

“GOSPEL ORIGINS”: A REPLY TO J. W. WENHAM

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In the Fall, 1978 fascicle of the *Trinity Journal* (old series 7 [1978] 112-134), J. W. Wenham published an article in which he gave a refreshing new review of the evidence regarding the origins of the gospels. It will be helpful at the outset to reproduce Wenham's own summary of his conclusions:

Put crudely, my belief is that Acts was written by Luke in Rome at the time where its story ends, about AD 62. (See Chronological Table). Luke's gospel was written in Greece in the early fifties. Luke used both Mark and the Greek Matthew. Mark was written in Rome about AD 44 and is based on Peter's oral teaching. The gospel as a literary form was invented by Matthew, whose gospel appeared first in Aramaic or Hebrew. It may well have been composed during the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom when the apostles stayed together in Jerusalem, and it was probably published with their collective approval. It was translated into Greek following the successful publication of Mark, and the translator used Marcan turns of phrase when it served his purpose.

Furthermore, I believe that Luke was a Hellenistic Jew and is to be identified with Lucius of Cyrene, church leader at Antioch and kinsman of Paul. I think that Luke was brought up in Cyrenaica in North Africa; did his medical training at Tarsus and practiced in Judaea; was one of the seventy; was the unnamed disciple of the Emmaus road; and was one of the band of Cypriots and Cyrenians who first evangelized the Gentiles. He certainly worked at Antioch with Paul and became his travel companion.

Mark's father, I believe, also came from Cyrene. He was cousin to Simon Peter's wife, and he possibly owned the garden of Gethsemane. Mark was closely associated with Peter, at least from the time when he ran away naked at Jesus' arrest [Mk 14:51, 52]. It was to his home that Peter first escaped in AD 42. Peter then went on to Rome, and Mark assisted him in the work there.

The fourth gospel was written in Ephesus in the early sixties by John the apostle, Jesus' cousin and closest friend. John extracted from his own oral teaching matter which supplemented the other three.

I believe that Matthew, Luke and John made first-hand records of Jesus' words and deeds, which they later incorporated in their gospels.

Wenham admits that he holds these views with differing degrees of certainty and, noting that this reconstruction represents only an "interim account," invites criticism. In accepting Wenham's invitation, I write as one who is extremely grateful for the contribution he has made and with considerably less expertise than he has gained in the course of his long research and meditations.

Wenham begins with the external evidence relating to the authorship and date of the first gospel. This starting point reflects Wenham's generally high regard for the testimony of the early church fathers, a point of view which would appear to be more appropriate than the almost total scepticism with which this testimony is treated in some quarters.

The external evidence concerning the origin of Matthew's gospel finds its most important witness in the statement of Papias (c. A.D. 135) as quoted by Eusebius. "Matthew compiled the 'Sayings,' (*logia*) in the Aramaic language, and everyone translated (*hermeneuo*) them as well as he could."¹ Few, if any, extra-canonical Christian texts have been subjected to more scrutiny than this brief statement. Foregoing an extensive investigation, which would, by itself, occupy the space reserved for the entire article, the following points can, with some confidence, be made. First, despite the difficulties to be noted, it is overwhelmingly probable, on the basis of the available evidence, that Papias meant to refer, and Eusebius understood him to be referring, to a gospel.² The word *logia* is used in this sense in the immediate context of Papias' treatise and those early Christian leaders who seem to refer back to Papias so understood it.³ Secondly, *Hebraica dialectos* most naturally describes the language (either Hebrew or Aramaic) in which the *logia* were composed. The suggestion that the phrase could refer to the *style* of composition, while attractive, is unlikely.⁴ Thirdly, in view of the explicit allusion to language in the context, it is more likely that *hermeneuo* means "translate," rather than "interpret."⁵ On this interpretation, then, Papias asserts the Matthean authorship of a gospel, composed in (probably) Aramaic and translated by a number of others.

Before pursuing the linguistic problem raised by this conclusion, it would be well to summarize the remainder of the patristic attestation. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* III.1.1) repeats the claim that Matthew wrote a gospel "among the Hebrews . . . in their own dialect." Clement of Alexandria (cf. *H.E.* VI.14.5) asserts that the gospels with genealogies were composed first and Origen (*H.E.* VI.25.4) explicitly claims that the first gospel was written by Matthew, the tax-

¹*Historia Ecclesiastica* (hereafter *HE*) III.39-16. Translations are from Eusebius: *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, ed. G. A. Williamson (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1965).

