

The Gospels

1) Introduction

Many readers of the Gospels are embarrassed and even abashed when they stop to think about the meaning of certain descriptions. The same is true when they make comparisons between different versions of the same event found in several Gospels. This observation is made by Father Roguet in his book *Initiation to the Gospels (Initiation à l'Évangile)*¹.

With the wide experience he has gained in his many years of answering perturbed readers' letters in a Catholic weekly, he has been able to assess just how greatly they have been worried by what they have read. His questioners come from widely varying social and cultural backgrounds. He notes that their requests for explanations concern texts that are “considered abstruse, incomprehensible, if not contradictory, absurd or scandalous”. There can be no doubt that a complete reading of the Gospels is likely to disturb Christians profoundly.

This observation is very recent: Father Roguet's book was published in 1973. Not so very long ago, the majority of Christians knew only selected sections of the Gospels that were read during services or commented upon during sermons. With the exception of the Protestants, it was not customary for Christians to read the Gospels in their entirety. Books of religious instruction only contained extracts; the in extensor text hardly circulated at all.

At a Roman Catholic school I had copies of the works of Virgil and Plato, but I did not have the New Testament. The Greek text of this would nevertheless have been very instructive: it was only much later on that I realized why they had not set us translations of the holy writings of Christianity. The latter could have led us to ask our teachers questions they would have found it difficult to answer.

These discoveries, made if one has a critical outlook during a reading in extensor of the Gospels, have led the Church to come to the aid of readers by helping them overcome their perplexity. “Many Christians need to learn how to read the Gospels”, notes Father Roguet. Whether or not one agrees with the explanations he gives, it is greatly to the author's credit that he actually tackles these delicate problems. Unfortunately, it is not always like this in many writings on the Christian Revelation.

In editions of the Bible produced for widespread publication, introductory notes more often than not set out a collection of ideas that would tend to persuade the reader that the Gospels hardly raise any problems concerning the personalities of the authors of the various books, the authenticity of the texts and the truth of the descriptions. In spite of the fact that there are so many unknowns concerning authors of whose identity we are not at all sure, we find a wealth of precise information in this kind of introductory note.

Often they present as a certainty what is pure hypothesis, or they state that such-and-such an evangelist was an eye-witness of the events, while specialist works claim the opposite. The time that elapsed between the end of Jesus' ministry and the appearance of the texts is drastically reduced. They would have one believe that these were written by one man taken from an oral tradition, when in fact specialists have pointed out adaptations to the texts.

Of course, certain difficulties of interpretation are mentioned here and there, but they ride rough shod over glaring contradictions that must strike anyone who thinks about them. In the little glossaries one finds among the appendices complementing a reassuring preface, one observes how improbabilities, contradictions or blatant errors have been hidden or stifled under clever arguments of an apologetic nature. This disturbing state of affairs shows up the misleading nature of such commentaries.

The ideas to be developed in the coming pages will without doubt leave any readers still unaware of these problems quite amazed. Before going into detail however, I will provide an immediate illustration of my ideas with an example that seems to me quite conclusive.

Neither Matthew nor John speaks of Jesus's Ascension. Luke in his Gospel places it on the day of the Resurrection and forty days later in the Acts of the Apostles of which he is said to be the author. Mark mentions it (without giving a date) in a conclusion considered unauthentic today. The Ascension therefore has no solid scriptural basis. Commentators nevertheless approach this important question with incredible lightness.

Tricot, in his Little Dictionary of the New Testament (Petit Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament) in the Crampon Bible, (1960 edition)², a work produced for mass publication, does not devote an entry to the Ascension. The Synopsis of the Four Gospels (Synopse des Quatre Evangiles) by Fathers Benoît and Boismard, teachers at the Biblical School of Jerusalem, (1972 edition)³, informs us in volume II, pages 451 and 452, that the contradiction between Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles may be explained by a 'literary artifice': this is, to say the least, difficult to follow!

In all probability, Father Roguet in his Initiation to the Gospel, 1973, (pg. 187) has not been convinced by the above argument. The explanation he gives us is curious, to say the least: "Here, as in many similar cases, the problem only appears insuperable if one takes Biblical statements literally, and forgets their religious significance. It is not a matter of breaking down the factual reality into a symbolism which is inconsistent, but rather of looking for the theological intentions of those revealing these mysteries to us

by providing us with facts we can apprehend with our senses and signs appropriate to our incarnate spirit.”

How is it possible to be satisfied by an exegesis of this kind? Only a person who accepted everything unconditionally would find such apologetic set-phrases acceptable. Another interesting aspect of Father Roguet's commentary is his admission that there are 'many similar cases'; similar, that is, to the Ascension in the Gospels. The problem therefore has to be approached as a whole, objectively and in depth. It would seem reasonable to look for an explanation by studying the conditions attendant upon the writing of the Gospels, or the religious atmosphere prevailing at the time.

When adaptations of the original writings taken from oral traditions are pointed out, and we see the way texts handed down to us have been corrupted, the presence of obscure, incomprehensible, contradictory, improbable, and even absurd passages comes as much less of a surprise. The same may be said of texts which are incompatible with today's proven reality, thanks to scientific progress. Observations such as these denote the element of human participation in the writing and modification of the texts.

Admittedly, in the last few decades, objective research on the Scriptures has gained attention. In a recent book, *Faith in the Resurrection, Resurrection of Faith*⁴ (Foi en la Resurrection, Resurrection de la foi), Father Kannengiesser, a professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris, outlines this profound change in the following terms: “The faithful are hardly aware that a revolution has taken place in methods of Biblical exegesis since the time of Pious XII”⁵.

