date of the First Gospel, as he says: “Matthew produced his Gospel when Peter and Paul were evangelizing and founding the Church of Rome, consequently about the years 64-67.” However, this text presents difficulties of interpretation which render its meaning uncertain and prevent us from deducing any positive conclusion.

In our day opinion is rather divided. Catholic critics, in general, favour the years 40-45, although some (e.g. Patrizi) go back to 36-39 or (e.g. Aberle) to 37. Belser assigns 41-42; Conély, 40-50; Schafer, 50-51; Hug, Reuschl, Schanz, and Rose, 60-67. This last opinion is founded on the combined testimonies of St. Irenæus and Eusebius, and on the remark inserted parenthetically in the discourse of Jesus in chapter xxiv, 15: “When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place”: here the author interrupts the sentence and invites the reader to take heed of what follows, viz.: “Then they that are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains.” As there would have been no occasion for a like warning had the destruction of Jerusalem already taken place, Matthew must have written his Gospel before the year 70 (about 65-70 according to Batiffol). Protestant and Liberalistic critics also are greatly at variance as regards the time of the composition of the First Gospel. Zahn sets the date about 61-66, and Godet about 60-66; Keim, Meyer, Holtzmann (in his earlier writings), Beyschlag, and Maclean, before 70, Bartiet about 68-69; W. Allen and Plummer, about 65-75; Hilgenfeld and Holtzmann (in his later writings), soon after 70; B. Weiss and Harnack, about 70-75; Renan, later than 85, Réville, between 69 and 96, Jülicher, in 81-96, Montefiore, about 90-100, Volkmar, in 110; Baur, about 130-34. The following are some of the arguments advanced to prove that the First Gospel was written several years after the Fall of Jerusalem. When Jesus prophesies to His Apostles that they will be delivered up to the councils, scourged in the synagogues, brought before governors and kings for His sake; that they will give testimony of Him, will for Him be hated and driven from city to city (x, 17-23) and when He commissions them to teach all nations and make them His disciples, His words intimate, it is claimed, the lapse of many years, the establishment of the Christian Church in distant parts, and its cruel persecution by the Jews and even by Roman emperors and governors. Moreover, certain sayings of the Lord—such as: “Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church” (16:18), “If he [thy brother] will not hear them: tell the Church” (xviii, 10)—carry us to a time when the Christian Church was already constituted, a time that could not have been much earlier than the year 100. The fact is, that what was predicted by
Our Lord, when He announced future events and established the charter and foundations of His Church, is converted into reality and made coexistent with the writing of the First Gospel. Hence, to give these arguments a probatory value it would be necessary either to deny Christ’s knowledge of the future or to maintain that the teachings embodied in the First Gospel were not authentic.

**Historic value of the First Gospel Of the narratives**

Apart from the narratives of the Childhood of Jesus, the cure of the two blind men, the tribute money, and a few incidents connected with the Passion and Resurrection, all the others recorded by St. Matthew are found in both the other Synoptists, with one exception (viii, 5-13) which occurs only in St. Luke. Critics agree in declaring that, regarded as a whole, the events of the life of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels are historic. For us, these facts are historic even in detail, our criterion of truth being the same for the aggregate and the details. The Gospel of St. Mark is acknowledged to be of great historic value because it reproduces the preaching of St. Peter. But, for almost all the events of the Gospel, the information given by St. Mark is found in St. Matthew, while such as are peculiar to the latter are of the same nature as events recorded by St. Mark, and resemble them so closely that it is hard to understand why they should not be historic, since they also are derived from the primitive catechesis. It may be further observed that the narratives of St. Matthew are never contradictory to the events made known to us by profane documents, and that they give a very accurate account of the moral and religious ideas, the manners and customs of the Jewish people of that time. In his recent work, “The Synoptic Gospels” (London, 1909), Montefiore, a Jewish critic, does full justice to St. Matthew on these different points. Finally all the objections that could possibly have been raised against their veracity vanish, if we but keep in mind the standpoint of the author, and what he wished to demonstrate. The comments we are about to make concerning the Lord’s utterances are also applicable to the Gospel narratives. For a demonstration of the historic value of the narratives of the Holy Childhood, we recommend Father Durand’s scholarly work, “L’enfance de Jésus-Christ d’après les évangiles canoniques” (Paris, 1907).