²See especially Paul Nepper-Christensen, *Das Matthäusevangelium: Ein judenchristliches Evangelium?* Theologica Danica I (Århus: Universitats, 1958) 38-43; C. Steward Petrie, "The Authorship of 'The Gospel According to Matthew': A Reconsideration of the External Evidence," *NTS* 14 (1967-1968) 31. The view that a collection of Jesus' sayings, perhaps "Q," is what Papias refers to remains popular also (Ernest L. Abel, "Who wrote Matthew?" *NTS* 17 [1970-1971] 139; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB [London: Oliphants, 1972] 23-27).

³As Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* III.1.9); Eusebius (*HE* III.24).

⁴For this view, cf. J. Kürzinger, "Iranäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums," *NTS* 10 (1963-1964) 109-113.

⁵Petrie, "Authorship," 29-30.

collector, and appeared in “the Hebrew language.” It is sometimes asserted that these latter traditions are merely repetitions of Papias’ belief and, therefore, of no independent value, but such slavish dependence is unlikely because (a) details not mentioned by Papias are added and (b) the unchallenged tradition that the first gospel was composed in a Semitic language is unlikely in view of its complete replacement by the gospel *in Greek*, unless the tradition was particularly strong and/or reliable. Thus, although Papias never identifies Matthew as the author (or translator) of the Greek gospel, this was the universally held position from the earliest period.

This clear and unanimous tradition concerning the origin of the first gospel would be of unequivocal importance were it not for the language question. We possess no copy of the first gospel in any language other than Greek, nor is it generally thought that the first gospel could be a translation from a Semitic original.⁶ In the face of this difficulty, some have chosen to reject the tradition entirely,⁷ others to accept only the evidence with respect to authorship.⁸ But before rejecting a part or the whole of the tradition, it would be better to seek an explanation for it. The language difficulty has been eased by attributing to Matthew some source for the first, or all the gospels, but this expedient is unable to explain the later fathers’ insistence on linking Matthew with the canonical Greek gospel.⁹ The solution which is best able to explain most of the evidence is the “two edition” theory which holds that Matthew, previous to his Greek publication, had written a Semitic version of the gospel.¹⁰ A similar process finds parallels in the production of other ancient works.¹¹ That Matthew’s Greek is not “translation Greek” is a problem only if one thinks of a *literal* translation process—does the New English Bible show evident linguistic signs of the languages from which it is translated? This “two stage” theory is essentially the conclusion to which Wenham also comes.

I am less inclined to agree with Wenham on the dating of these two editions. He finds a probable provenance for the Semitic edition in the time of the dispersal of Jewish Christians from Palestine in the years 33-42, while the Greek

⁶Nigel Turner says, “Matthew’s Greek is assuredly not a translation, in spite of its Semitic idiom, for its style is too smooth . . .” (*Style*, vol. 4 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by James Hope Moulton [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976] 37).

⁷Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1975) 120-21.

⁸Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels: Some Basic Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [=1963]) 78-92.

⁹Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1977 [reprint]) 2.516.

¹⁰Others who maintain a “two edition” theory of some sort: Brooke Foss Westcott, *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (8th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1895) 188-89; Zahn, *Introduction* 2.516-17; Dom John Chapman, *Matthew, Mark and Luke: A Study in the Order and Interrelation of the Synoptic Gospels*, ed. John M. T. Barton (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937) 90-92; X. Léon-Dufour, “The Synoptic Problem,” in *Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. A. Robert and A. Feuillet (New York: Desclee, 1965) 283; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 177 (possibly); D. Edmund Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Vol. 1: *The Gospels and Acts* (Chicago: Moody, 1975) 54-55; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 97.

¹¹Josephus is said to have published his *Jewish War* first in Aramaic, then in Greek.

espoused by others before him¹⁵) that Peter went to Rome at this early date is based on a tradition that Peter was a founder and “overseer” (*episkopos*) of the Roman Church for twenty-five years and on the identification of the “other place” to which Peter fled (Acts 12:17) as Rome. As to the latter point, I am not persuaded by Wenham’s reasons for thinking that Luke makes a veiled reference to Rome with this phrase. Luke’s language is too indefinite to justify this as an even probable conclusion.¹⁶ Even weaker is the support derived from the twenty-five episcopate tradition preserved in the *Liber Pontificalis*. This tradition cannot be traced back earlier than the mid-fourth century and grave doubts about its reliability are raised by its statements.¹⁷ After a thorough sifting of the evidence relating to this tradition, O’Connor concludes: “It is certain that the proposal concerning the supposed twenty-five-year episcopate of Peter was born in the imagination or developed out of genuine confusion.”¹⁸