The 'Revolution' that the author mentions is therefore very recent. It is beginning to be extended to the teaching of the faithful, in the case of certain specialists at least, who are animated by this spirit of revival. “The overthrow of the most assured prospects of the pastoral tradition,” the author writes, “has more or less begun with this revolution in methods of exegesis.”

Father Kannengiesser warns that 'one should not take literally' facts reported about Jesus by the Gospels, because they are 'writings suited to an occasion' or 'to combat', whose authors 'are writing down the traditions of their own community about Jesus'. Concerning the Resurrection of Jesus, which is the subject of his book, he stresses that none of the authors of the Gospels can claim to have been an eye-witness.

He intimates that, as far as the rest of Jesus's public life is concerned, the same must be true because, according to the Gospels, none of the Apostles, apart from Judas Iscariot, left Jesus from the moment he first followed Him until His last earthly manifestations.

We have come a long way from the traditional position, which was once again solemnly confirmed by the Second Vatican Council only ten years ago. This once again is resumed by modern works of popularization destined to be read by the faithful. Little by little the truth is coming to light however.

It is not easy to grasp, because the weight of such a bitterly defended tradition is very heavy indeed. To free oneself from it, one has to strike at the roots of the problem, i.e. examine first the circumstances that marked the birth of Christianity.

2) Historical Reminder Judeo-Christianity And Saint Paul

The majority of Christians believe that the Gospels were written by direct witnesses of the life of Jesus and therefore constitute unquestionable evidence concerning the events highlighting His life and preachings. One wonders, in the presence of such guarantees of authenticity, how it is possible to discuss the teachings derived from them and how one can cast doubt upon the validity of the Church as an institution applying the general instructions Jesus Himself gave. Today's popular editions of the Gospels contain commentaries aimed at propagating these ideas among the general public.

The value the authors of the Gospels have as eye-witnesses is always presented to the faithful as axiomatic. In the middle of the Second century, Saint Justin did, after all, call the Gospels the 'Memoirs of the Apostles'. There are moreover so many details proclaimed concerning the authors that it is a wonder that one could ever doubt their accuracy; 'Matthew was a well-known character 'a customs officer employed at the tollgate or customs house at Capharnaum'; it is even said that he spoke Aramaic and Greek.

Mark is also easily identifiable as Peter's colleague; there is no doubt that he too was an eye-witness. Luke is the 'dear physician' of whom Paul talks: information on him is very precise. John is the Apostle who was always near to Jesus, son of Zebedee, fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

Modern studies on the beginnings of Christianity show that this way of presenting things hardly corresponds to reality. We shall see who the authors of the Gospels really were. As far as the decades following Jesus's mission are concerned, it must be understood that events did not at all happen in the way they have been said to have taken place and that Peter's arrival in Rome in no way laid the foundations for the Church.

On the contrary, from the time Jesus left earth to the second half of the Second century, there was a struggle between two factions. One was what one might call Pauline Christianity and the other Judeo-Christianity. It was only very slowly that the first supplanted the second, and Pauline Christianity triumphed over Judeo-Christianity.

A large number of very recent works are based on contemporary discoveries about Christianity. Among them we find Cardinal Daniélou's name. In December 1967 he published an article in the review *Studies (Etudes)* entitled. 'A New Representation of the Origins of Christianity: Judeo-Christianity'. (*Une vision nouvelle des origines chrétiennes, le judéo-christianisme*).

Here he reviews past works, retraces its history and enables us to place the appearance of the Gospels

in quite a different context from the one that emerges on reading accounts intended for mass publication. What follows is a condensed version of the essential points made in his article, including many quotations from it.

After Jesus's departure, the "little group of Apostles" formed a "Jewish sect that remained faithful to the form of worship practiced in the Temple". However, when the observances of converts from paganism were added to them, a 'special system' was offered to them, as it were: the Council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D. exempted them from circumcision and Jewish observances; "many Judeo-Christians rejected this concession".

This group was quite separate from Paul's. What is more, Paul and the Judeo-Christians were in conflict over the question of pagans who had turned to Christianity, (the incident of Antioch, 49 A.D.). "For Paul, the circumcision, Sabbath, and form of worship practiced in the Temple were henceforth old fashioned, even for the Jews. Christianity was to free itself from its political-cum-religious adherence to Judaism and open itself to the Gentiles."

For those Judeo-Christians who remained 'loyal Jews,' Paul was a traitor. Judeo-Christian documents call him an 'enemy', accuse him of 'tactical double-dealing',.. "Until 70 A.D., Judeo-Christianity represents the majority of the Church" and "Paul remains an isolated case".

The head of the community at that time was James, a relation of Jesus. With him were Peter (at the beginning) and John. "James may be considered to represent the Judeo-Christian camp, which deliberately clung to Judaism as opposed to Pauline Christianity." Jesus's family has a very important place in the Judeo-Christian Church of Jerusalem. "James's successor was Simeon, son of Cleopas, a cousin of the Lord".

Cardinal Danielou here quotes Judeo-Christian writings which express the views on Jesus of this community which initially formed around the apostles: the Gospel of the Hebrews (coming from a Judeo-Christian community in Egypt), the writings of Clement: Homilies and Recognitions, 'Hypotyposeis', the Second Apocalypse of James, the Gospel of Thomas.⁶ "It is to the Judeo-Christians that one must ascribe the oldest writings of Christian literature." Cardinal Daniélou mentions them in detail.

"It was not just in Jerusalem and Palestine that Judeo-Christianity predominated during the first hundred years of the Church. The Judeo-Christian mission seems everywhere to have developed before the Pauline mission. This is certainly the explanation of the fact that the letters of Paul allude to a conflict." They were the same adversaries he was to meet everywhere: in Galatia, Corinth, Colossae, Rome and Antioch.