**Of the discourses**

The greater part of Christ’s short sayings are found in the three Synoptic Gospels and consequently spring from the early catechesis. His long discourses, recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke, also formed part of an authentic catechesis, and critics in general are agreed in acknowledging their historic value. There are, however some who maintain that the Evangelist modified his documents to adapt them to the faith professed in Christian communities at the time when he wrote his Gospel. They also claim that, even prior to the composition of the Gospels, Christian faith had altered Apostolic reminiscences. Let us first of all observe that these objections would have no weight whatever, unless we were to concede that the First Gospel was not written by St. Matthew. And even assuming the same point of view as our adversaries, who think that our Synoptic Gospels depend upon anterior sources, we maintain that these changes, whether attributable to the Evangelists or to their sources (i.e. the faith of the early Christians), could not have been effected.
The alterations claimed to have been introduced into Christ’s teachings could not have been made by the Evangelists themselves. We know that the latter selected their subject-matter and disposed of it each in his own way, and with a special end in view, but this matter was the same for all three, at least for the whole contents of the pericopes, and was taken from the original catechesis, which was already sufficiently well established not to admit of the introduction into it of new ideas and unknown facts. Again, all the doctrines which are claimed to be foreign to the teachings of Jesus are found in the three Synoptists, and are so much a part of the very framework of each Gospel that their removal would mean the destruction of the order of the narrative. Under these conditions, that there might be a substantial change in the doctrines taught by Christ, it would be necessary to suppose a previous understanding among the three Evangelists, which seems to us impossible, as Matthew and Luke at least appear to have worked independently of each other and it is in their Gospels that Christ’s longest discourses are found. These doctrines, which were already embodied in the sources used by the three Synoptists, could not have resulted from the deliberations and opinions of the earliest Christians. First of all, between the death of Christ and the initial drawing up of the oral catechesis, there was not sufficient time for originating, and subsequently enjoining upon the Christian conscience, ideas diametrically opposed to those said to have been exclusively taught by Jesus Christ. For example, let us take the doctrines claimed, above all others, to have been altered by the belief of the first Christians, namely that Jesus Christ had called all nations to salvation. It is said that the Lord restricted His mission to Israel, and that all those texts wherein He teaches that the Gospel should be preached throughout the entire world originated with the early Christians and especially with Paul. Now, in the first place, these universalist doctrines could not have sprung up among the Apostles. They and the primitive Christians were Jews of poorly developed intelligence, of very narrow outlook, and were moreover imbued with particularist ideas. From the Gospels and Acts it is easy to see that these men were totally unacquainted with universalist ideas, which had to be urged upon them, and which, even then, they were slow to accept. Moreover, how could this first Christian generation, who, we are told, believed that Christ’s Second Coming was close at hand, have originated these passages proclaiming that before this event took place the Gospel should be preached to all nations? These doctrines do not emanate from St. Paul and his disciples. Long before St. Paul could have exercised any influence whatever over the Christian conscience, the Evangelical sources containing these precepts had already been composed. The Apostle of the Gentiles was the special propagator of these doctrines, but he was not their creator. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he understood that the ancient prophecies had been realized in the Person of Jesus and that the doctrines taught by Christ were identical with those revealed by the Scriptures.

Finally, by considering as a whole the ideas constituting the basis of the earliest Christian writings, we ascertain that these doctrines, taught by the prophets, and accentuated by the life and words of Christ, form the framework of the Gospels and the basis of Pauline preaching. They are, as it were, a kind of fasces which it would be impossible to unbind, and into which no new idea could be inserted without destroying its strength and unity. In the prophecies, the Gospels the Pauline Epistles, and the first Christian writings an intimate correlation joins all together, Jesus Christ Himself being the centre and the common bond. What one has said of Him, the others reiterate,
and never do we hear an isolated or a discordant voice. If Jesus taught doctrines contrary or foreign to those which the Evangelists placed upon His lips, then He becomes an inexplicable phenomenon, because, in the matter of ideas, He is in contradiction to the society in which He moved, and must be ranked with the least intelligent sections among the Jewish people. We are justified, therefore, in concluding that the discourses of Christ, recorded in the First Gospel and reproducing the Apostolic catechesis, are authentic. We may however, again observe that, his aim being chiefly apologetic, Matthew selected and presented the events of Christ’s life and also these discourses in a way that would lead up to the conclusive proof which he wished to give of the Messiahship of Jesus. Still the Evangelist neither substantially altered the original catechesis nor invented doctrines foreign to the teaching of Jesus. His action bore upon details or form, but not upon the basis of words and deeds.

Appendix: decisions of the Biblical Commission

The following answers have been given by the Biblical Commission to inquiries about the Gospel of St. Matthew: In view of the universal and constant agreement of the Church, as shown by the testimony of the Fathers, the inscription of Gospel codices, most ancient versions of the Sacred Books and lists handed down by the Holy Fathers, ecclesiastical writers, popes and councils, and finally by liturgical usage in the Eastern and Western Church, it may and should be held that Matthew, an Apostle of Christ, is really the author of the Gospel that goes by his name. The belief that Matthew preceded the other Evangelists in writing, and that the first Gospel was written in the native language of the Jews then in Palestine, is to be considered as based on Tradition.

The preparation of this original text was not deferred until after the destruction of Jerusalem, so that the prophecies it contains about this might be written after the event; nor is the alleged uncertain and much disputed testimony of Irenaeus convincing enough to do away with the opinion most conformed to Tradition, that their preparation was finished even before the coming of Paul to Rome. The opinion of certain Modernists is untenable, viz., that Matthew did not in a proper and strict sense compose the Gospel, as it has come down to us, but only a collection of some words and sayings of Christ, which, according to them, another anonymous author used as sources.

The fact that the Fathers and all ecclesiastical writers, and even the Church itself from the very beginning, have used as canonical the Greek text of the Gospel known as St. Matthew’s, not even excepting those who have expressly handed down that the Apostle Matthew wrote in his native tongue, proves for certain that this very Greek Gospel is identical in substance with the Gospel written by the same Apostle in his native language. Although the author of the first Gospel has the dogmatic and apologetic purpose of proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Messias foretold by the prophets and born of the house of David, and although he is not always chronological in arranging the facts or sayings which he records, his narration is not to be regarded as lacking truth. Nor can it be said that his accounts of the deeds and utterances of Christ have been altered and adapted by the influence of the prophecies of the Old Testament and the conditions of the growing Church, and that they do not therefore conform to historical truth. Notably unfounded
are the opinions of those who cast doubt on the historical value of the first two chapters, treating of the genealogy and infancy of Christ, or on certain passages of much weight for certain dogmas, such as those which concern the primacy of Peter (xvi, 17-19), the form of baptism given to the Apostles with their universal missions (xxviii, 19-20), the Apostles’ profession of faith in Christ (xiv, 33), and others of this character specially emphasized by Matthew.