Still, it must be asked, is it *possible* that Peter visited Rome this early—hence allowing an early 40’s date for Mark? It seems difficult to exclude such a possibility. We know that Peter was in Antioch at some time before (probably) A.D. 49 (Gal 2:11-21), in Jerusalem in A.D. 49-50 (Acts 15), perhaps in Corinth before A.D. 55,¹⁹ *certainly not* in Rome in A.D. 57,²⁰ almost certainly in Rome in the early 60’s.²¹ Other than this, it can reasonably be inferred that Peter engaged in missionary activity among Jews from A.D. 42 on²² and that he was martyred after a ministry in Rome.²³ Cullmann’s dismissal of the possibility that Peter was in Rome *before* the date of Romans is unfounded; he himself admits the likelihood that Peter would have visited Rome in his capacity of “overseer” of the Jewish mission.²⁴ Thus, while

¹⁵J. W. Wenham, “Did Peter go to Rome in A.D. 42?” *TynB* 23 (1972) 94-102; see also the literature cited by Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* 112-14).

¹⁶Since it is known that Peter was in Antioch before (probably) A.D. 49 (Gal 2:11ff), this city is often suggested. Oscar Cullmann (*Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* [2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962] 39-42) argues that the reference indicates Peter’s movement into the missionary enterprise outside Palestine.

¹⁷The document contradicts itself by stating that Peter first came to Rome in Nero’s reign (A.D. 54-68). It also is manifestly in error in claiming that Peter and Paul were co-founders of the church in Rome (Daniel Wm. O’Connor, *Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical and Archaeological Evidence* [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969] 33-34). The sixth century *Liber Pontificalis* is based on the 4th century *Catalogus Liberianus* for the information about Peter (Cullmann, *Peter* 123).

¹⁸*Peter in Rome* 50. He concludes that it is almost certain that Peter visited Rome, but that one cannot determine when (50).

¹⁹While the existence of a “Cephas party” at Corinth (1 Cor 1:12) may indicate a visit of Peter to Corinth before that epistle was written, it does not demand it—Jewish Christians could have appealed to Peter as their “spiritual father” whether he had visited Corinth or not (Cullmann, *Peter* 56).

²⁰It is inconceivable that Paul would have omitted Peter from his extensive list of greetings in Romans 16 had the latter been in Rome at that time.

²¹This is the most likely date for 1 Peter, in which Peter sends greetings from “Babylon”—almost certainly a cryptogram for Rome.

²²See the discussion in Cullmann, *Peter* 41-57.

²³Cullmann, *Peter* 91-157.

²⁴*Peter* 80-81.

edition is dated between 42-52, when the mission in the dispersion necessitated such a tool. But little evidence in support of these dates is adduced, and Wenham is forced to go against the only relevant external evidence, which dates the Semitic Matthew to the time "when Peter and Paul in Rome were preaching the gospel and founded the church" (Irenaeus, quoted in *H.E.* V.8.2.). While, as Wenham points out, there is reason to distrust this testimony (it is unlikely that Paul was involved in the establishing of the church in Rome), the rejection of the late date does not establish the early one. More seriously, Wenham fails to deal with the internal evidence of the gospel itself in establishing his dates. Although admittedly subjective, the appeal to theological tendencies in estimating the dates and provenances of the gospels cannot be entirely excluded. And the peculiar mixture of reverence for Jewish traditions along with blistering criticisms of Judaism and universalistic emphases suggests a date when tensions with the Jewish community were running high. Such a situation is more likely to have existed *after* A.D. 55 or so. Moreover, Matthew's description of situations which he claims are true "to this day" (27:8; 28:15) presumes the passing of some time since the relevant events. On the other hand, it is probable that Matthew is to be dated before A.D. 70—as J. A. T. Robinson convincingly argues, it is the *lack* of reference to the fall of Jerusalem in the gospels which is significant.¹² Thus while endorsing Wenham's general view of the origin of Matthew, I would be inclined to move back his dates at least a decade.

Wenham again begins with external evidence in his discussion of the origins of Mark's gospel. After setting forth the early (Papias) and widespread (Asia Minor, Gaul, Alexandria) evidence for a connection between Mark and Peter, he concludes, rightly I believe, that the tradition must be regarded as reliable.¹³ Although giving some attention to the tradition which associates Mark with Alexandria, he follows the majority of early fathers in seeing the second gospel as a Roman work.¹⁴ In establishing the date of the gospel, Wenham engages in what would seem to be a more problematic reconstruction. Briefly, he argues that Peter, after his escape from a Jerusalem jail in A.D. 42, made a trip to Rome where he came into contact with Mark. After Peter left Rome, perhaps in 44, Mark wrote his gospel.

Wenham's suggestion (given greater elaboration in an earlier article and

¹²*Redating the New Testament* 13-30. See also Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "Die Stadt der Mörder (Matt 22:7)," *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche* (für J. Jeremias), ed. Walther Eltester, BZNT 26 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964) 108-126; B. Reicke, "Synoptic Prophecies on the Destruction of Jerusalem," *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren*, ed. D. W. Aune, NovT Supp 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 121-34.