The Syro-Palestinian coast from Gaza to Antioch was Judeo-Christian "as witnessed by the Acts of the Apostles and Clementine writings". In Asia Minor, the existence of Judeo-Christians is indicated in Paul's letters to the Galatians and Colossians. Papias's writings give us information about Judeo-Christianity in Phrygia. In Greece, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians mentions Judeo-Christians,

especially at Apollos.

According to Clement's letter and the Shepherd of Hermas, Rome was an 'important centre'. For Suetonius and Tacitus, the Christians represented a Jewish sect. Cardinal Daniélou thinks that the first evangelization in Africa was Judeo-Christian. The Gospel of the Hebrews and the writings of Clement of Alexandria link up with this.

It is essential to know these facts to understand the struggle between communities that formed the background against which the Gospels were written. The texts that we have today, after many adaptations from the sources, began to appear around 70 A.D., the time when the two rival communities were engaged in a fierce struggle, with the Judeo-Christians still retaining the upper hand. With the Jewish war and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the situation was to be reversed.

This is how Cardinal Daniélou explains the decline: "After the Jews had been discredited in the Empire, the Christians tended to detach themselves from them. The Hellenistic peoples of Christian persuasion then gained the upper hand. Paul won a posthumous victory. Christianity separated itself politically and sociologically from Judaism; it became the third people. All the same, until the Jewish revolt in 140 A.D., Judeo-Christianity continued to predominate culturally"

From 70 A.D. to a period sometime before 110 A.D. the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were produced. They do not constitute the first written Christian documents: the letters of Paul date from well before them. According to O. Culmann, Paul probably wrote his letter to the Thessalonians in 50 A.D. He had probably disappeared several years prior to the completion of Mark's Gospel.

Paul is the most controversial figure in Christianity. He was considered to be a traitor to Jesus's thought by the latter's family and by the apostles who had stayed in Jerusalem in the circle around James. Paul created Christianity at the expense of those whom Jesus had gathered around him to spread his teachings. He had not known Jesus during his lifetime and he proved the legitimacy of his mission by declaring that Jesus, raised from the dead, had appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

It is quite reasonable to ask what Christianity might have been without Paul and one could no doubt construct all sorts of hypotheses on this subject. As far as the Gospels are concerned however, it is almost certain that if this atmosphere of struggle between communities had not existed, we would not have had the writings we possess today. They appeared at a time of fierce struggle between the two communities.

These 'combat writings', as Father Kannengiesser calls them, emerged from the multitude of writings on Jesus. These occurred at the time when Paul's style of Christianity won through definitively, and created its own collection of official texts. These texts constituted the 'Canon' which condemned and excluded as unorthodox any other documents that were not suited to the line adopted by the Church.

The Judeo-Christians have now disappeared as a community with any influence, but one still hears

people talking about them under the general term of 'Judaistic'. This is how Cardinal Daniélou describes their disappearance:

“When they were cut off, from the Great Church, that gradually freed itself from its Jewish attachments, they petered out very quickly in the West. In the East however it is possible to find traces of them in the Third and Fourth Centuries A.D., especially in Palestine, Arabia, Transjordan, Syria and Mesopotamia. Others joined in the orthodoxy of the Great Church, at the same time preserving traces of Semitic culture; some of these still persist in the Churches of Ethiopia and Chaldea”.

3) The Four Gospels, Sources and History

In the writings that come from the early stages of Christianity, the Gospels are not mentioned until long after the works of Paul. It was not until the middle of the Second century A.D., after 140 A.D. to be precise, that accounts began to appear concerning a collection of Evangelic writings, In spite of this, “from the beginning of the Second century A.D., many Christian authors clearly intimate that they knew a great many of Paul's letters.”

These observations are set out in the Introduction to the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, New Testament (Introduction à la Traduction oecuménique de la Bible, Nouveau Testament) edited 1972⁷. They are worth mentioning from the outset, and it is useful to point out here that the work referred to is the result of a collective effort which brought together more than one hundred Catholic and Protestant specialists.

The Gospels, later to become official, i.e. canonic, did not become known until fairly late, even though they were completed at the beginning of the Second century A.D. According to the Ecumenical Translation, stories belonging to them began to be quoted around the middle of the Second century A.D. Nevertheless, “it is nearly always difficult to decide whether the quotations come from written texts that the authors had next to them or if the latter were content to evoke the memory of fragments of the oral tradition.”

“Before 140 A.D.” we read in the commentaries this translation of the Bible contains, “there was, in any case, no account by which one might have recognized a collection of evangelic writings”. This statement is the opposite of what A. Tricot writes (1960) in the commentary to his translation of the New Testament: “Very early on, from the beginning of the Second century A.D., it became a habit to say “Gospel' meaning the books that Saint Justin around 150 A.D. had also called “The Memoirs of the Apostles'.” Unfortunately, assertions of this kind are sufficiently common for the public to have ideas on the date of the Gospels which are mistaken.

The Gospels did not form a complete whole 'very early on'; it did not happen until more than a century after the end of Jesus's mission. The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible estimates the date the four Gospels acquired the status of canonic literature at around 170 A.D.

Justin's statement which calls the authors 'Apostles' is not acceptable either, as we shall see. As far as the date the Gospels were written is concerned, A. Tricot states that Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's Gospels were written before 70 A.D. but this is not acceptable, except perhaps for Mark. Following many others, this commentator goes out of his way to present the authors of the Gospels as the apostles or the companions of Jesus.

For this reason he suggests dates of writing that place them very near to the time Jesus lived. As for John, whom A. Tricot has us believe lived until roughly 100 A.D., Christians have always been used to seeing him depicted as being very near to Jesus on ceremonial occasions. It is very difficult however to assert that he is the author of the Gospel that bears his name. For A. Tricot, as for other commentators, the Apostle John (like Matthew) was the officially qualified witness of the facts he recounts, although the majority of critics do not support the hypothesis which says he wrote the fourth Gospel.

If however the four Gospels in question cannot reasonably be regarded as the 'Memoirs' of the apostles or companions of Jesus, where do they come from? O. Culmann, in his book *The New Testament (Le Nouveau Testament)*,⁸ says of this that the evangelists were only the "spokesmen of the early Christian community which wrote down the oral tradition.

For thirty or forty years, the Gospel had existed as an almost exclusively oral tradition: the latter only transmitted sayings and isolated narratives. The evangelists strung them together, each in his own way according to his own character and theological preoccupations. They linked up the narrations and sayings handed down by the prevailing tradition. The grouping of Jesus's sayings and likewise the sequence of narratives is made by the use of fairly vague linking phrases such as 'after this', 'when he had' etc. In other words, the 'framework' of the Synoptic Gospels ⁹ is of a purely literary order and is not based on history."

The same author continues as follows: "It must be noted that the needs of preaching, worship and teaching, more than biographical considerations, were what guided the early community when it wrote down the tradition of the life of Jesus. The apostles illustrated the truth of the faith they were preaching by describing the events in the life of Jesus. Their sermons are what caused the descriptions to be written down. The sayings of Jesus were transmitted, in particular, in the teaching of the catechism of the early Church."

This is exactly how the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible (*Traduction oecuménique de la Bible*) describe the writing of the Gospels: the formation of an oral tradition influenced by the preachings of Jesus's disciples and other preachers; the preservation by preaching of this material, which is in actual fact found in the Gospels, by preaching, liturgy, and teaching of the faithful; the slender possibility of a concrete form given by writings to certain confessions of faith, sayings of Jesus, descriptions of the Passion for example; the fact that the evangelists resort to various written forms as well as data contained in the oral tradition.

They resort to these to produce texts which “are suitable for various circles, which meet the needs of the Church, explain observations on the Scriptures, correct errors and even, on occasion, answer adversaries' objections. Thus the evangelists, each according to his own outlook, have collected and recorded in writing the material given to them by the oral tradition”.

This position has been collectively adopted by more than one hundred experts in the exegesis of the New Testament, both Catholic and Protestant. It diverges widely from the line established by the Second Vatican Council in its dogmatic constitution on the Revelation drawn up between 1962 and 1965. This conciliar document has already been referred to once above, when talking of the Old Testament. The Council was able to declare of the latter that the books which compose it “contain material which is imperfect and obsolete”, but it has not expressed the same reservations about the Gospels.

On the contrary, as we read in the following: “Nobody can overlook the fact that, among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a well-deserved position of superiority. This is by virtue of the fact that they represent the most pre-eminent witness to the life and teachings of the Incarnate Word, Our Saviour. At all times and in all places the Church has maintained and still maintains the apostolic origin of the four Gospels. What the apostles actually preached on Christ's orders, both they and the men in their following subsequently transmitted, with the divine inspiration of the Spirit, in writings which are the foundation of the faith, i.e. the fourfold Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.”

“Our Holy Mother, the Church, has firmly maintained and still maintains with the greatest constancy, that these four Gospels, which it unhesitatingly confirms are historically authentic, faithfully transmit what Jesus, Son Of God, actually did and taught during his life among men for their eternal salvation until the day when He was taken up into the heavens. The sacred authors therefore composed the four Gospels in such a way as to always give us true and frank information on the life of Jesus”.

This is an unambiguous affirmation of the fidelity with which the Gospels transmit the acts and sayings of Jesus. There is hardly any compatibility between the Council's affirmation and what the authors quoted above claim. In particular the following: The Gospels “are not to be taken literally” they are “writings suited to an occasion” or “combat writings”. Their authors “are writing down the traditions of their own community concerning Jesus”. (Father Kannengiesser).

The Gospels are texts which “are suitable for various circles, meet the needs of the Church, explain observations on the Scriptures, correct errors and even, on occasion, answer adversaries' objections. Thus, the evangelists, each according to his own outlook, have collected and recorded in writing the material given to them by the oral tradition”. (Ecumenical Translation of the Bible).

It is quite clear that we are here faced with contradictory statements: the declaration of the Council on the one hand, and more recently adopted attitudes on the other. According to the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, a faithful account of the actions and words of Jesus is to be found in the

Gospels; but it is impossible to reconcile this with the existence in the text of contradictions, improbabilities, things which are materially impossible or statements which run contrary to firmly established reality.

If, on the other hand, one chooses to regard the Gospels as expressing the personal point of view of those who collected the oral traditions that belonged to various communities, or as writings suited to an occasion or combat—writings, it does not come as a surprise to find faults in the Gospels. All these faults are the sign that they were written by men in circumstances such as these. The writers may have been quite sincere, even though they relate facts without doubting their inaccuracy.

They provide us with descriptions which contradict other authors' narrations, or are influenced by reasons of religious rivalry between communities. They therefore present stories about the life of Jesus from a completely different angle than their adversaries. It has already been shown how the historical context is in harmony with the second approach to the Gospels. The data we have on the texts themselves definitively confirms it.

The Gospel According To Matthew

Matthew's is the first of the four Gospels as they appear in the New Testament. This position is perfectly justified by the fact that it is a prolongation, as it were, of the Old Testament. It was written to show that "Jesus fulfilled the history of Israel", as the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible note and on which we shall be drawing heavily. For this reason Matthew constantly refers to quotations from the Old Testament, showing that Jesus acted as if he were the Messiah the Jews were awaiting.

This Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus¹⁰. Matthew traces it back to Abraham via David. We shall presently see the fault in the text that most commentators silently ignore. Matthew's obvious intention was nevertheless to indicate the general tenor of his work straight away by establishing this line of descendants. The author continues the same line of thought by constantly bringing to the forefront Jesus's attitude toward Jewish law, the main principles of which (praying, fasting, and dispensing charity) are summarized here.