¹³For a good review of the evidence, see H. E. W. Turner, "The Tradition of Mark's Dependence upon Peter," *ExpTim* 71 (1959-1960) 260-63.

¹⁴First explicitly stated by Clement (cf. *HE* II.15.1). The Anti-Marcionite prologue asserts that the gospel was composed in "the regions of Italy." A recently discussed document, alluded to by Wenham, may provide evidence that Clement thought Mark was written in Alexandria (cf. Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* [New York: Harper & Row, 1973] esp. 14-15). But the genuineness of the document is not yet established.

evidence of a visit of Peter to Rome in the early 40's is lacking, there is no basis to deny the *possibility* of such a visit.

Having said this, however, several substantial objections to such an early date for Mark remain. First, an early and persistent tradition holds that Mark wrote only after Peter's death.²⁵ While, to be sure, an almost equally strong tradition maintains that Mark's gospel was written *before* Peter's death,²⁶ it is easier to explain the contrary belief if Mark wrote later rather than earlier in Peter's life. Secondly, there is some doubt as to whether *Mark* was likely to have been in Rome at such an early date. The impression given by Acts is that Mark was attached to the Antiochene arm of the early missionary enterprise, along with Barnabas and Paul. And would Mark have occupied the subordinate role implied in the narrative of Acts 13:6-13 and 15:36-39, if he had already had experience in Rome?²⁷ Thirdly, it is argued by a number of Marcan scholars that the theme of "suffering discipleship" found in that gospel strongly favors a date after the outbreak of the Neronian persecutions in A.D. 64.²⁸ Finally, there is some point in the argument that the writing of Mark should be attributed to the time when we *know* that Peter and Mark were in Rome together—the early or middle 60's (cf. 1 Pet 5:13).

While none of these objections is absolutely decisive, their combined weight leads me to question the probability of a date for Mark in the early 40's.²⁹ Whether it should, therefore, be dated in the middle 60's (with most Marcan scholars) or in the middle 50's (when a plausible case can be made for a visit of Peter to Rome³⁰) is a question that cannot be answered until other matters are considered.

Wenham develops an extensive and fascinating case for viewing Luke as a Jewish disciple and eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus who wrote his gospel before c. A.D. 55. Since the early (pre-fourth century) external evidence relating to the third gospel states clearly that Luke was *not* a follower of the

²⁵The Anti-Marcionite Prologue (c. 160?); Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.1.2; *HE* V.8.2 (*exodus* in the latter two sources almost certainly denotes "death" [Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1966) 4-5]; Zahn, *Introduction* 2.398).

²⁶Clement, quoted in *HE* VI.24; II.15; perhaps also the recently discovered letter of Clement mentioned above. Zahn suggests that the traditions can be reconciled by supposing that Mark wrote down Peter's teaching before he died, but only published it later (*Introduction* 2.432-34).

²⁷The term *huperetēs*, "servant," used of Mark in Acts 13:5, need not indicate a servile role (William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* [NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 22-23), but the subordinate place of Mark seems clearly indicated in Luke's narrative.

²⁸To name three of the best modern commentators: Taylor, *Mark* 31; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: University Press, 1966) 8; Lane, *Mark* 12-18.

²⁹The argument (not alluded to by Wenham) for an early dating of Mark on the grounds that fragments of the Gospel have been discovered at Qumran (Jose O'Callaghan, "Papiros neutestamentarios en le cuera 7 de Qumran," *Bib* 53 [1972] 91-100) has been pretty thoroughly discredited (see, e.g., Pierre Benoit, "Note sur les Fragments grecs de la Grotte 7 de Qumran," *RB* 79 [1972] 321-24).

³⁰T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, ed. Matthew Black (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 39-40.

earthly Jesus,³¹ such a conclusion would appear to require strong support from internal NT considerations. Wenham finds this evidence in Luke's prologue, the travel narrative and mission of the seventy and the Emmaus Road incident.