Jesus addresses His teachings first and foremost to His own people. This is how He speaks to the twelve Apostles "go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans¹¹ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10, 5–6). "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". (Matthew 15, 24). At the end of his Gospel, in second place, Matthew extends the apostolic mission of Jesus's first disciples to all nations.

He makes Jesus give the following order. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28, 19), but the primary destination must be the 'house of Israel'. A. Tricot says of this Gospel, "Beneath its Greek garb, the flesh and bones of this book are Jewish, and so is its spirit; it has a Jewish feel and bears its distinctive signs".

On the basis of these observations alone, the origins of Matthew's Gospel may be placed in the tradition of a Judeo-Christian community. According to O. Culmann, this community "was trying to break away from Judaism while at the same time preserving the continuity of the Old Testament. The main preoccupations and the general tenor of this Gospel point towards a strained situation."

There are also political factors to be found in the text. The Roman occupation of Palestine naturally heightened the desire of this country to see itself liberated. They prayed for God to intervene in favour of the people He had chosen among all others, and as their omnipotent sovereign who could give direct support to the affairs of men, as He had already done many times in the course of history.

What sort of person was Matthew? Let us say straight away that he is no longer acknowledged to be one of Jesus's companions. A. Tricot nevertheless presents him as such in his commentary to the translation of the New Testament, 1960: "Matthew alias, Levi, was a customs officer employed at the tollgate or customs house at Capharnaum when Jesus called him to be one of His disciples." This is the opinion of the Fathers of the Church, Origen, Jerome and Epiphany. This opinion is no longer held today. One point which is uncontested is that the author is writing "for people who speak Greek, but nevertheless know Jewish customs and the Aramaic language."

It would seem that for the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation, the origins of this Gospel are as follows: "It is normally considered to have been written in Syria, perhaps at Antioch..., or in Phoenicia, because a great many Jews lived in these countries. [12](#) ...we have indications of a polemic against the orthodox Judaism of the Synagogue and the Pharisees such as was manifested at the synagogal assembly at Jamina circa 80 A.D."

In such conditions, there are many authors who date the first of the Gospels at about 80-90 A.D., perhaps also a little earlier, it is not possible to be absolutely definite about this... since we do not know the author's exact name, we must be satisfied with a few outlines traced in the Gospel itself, the author can be recognized by his profession. He is well-versed in Jewish writings and traditions. He knows, respects, but vigorously challenges the religious leaders of his people.

He is a past master in the art of teaching and making Jesus understandable to his listeners. He always insists on the practical consequences of his teachings. He would fit fairly well the description of an educated Jew turned Christian; a householder "who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" as Matthew says (13, 52). This is a long way from the civil servant at Capharnaum, whom Mark and Luke call Levi, and who had become one of the twelve Apostles...

Everyone agrees in thinking that Matthew wrote his Gospel using the same sources as Mark and Luke. His narration is, as we shall see, different on several essential points. In spite of this, Matthew borrowed heavily from Mark's Gospel although the latter was not one of Jesus's disciples (O. Culmann).

Matthew takes very serious liberties with the text. We shall see this when we discuss the Old Testament in relation to the genealogy of Jesus which is placed at the beginning of his Gospel. He inserts into his

book descriptions which are quite literally incredible. This is the adjective used in the work mentioned above by Father Kannengiesser referring to an episode in the Resurrection, the episode of the guard.

He points out the improbability of the story referring to military guards at the tomb, “these Gentile soldiers” who “report, not to their hierarchical superiors, but to the high priests who pay them to tell lies”. He adds however: “One must not laugh at him because Matthew's intention was extremely serious. In his own way he incorporates ancient data from the oral tradition into his written work. The scenario is nevertheless worthy of Jesus Christ Superstar. [13](#)”

Let us not forget that this opinion on Matthew comes from an eminent theologian teaching at the Catholic Institute of Paris (Institute Catholique de Paris). Matthew relates in his narration the events accompanying the death of Jesus. They are another example of his imagination. “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

This passage from Matthew (27, 51–53) has no corresponding passage in the other Gospels. It is difficult to see how the bodies of the saints in question could have raised from the dead at the time of Jesus's death (according to the Gospels it was on the eve of the Sabbath) and only emerge from their tombs after his resurrection (according to the same sources on the day after the Sabbath).

The most notable improbability is perhaps to be found in Matthew. It is the most difficult to rationalize of all that the Gospel authors claim Jesus said. He relates in chapter 12, 38–40 the episode concerning Jonah's sign: Jesus was among the scribes and pharisees who addressed him in the following terms:

“Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you. But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Jesus therefore proclaims that he will stay in the earth three days and three nights. So Matthew, along with Luke and Mark, place the death and burial of Jesus on the eve of the Sabbath. This, of course, makes the time spent in the earth three days (treis êmeras in the Greek text), but this period can only include two and not three nights (treis nuktas in the Greek text [14](#)).

Gospel commentators frequently ignore this episode. Father Roguet nevertheless points out this improbability when he notes that Jesus “only stayed in the tomb” three days (one of them complete) and two nights. He adds however that “it is a set expression and really means three days”. It is disturbing to see commentators reduced to using arguments that do not contain any positive meaning. It would be much more satisfying intellectually to say that a gross error such as this was the result of a scribe's mistake!

Apart from these improbabilities, what mostly distinguishes Matthew's Gospel is that it is the work of a Judeo-Christian community in the process of breaking away from Judaism while remaining in line with the Old Testament. From the point of view of Judeo-Christian history it is very important.

The Gospel According To Mark

This is the shortest of the four Gospels. It is also the oldest, but in spite of this it is not a book written by an apostle. At best it was written by an apostle's disciple.