In the prologue, Luke's distinguishing of himself from "those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (1:2) has generally been taken as evidence that Luke was not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus. Wenham contests this conclusion, arguing that "from-the-beginning-eyewitnesses" refer only to *apostles*, who were required to have been with Jesus since the baptism of John (Acts 1:22). While it is probably inappropriate to speak of a "semi-technical" description since the relevant expression is never used elsewhere,³² it must be said that Wenham's interpretation of the phrase is a possible one. But the fact that Luke without qualification associates himself with those who "received" the apostolic tradition still suggests that he does not consider himself an eyewitness. As Plummer says, "He [Luke] claims to be believed because of the accuracy of his researches among the best authorities. Had he himself been an eyewitness of any portion, would he not have let us know this?"³³ Nor does it appear likely that the verb employed in v 3, "having followed" can be read as a reference to "direct discipleship." The word does not bear this meaning in the New Testament and its dative plural (almost certainly neuter) object, "all things" seems to preclude the connotation "following a person."³⁴ All in all, while the interpretation advocated by Wenham is *possible*, there is strong support for the traditional view: Luke assures Theophilus that he has accurately and carefully investigated "all things" so as to qualify for the writing of a book(s) about the deeds which the eyewitnesses have "handed down" to others, himself included.³⁵

Wenham discovers further indication that Luke was a Jew and an eyewitness, in the nature of the narrative in Luke 10 and following. The detailed and historically reliable material in Luke's "travel narrative," unparalleled (as a body) in the other gospels, is best accounted for, Wenham argues, if Luke himself were an eyewitness of these events. He further hypothesizes that Luke includes the similarly unparalleled account of the mission of the seventy (10:1-23) because he was one of their number. Such conjectures are virtually impossible to disprove except on the basis of general considerations pertaining to Luke's identity, but reasons given for these identifications fall far short of proof. Many historically reliable and detailed events, unique to a single gospel, are recorded for which eyewitness testimony from the author was clearly unavailable (one thinks of the Lucan infancy narratives); nor is it likely that *all* of Luke's travel narrative can be viewed as an entirely independent tradition.

³¹The Muratonian Fragment (c. A.D. 200). The Anti-Marcionite Prologue states that Luke was "a disciple of the apostles"; Eusebius denies that Luke was a follower of the Lord (*HE* III.24).

³²*Autoptēs*, "eyewitness," is used only here in the New Testament.

³³*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke* (ICC; 5th ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922) xix-xx.

³⁴Cf. BAG 624; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 42-43.

³⁵See the discussion in Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 34-39.

While I would agree that Jesus did and said the same things more than once and that critics often overlook this inevitable aspect of an itinerant ministry, it is most improbable that some of the events recorded in these chapters took place twice (see Luke 11:14-23, to name only one). That Luke may have depended on eyewitnesses for his information I do not doubt, but there is insufficient evidence to show that he *himself* was an eyewitness.

Without going into details, I would in a similar manner question Wenham's identification of Luke with one of the Emmaus road disciples. The point to be made is that the *direct* personal knowledge of Luke could lie behind these incidents *if* a strong case that he was an eyewitness could be independently established. But there are formidable objections to such a view. We have already discussed the prologue; two other points need to be made.

First, as we have already mentioned, the early fathers explicitly denied that Luke was an eyewitness. Wenham attempts to discount this testimony by suggesting that the knowledge of these men was "sketchy, except for what they read in the New Testament." But a few pages earlier, he has used these same traditions, *without corroborating New Testament support*, to argue that Matthew wrote the first gospel and Mark depended on Peter's preaching. He cannot have it both ways. The principle laid down by Zahn long ago has much to commend it: "Nor has the imagination any rights over against a tradition, be this as meagre as it may be, until it is shown that the latter is without basis in fact, and therefore fake."³⁶ And in this case, no compelling reason for rejecting the fathers' view exists. Second, the most natural conclusion to be drawn from Col 4:10-14 is that Luke was a Gentile, for he is clearly distinguished from "those of the circumcision" (v 11).³⁷

When was Luke's gospel written? Wenham identifies Luke with the Lucius who sends greetings through Paul from Corinth (Rom 16:21) in A.D. 57 and mentions the "subscription" at the end of 2 Corinthians to the effect that Luke and Titus were the bearers of the letter. Further, he identifies "the brother who is praised by all the churches" as Luke and the "gospel" for which he is praised as the *written* gospel of Luke. Thus is established a date for Luke's gospel *before* A.D. 56.

The movements of Luke according to this reconstruction fit what we can deduce from Acts, and the identification of Luke with "the brother" of

³⁶*Introduction* 2.376.

³⁷Although Wenham suggests that the text need not indicate this, it is difficult to see how this conclusion can be avoided. No matter how one punctuates v 11, Luke seems to be clearly distinguished from "those of the circumcision," a designation of Jewish Christians (*TDNT* [1968] 6.81); see Moule's evaluation of the punctuation possibilities and his conclusion: "In any case, this group, as Jewish Christians friendly with the apostle, are distinguished from the names which follow; and this is the chief evidence that St. Luke (v 14) was a Gentile" (C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [CGTC; Cambridge: University Press, 1957] 137). That Luke was from Antioch is very possible (Zahn, *Introduction* 3.2; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952] 7) but that he is to be identified with Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13:1) is perhaps unlikely (although the equation is linguistically possible [Bruce, *Acts* 7], it is Luke's habit not to include his name in Acts [Hiebert, *Introduction* 1.126]).

2 Cor 8:18 has something to be said for it³⁸ (though I would consider the suggestion that the Lucius of Rom 16:21 is the third evangelist most improbable³⁹ and the reliability of the “subscription” unlikely⁴⁰). But the suggestion that Paul refers to the *written* gospel in 2 Cor 8:18 I find most improbable, for never does Paul elsewhere, in sixty other cases, employ *euangelion* to refer to a written document—the term consistently denotes *oral* preaching.⁴¹ It must be concluded that Paul’s letters offer no indication as to the date of Luke’s gospel.

Since little evidence, and that conflicting, is found in the early fathers,⁴² the explanation for the ending of Acts becomes a crucial consideration. *If* Luke broke off his account before narrating Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment and martyrdom because Acts was published at the end of Paul’s two year house-arrest (perhaps as a brief for Paul’s trial), a date of about A.D. 62 for Acts would be necessary with an earlier date for the gospel.⁴³ However, while this argument appears to be the most satisfactory explanation for the ending of Acts, it is not conclusive: Luke may have ended his account where he did for theological or compositional reasons.⁴⁴

After briefly noting the strong external and internal support for the position that John the Apostle wrote the fourth gospel, Wenham establishes the date by fixing the *terminus a quo* at A.D. 57, since John knew but did not use the synoptics and the *terminus ad quem* at A.D. 66, since the gospel gives no hint of the destruction of Jerusalem. Again, I must indicate general agreement with this position, while registering some caveats. The case for johannine authorship, based on the early and nearly unanimous patristic testimony⁴⁵ and clear

³⁸Plummer calls this identification the “best guess” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915] 248; and see the extended note in P. E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 312-16).

³⁹If Luke was a Gentile, as Col 4:11-14 suggests, he cannot be identified with Lucius in Rom 16:21 because the latter is a “kinsman” of Paul’s.

⁴⁰Hughes, *Second Corinthians* 313.

⁴¹Origen is perhaps responsible for originating the tradition that 2 Cor 8:18 has reference to the third gospel (cf. *HE* VI.25).

⁴²Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* III.1.1) suggests that Luke wrote *after* Paul’s death; Eusebius (*HE* II.22) *before*; Jerome gives both traditions (Mt, PL 29, 18; *de Viris ill.* XIV.1,11ff).

⁴³Adolf Harnack, *The Date of Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Putman’s, 1911) 90-115; Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978 [reprint] v; Bruce, *Acts* 10-14; Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* 89-92; A. J. Mattill, “The Date and Purpose of Luke-Acts: Rackham Reconsidered,” *CBQ* 40 (1978) 335-50.

⁴⁴The proclamation of the gospel in Rome may have been the true climax to Luke’s history (cf. e.g., I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* [TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 47). Zahn argues that no conclusions as to date could be drawn from the ending of Acts because Luke intended to write a third volume (*Introduction* 3.57-58).

⁴⁵In the second century: Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.1.2; the Muratorian Canon, lines 9ff. Schnackenburg concludes his discussion of the external evidence by saying: “. . . if we look back once more at the tradition of the early church as a whole, the view that remains solidly founded is that the fourth gospel was composed by the Apostle John in Ephesus” (*The Gospel According to St. John* [A Crossroad Book; New York: Seabury, 1980] 1.91).

internal indications,⁴⁶ has not been overturned by modern critical theories. That John did not borrow directly from the synoptic gospels *in their present form* is a view which is receiving more and more support.⁴⁷ But that he knew of the *contents* of the synoptics is equally probable, granted the extreme selectivity of his presentation. I am less certain that John must have written his gospel before the Jewish revolt. The lack of anything like the Olivet Discourse in John gives him less reason to refer to it, and the present tense in a verse such as 5:2 ("there *is* in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool") may be explained as a historical present, lending vividness to the narrative.⁴⁸

If it is not certain that John wrote before the revolt, there are some indications that he wrote at about that time or later. The early fathers generally regarded John as the last gospel to be written,⁴⁹ but it is improbable that the synoptics were completed before A.D. 60 *at the earliest*. This brings us to the middle 60's, at least, for John. The fathers are equally clear in affirming that John wrote from Ephesus; yet Ephesians (c. 60) and 1 Timothy (c. 64) give no indication of John's presence in the "pauline" city. Other frequently adduced arguments for a late date are unconvincing. Banishment from the synagogue, while not apparently officially practiced until A.D. 85, was *in fact* practiced much earlier (cf. Acts 13-14; 1 Thess 2:14ff). And the argument that the degree of theological development found in John demands a late date has been exposed as fallacious: not only is it inadmissible to correlate "development in theology" with date,⁵⁰ but John hardly gives a theology more "developed" than Romans (A.D. 57). Taking all things into consideration, a date before A.D. 70 for John's gospel seems to me improbable; the upper limit can be established only by guessing the latest probable date of John's death, perhaps c. 90-95.