O. Culmann has written that he does not consider Mark to be a disciple of Jesus. The author nevertheless points out, to those who have misgivings about the ascription of this Gospel to the Apostle Mark, that "Matthew and Luke would not have used this Gospel in the way they did had they not known that it was indeed based on the teachings of an apostle".

This argument is in no way decisive. O. Culmann backs up the reservations he expresses by saying that he frequently quotes from the New Testament the sayings of a certain 'John nicknamed Mark'. These quotations, do not however mention the name of a Gospel author, and the text of Mark itself does not name any author.

The paucity of information on this point has led commentators to dwell on details that seem rather extravagant: using the pretext, for example, that Mark was the only evangelist to relate in his description of the Passion the story of the young man who had nothing but a linen cloth about his body and, when seized, left the linen cloth and ran away naked (Mark 14, 51-52), they conclude that the young man must have been Mark, "the faithful disciple who tried to follow the teacher" (Ecumenical Translation). Other commentators see in this "personal memory a sign of authenticity, an anonymous signature", which "proves that he was an eyewitness" (O. Culmann).

O. Culmann considers that "many turns of phrase corroborate the hypothesis that the author was of Jewish origin," but the presence of Latin expressions might suggest that he had written his Gospel in Rome. "He addresses himself moreover to Christians not living in Palestine and is careful to explain the Aramic expressions he uses."

Tradition has indeed tended to see Mark as Peter's companion in Rome. It is founded on the final section of Peter's first letter (always supposing that he was indeed the author). Peter wrote in his letter. "The community which is at Babylon, which is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark." "By Babylon, what is probably meant is Rome" we read in the commentary to the Ecumenical Translation.

From this, the commentators then imagine themselves authorized to conclude that Mark, who was supposed to have been with Peter in Rome, was the Evangelist...One wonders whether it was not the same line of reasoning that led Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in circa 150 A.D., to ascribe this Gospel to Mark as 'Peter's interpreter' and the possible collaborator of Paul.

Seen from this point of view, the composition of Mark's Gospel could be placed after Peter's death, i.e. at between 65 and 70 A.D. for the Ecumenical Translation and circa 70 A.D. for O. Culmann.

The text itself unquestionably reveals a major flaw, it is written with a total disregard to chronology. Mark therefore places, at the beginning of his narration (1, 16–20), the episode of the four fishermen whom Jesus leads to follow him by simply saying “I will make you become fishers of men”, though they do not even know Him. The evangelist shows, among other things, a complete lack of plausibility.

As Father Roguet has said, Mark is 'a clumsy writer', 'the weakest of all the evangelists'; he hardly knows how to write a narrative. The commentator reinforces his observation by quoting a passage about how the twelve Apostles were selected. Here is the literal translation:

“And he went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he made that the twelve were to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons; and he made the twelve and imposed the name Simon on Peter” (Mark, 3, 13–16).

He contradicts Matthew and Luke, as has already been noted above, with regard to the sign of Jonah. On the subject of signs given by Jesus to men in the course of His mission Mark (8, 11–13) describes an episode that is hardly credible:

“The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And he left them, and getting into the boat again he departed to the other side.”

There can be no doubt that this is an affirmation coming from Jesus Himself about his intention not to commit any act which might appear supernatural. Therefore the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation, who are surprised that Luke says Jesus will only give one sign (the sign of Jonah; see Matthew's Gospel), consider it 'paradoxical' that Mark should say “no sign shall be given to this generation” seeing, as they note, the “miracles that Jesus himself gives as a sign” (Luke 7,22 and 11,20).

Mark's Gospel as a whole is officially recognised as being Canonic. All the same, the final section of Mark's Gospel (16, 19–20) is considered by modern authors to have been tacked on to the basic work: the Ecumenical Translation is quite explicit about this. This final section is not contained in the two oldest complete manuscripts of the Gospels, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus that date from the Fourth century A.D.

Culmann notes on this subject that: “More recent Greek manuscripts and certain versions at this point added a conclusion on appearances which is not drawn from Mark but from the other Gospels.” In fact, the versions of this added ending are very numerous. In the texts there are long and short versions (both are reproduced in the Bible, Revised Standard Version, 1952). Sometimes the long version has some

additional material.

Father Kannengiesser makes the following comments on the ending. “The last verses must have been suppressed when his work was officially received (or the popular version of it) in the community that guaranteed its validity. Neither Matthew, Luke nor a fortiori John saw the missing section. Nevertheless, the gap was unacceptable.

A long time afterwards, when the writings of Matthew, Luke and John, all of them similar, had been in circulation, a worthy ending to Mark was composed. Its elements were taken from sources throughout the other Gospels. It would be easy to recognize the pieces of the puzzle by enumerating Mark (16, 9–20). One would gain a more concrete idea of the free way in which the literary genre of the evangelic narration was handled until the beginnings of the Second century A.D.”

What a blunt admission is provided for us here, in the thoughts of a great theologian, that human manipulation exists in the texts of the Scriptures!

[The Gospel According To Luke](#)

For O. Culmann, Luke is a 'chronicler', and for Father Kannengiesser he is a 'true novelist'. In his prologue to Theophilus, Luke warns us that he, in his turn, following on from others who have written accounts concerning Jesus, is going to write a narrative of the same facts using the accounts and information of eye witnesses implying that he himself is not one, including information from the apostles' preaching. It is therefore to be a methodical piece of work which he introduces in the following terms:

“In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having informed myself about all things from their beginnings, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning things of which you have been informed.”

From the very first line one can see all that separates Luke from the 'scribbler' Mark to whose work we have just referred. Luke's Gospel is incontestably a literary work written in classical Greek free from any barbarisms.

Luke was a cultivated Gentile convert to Christianity. His attitude towards the Jews is immediately apparent. As O. Culmann points out, Luke leaves out Mark's most Judaic verses and highlights the Jews' incredulity at Jesus's words, throwing into relief his good relations with the Samaritans, whom the Jews detested. Matthew, on the other hand, has Jesus ask the apostles to flee from them.

This is just one of many striking examples of the fact that the evangelists make Jesus say whatever suits their own personal outlook. They probably do so with sincere conviction. They give us the version of Jesus's words that is adapted to the point of view of their own community. How can one deny in the face

of such evidence that the Gospels are 'combat writings' or 'writings suited to an occasion', as has been mentioned already? The comparison between the general tone of Luke's Gospel and Matthew's is in this respect a good demonstration.

Who was Luke? An attempt has been made to identify him with the physician of the same name referred to by Paul in several of his letters. The Ecumenical Translation notes that "several commentators have found the medical occupation of the author of this Gospel confirmed by the precision with which he describes the sick".

This assessment is in fact exaggerated out of all proportion. Luke does not properly speaking 'describe' things of this kind; "the vocabulary he uses is that of a cultivated man of his time". There was a Luke who was Paul's travelling companion, but was he the same person? O. Culmann thinks he was.

The date of Luke's Gospel can be estimated according to several factors: Luke used Mark's and Matthew's Gospels. From what we read in the Ecumenical Translation, it seems that he witnessed the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus's armies in 70 A.D. The Gospel probably dates from after this time. Present-day critics situate the time it was written at circa 80–90 A.D., but several place it at an even earlier date.

The various narrations in Luke show important differences when compared to his predecessors. An outline of this has already been given. The Ecumenical Translation indicates them on pages 181 et seq. O. Culmann, in his book, *The New Testament (Le Nouveau Testament)* page 18, cites descriptions in Luke's Gospel that are not to be found anywhere else. And they are not about minor points of detail.

The descriptions of Jesus's childhood are unique to Luke's Gospel. Matthew describes Jesus's childhood differently from Luke, and Mark does not mention it at all. Matthew and Luke both provide different genealogies of Jesus: the contradictions are so large and the improbabilities so great, from a scientific point of view, that a special chapter of this book has been devoted to the subject.

It is possible to explain why Matthew, who was addressing himself to Jews, should begin the genealogy at Abraham, and include David in it, and that Luke, as a converted Gentile, should want to go back even farther. We shall see however that the two genealogies contradict each other from David onwards. Jesus's mission is described differently on many points by Luke, Matthew and Mark.

An event of such great importance to Christians as the institution of the Eucharist gives rise to variations between Luke and the other two evangelists. [15](#) Father Roguet notes in his book *Initiation to the Gospel (Initiation à l'Évangile)* page 75, that the words used to institute the Eucharist are reported by Luke (22, 19–24) in a form very different from the wording in Matthew (26, 26–29) and in Mark (14, 22–24) which is almost identical. "On the contrary" he writes, "the wording transmitted by Luke is very similar to that evoked by Saint Paul" (*First Letter to the Corinthians*, 11, 23–25) .

As we have seen, in his Gospel, Luke expresses ideas on the subject of Jesus's Ascension which

contradict what he says in the Acts of the Apostles. He is recognized as their author and they form an integral part of the New Testament. In his Gospel he situates the Ascension on Easter Day, and in the Acts forty days later. We already know to what strange commentaries this contradiction has led Christian experts in exegesis.

Commentators wishing to be objective, such as those of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, have been obliged to recognise as a general rule the fact that for Luke “the main preoccupation was not to write facts corresponding to material accuracy”. When Father Kannengiesser compares the descriptions in the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke himself with the description of similar facts on Jesus raised from the dead by Paul, he pronounces the following opinion on Luke: “Luke is the most sensitive and literary of the four evangelists, he has all the qualities of a true novelist”.

The Gospel According To John

John's Gospel is radically different from the three others; to such an extent indeed that Father Roguet in his book *Initiation to the Gospel (Initiation à l'Évangile)*, having commented on the other three, immediately evokes a startling image for the fourth. He calls it, different world. It is indeed a unique book; different in the arrangement and choice of subject, description and speech; different in its style, geography, chronology; there are even differences in theological outlook (O. Culmann).

Jesus's words are therefore differently recorded by John from the other evangelists: Father Roguet notes on this that whereas the synoptics record Jesus's words in a style that is “striking, much nearer to the oral style”, in John all is meditation; to such an extent indeed that “one sometimes wonders if Jesus is still speaking or whether His ideas have not imperceptibly been extended by the Evangelist's own thoughts”.

Who was the author? This is a highly debated question and extremely varying opinions have been expressed on this subject. Tricot and Father Roguet belong to a camp that does not have the slightest misgivings: John's Gospel is the work of an eyewitness, its author is John, son of Zebedee and brother of James. Many details are known about this apostle and are set out in works for mass publication. Popular iconography puts him near Jesus, as in the Last Supper prior to the Passion. Who could imagine that John's Gospel was not the work of John the Apostle whose figure is so familiar?

The fact that the fourth Gospel was written so late is not a serious argument against this opinion. The definitive version was probably written around the end of the First century A.D. To situate the time it was written at sixty years after Jesus would be in keeping with an apostle who was very young at the time of Jesus and who lived to be almost a hundred.

Father Kannengiesser, in his study on the Resurrection, arrives at the conclusion that none of the New Testament authors, save Paul, can claim to have been eyewitnesses to Jesus's Resurrection. John nevertheless related the appearance to a number of the assembled apostles, of which he was probably

a member, in the absence of Thomas (20, 19–24), then eight days later to the full group of apostles (20, 25–29).