Any acceptable reconstruction of "gospel origins" must justify itself by giving a reasonable explanation of the relationships among the first three gospels. Wenham argues for a flexible view of the synoptic problem, according to which oral tradition, literary dependence and individual historical research are all to be included. But, in setting forth a general scheme, he holds that Aramaic Matthew was written first and that Mark used it, but did not depend on it when he used it in writing Peter's reminiscences. The translator of

⁴⁶Westcott, to whose discussion Wenham refers, has presented the classic case (*The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 (= 1908)] ix-lii).

⁴⁷This view was given impetus particularly by P. Gardner-Smith, *St. John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: University Press, 1938). Among recent commentators, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) 1.XLV-XLVII, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 48-52; Schnackenburg, *John* 1.26-43.

⁴⁸Schnackenburg, *John* 2.460 (n.9). Turner claims 164 examples of the historical present in John (*Style* 70).

⁴⁹Clement's position, repeated by Eusebius, is typical: "Last of all, aware that the physical facts had been recorded in the gospels, encouraged by his pupils and irresistibly moved by the Spirit, John wrote a spiritual gospel" (*HE* VI.14).

⁵⁰Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* 344-45. Cf. also M. Hengel, "Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologie," *Neues Testament und Geschichte: Oscar Cullmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke (Zürich and Tübingen: Theologischer Verlag, 1972) 43-67.

Aramaic Matthew then used “Marcan phraseology when it suited him” in producing the Greek version. Luke, who depends mainly on his own eyewitness testimony and research, also “takes Mark as his basis” and uses Matthew “sparingly.”

In evaluating this hypothesis, it is necessary to say at the outset that I have no “final solution” to offer as an alternative to Wenham’s. Indeed, in the present state of the question, such a solution is probably impossible.⁵¹ Every theory has its difficulties and in pointing out some which I see in Wenham’s scheme, I want to avoid giving the impression that his is necessarily weaker than others. In fact, I am in general agreement with his reconstruction. Let me enumerate what I see to be the acceptable parts of his scheme before noting a couple of criticisms.

First, Wenham is to be commended for his incorporation of external testimony in his outline. Since arguments based solely on the evidence of the gospels are often very subjective and have been variously evaluated, the use of this relatively objective (though sometimes unreliable) evidence is important. Secondly, I think Wenham’s insistence that a solely literary solution to the problem is unsatisfactory is justified. Eyewitness testimony and cross-fertilization among various oral and written traditions must be allowed for—the situation was surely more complex than many “solutions” to the problem have allowed.⁵² Thirdly, Wenham’s general adherence to Marcan priority (among the *Greek* gospels) is probably justified. While many of the common arguments for this position have been shown to be fallacious,⁵³ this *general* view still seems to satisfy more of the evidence than any other.⁵⁴ Many of the problems raised with the priority of Mark are problems only if a rigidly “Streeterian” documentary approach is taken. If one allows for the influence of eyewitness reminiscences and streams of various traditions (as Wenham does), Marcan

⁵¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Priority of Mark and the ‘Q’ Source in Luke,” *Jesus and Man’s Hope* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970).1.132.

⁵²Cf. also Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* 93-94. On the other hand, the independence at the literary level suggested by Westcott (*Introduction* 168-92) and more recently for Matthew and Mark, by Rist (*On the Independence of Matthew and Mark*, SNTSMS 32 [Cambridge: University Press, 1978] is unlikely (see, e.g., Joseph B. Tyson, “Sequential Parallelism in the Synoptic Gospels,” *NTS* 22 [1976] 276-308). In a recent article Downing analyzes the method of Josephus in using his sources, concluding that he normally paraphrased them. If this is a general tendency, he argues, the similarities in the synoptics are more significant than the differences (F. Gerald Downing, “Redaction Criticism: Josephus’ *Antiquities* and the Synoptic Gospels,” *JSNT* 8 [1980] 46-65; 9 [1980] 27-48; cf. p.33).

⁵³See especially William Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (2nd ed.; Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina Press, 1976); Humphrey Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1968) 121-151; E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTSMS 9 (Cambridge University Press, 1969); Hans-Herbert Stoldt, *History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1980) 135-219.

⁵⁴Fitzmyer, “The Priority of Mark,” 134-47. Certainly, however, Sanders is correct in asserting: “The evidence does not seem to warrant the degree of certainty with which many scholars hold the two-document hypothesis” (*Tendencies* 278).

priority possesses fewer difficulties.⁵⁵

On the negative side, I have two basic criticisms of Wenham's reconstruction. First, it must be questioned whether Wenham's scheme adequately explains the extent of similarity between Mark and Matthew. Linguistic parallels suggest that the author of Greek Matthew goes considerably beyond an occasional use of Marcan phraseology. And in terms of content, the fact that Mark contains so little that is unique to his gospel would appear to demand either: (1) that Mark is heavily dependent on Aramaic Matthew; or (2) that Greek Matthew is heavily dependent on Mark. In the former case, the strong external testimony of Mark's dependence on Peter is jeopardized;⁵⁶ in the latter it becomes difficult to view Greek Matthew as, in any legitimate sense of the term, a "translation" of Aramaic Matthew. Since Mark's dependence on Peter is strongly attested, the latter alternative seems preferable. I would concur with Wikenhauser: "... an Aramaic original of the Gospel of St. Matthew can be defended only if we regard Greek Matthew not as a literal translation of the Aramaic, but as a thorough revision made with frequent use of the Gospel of St. Mark."⁵⁷

Second, despite a number of recent advocates, who want to "dispense" with Q,⁵⁸ the hypothesis of Luke's use of Matthew remains problematic. Since Matthew and Luke never agree against Mark in the general order of events they recount, any use of Matthew by Luke must have been very (almost unexplainably) selective.⁵⁹ And, although the "minor agreements" between Matthew and Luke *against* Mark cannot be overlooked and constitute a difficulty for any view that denies a direct relationship between Matthew and Luke,⁶⁰ one would expect *more* such "agreements" if Luke had used Matthew.⁶¹ Perhaps the agreements are better explained by supposing that

⁵⁵Thus, it is probably impossible to defend the priority of Mark to Matthew in *every single pericope*. "There is not any one description of the relationship of one Gospel to another which can be maintained consistently and which applies to all the material" (E. P. Sanders, "The Overlaps of Mark and Q and the Synoptic Problem," *NTS* 19 [1972-1973] 462). For specific examples of places in which Marcan priority appears to be an unsatisfactory explanation of the data, see: David Wenham, "The Synoptic Problem Revisited: Some New Suggestions about the Composition of Mark 4:1-34," *TynB* 23 [1972] 3-38; Thomas R. W. Longstaff, *Evidence of Conflation in Mark? A Study in the Synoptic Problem*, SBLDS 28 (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1977) 140-51.

⁵⁶This is pointed out by Alfred Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction* (2nd ed.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1958) 194. And Papias' evidence seems to tell against Mark depending on *any* form of Matthew (Rist, *Independence* 99). The supposition that Matthew and Mark are related through Peter's use of Greek Matthew in his preaching (Chapman, *Matthew, Mark and Luke* 90-92) is most improbable.

⁵⁷*Introduction* 195.

⁵⁸See, e.g., B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951) 1-61; A. M. Farrer, "On Dispensing with 'Q'," *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967) 55-86.

⁵⁹Robert Lisle Lindsay, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Dugith, n.d.) 23.

⁶⁰On the "minor agreements" see especially Stoldt, *Marcan Hypothesis* 10-22.

⁶¹Downing, "Redaction Criticism," 42-43; see Fitzmyer ("Priority of Mark," 148-50) for other arguments against the view that Luke used Matthew.

Matthew and Luke have in common traditions, oral and written, not utilized by Mark.

But these are somewhat minor caveats and, in general, it seems to me that Wenham's position does tolerably well in accounting both for the external testimony and for the internal synoptic data. At any rate, extensive critique of this view would be unfair since Wenham attempts only to give a brief survey in this article.

Few historical questions offer greater difficulties than the investigation into the origins of the canonical gospels. The scholar is faced with numerous and often conflicting testimonies from church fathers, bafflingly complex literary phenomena and, far too often, sheer lack of information. Given these handicaps, Wenham is to be commended for the comprehensive and detailed character of his reconstruction. In most basic points (the authorship of all four gospels, the probability of an Aramaic Matthew, Marcan priority), I am in agreement with the positions he so ably maintains. On some other issues I demur, not because of a conflicting interpretation of the evidence, but because I feel the evidence is inadequate to support the view in question. It is on the question of dating that most disagreement exists: despite the recent trend and Wenham's arguments, I still find it difficult to date Mark, probably the earliest gospel, before c. A.D. 55 and would not want to deny the possibility that one (or perhaps more) gospel did not see the light of day until after A.D. 70. But the discerning reader should note the wide measure of agreement in our positions and view the remaining points of difference as the inevitable by-product of scholarly investigation into so difficult a topic. On the ultimately essential point, that we possess an accurate record of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, Mr. Wenham and I are in complete agreement.