O. Culmann in his work *The New Testament* does not subscribe to this view. The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible states that the majority of critics do not accept the hypothesis that the Gospel was written by John, although this possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. Everything points however towards the fact that the text we know today had several authors: “It is probable that the Gospel as it stands today was put into circulation by the author's disciples who added chapter 21 and very likely several annotations (i.e. 4,2 and perhaps 4,1; 4,44; 7,37b; 11,2; 19,35). With regard to the story of the adulterous woman (7, 53–8, 11), everyone agrees that it is a fragment of unknown origin inserted later (but nevertheless belonging to canonic Scripture)”.

Passage 19, 35 appears as a 'signature' of an 'eyewitness' (O. Culmann), the only explicit signature in the whole of John's Gospel; but commentators believe that it was probably added later. Culmann thinks that latter additions are obvious in this Gospel; such as chapter 21 which is probably the work of a “disciple who may well have made slight alterations to the main body of the Gospel”.

It is not necessary to mention all the hypotheses suggested by experts in exegesis. The remarks recorded here made by the most eminent Christian writers on the questions of the authorship of the fourth Gospel are sufficient to show the extent of the confusion reigning on the subject of its authorship.

The historical value of John's stories has been contested to a great extent. The discrepancy between them and the other three Gospels is quite blatant. O. Culman offers an explanation for this; he sees in John a different theological point of view from the other evangelists. This aim “directs the choice of stories from the Logia¹⁶ recorded, as well as the way in which they are reproduced. Thus, the author often prolongs the lines and makes the historical Jesus say what the Holy Spirit Itself revealed to Him”. This, for the exegete in question, is the reason for the discrepancies.

It is of course quite conceivable that John, who was writing after the other evangelists, should have chosen certain stories suitable for illustrating his own theories. One should not be surprised by the fact that certain descriptions contained in the other Gospels are missing in John. The Ecumenical Translation picks out a certain number of such instances (page 282). Certain gaps hardly seem credible however, like the fact that the Institution of the Eucharist is not described.

It is unthinkable that an episode so basic to Christianity, one indeed that was to be the mainstay of its liturgy, i.e. the mass, should not be mentioned by John, the most pre–eminently meditative evangelist. The fact is, he limits himself, in the narrative of the supper prior to the Passion, to simply describing the washing of the disciples' feet, the prediction of Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial.

In contrast to this, there are stories which are unique to John and not present in the other three. The Ecumenical Translation mentions these (page 283). Here again, one could infer that the three authors did not see the importance in these episodes that John saw in them. It is difficult however not to be

taken aback when one finds in John a description of the appearance of Jesus raised from the dead to his disciples beside the Sea of Tiberias (John 21,1–14).

The description is nothing less than the reproduction (with numerous added details) of the miracle catch of fish which Luke (5, 1–11) presents as an episode that occurred during Jesus's life. In his description Luke alludes to the presence of the Apostle John who, as tradition has it, was the evangelist. Since this description in John's Gospel forms part of chapter 21, agreed to be a later addition, one can easily imagine that the reference to John's name in Luke could have led to its artificial inclusion in the fourth Gospel.

The necessity of transforming a description from Jesus's life to a posthumous description in no way prevented the evangelical text from being manipulated. Another important point on which John's Gospel differs from the other three is in the duration of Jesus's mission. Mark, Matthew and Luke place it over a period of one year. John spreads it over two years. O. Culmann notes this fact. On this subject the Ecumenical Translation expresses the following:

“The synoptics describe a long period in Galilee followed by a march that was more or less prolonged towards Judea, and finally a brief stay in Jerusalem. John, on the other hand, describes frequent journeys from one area to another and mentions a long stay in Judea, especially in Jerusalem (1, 19–51; 2, 13–3, 36; 5, 1–47; 14, 20–31). He mentions several Passover celebrations (2,13; 5,1; 6,4; 11,55) and thus suggests a ministry that lasted more than two years”. Which one of them should one believe—Mark, Matthew, Luke or John?

Sources Of The Gospels

The general outline that has been given here of the Gospels and which emerges from a critical examination of the texts tends to make one think of a literature which is “disjointed, with a plan that lacks continuity” and “seemingly insuperable contradictions”. These are the terms used in the judgement passed on them by the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible. It is important to refer to their authority because the consequences of an appraisal of this subject are extremely serious.

It has already been seen how a few notions concerning the religious history of the time when the Gospels were written helped to explain certain disconcerting aspects of this literature apparent to the thoughtful reader. It is necessary to continue, however, and ascertain what present-day works can tell us about the sources the Evangelists drew on when writing their texts. It is also interesting to see whether the history of the texts once they were established can help to explain certain aspects they present today.

The problem of sources was approached in a very simplistic fashion at the time of the Fathers of the Church. In the early centuries of Christianity, the only source available was the Gospel that the complete manuscripts provided first, i.e. Matthew's Gospel. The problem of sources only concerned Mark and

Luke because John constituted a quite separate case. Saint Augustine held that Mark, who appears second in the traditional order of presentation, had been inspired by Matthew and had summarized his work.

He further considered that Luke, who comes third in the manuscripts, had used data from both; his prologue suggests this, and has already been discussed. The experts in exegesis at this period were as able as we are to estimate the degree of corroboration between the texts and find a large number of verses common to two or three synoptics. Today, the commentators of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible provide the following figures:

verses common to all three synoptics -----	330
verses common to Mark and Matthew -----	178
verses common to Mark and Luke -----	100
verses common to Matthew and Luke -----	230

The verses unique to each of the first three Gospels are as follows: Matthew 330, Mark 53, and Luke 500. From the Fathers of the Church until the end of the Eighteenth century A.D., one and a half millenia passed without any new problems being raised on the sources of the evangelists: people continued to follow tradition. It was not until modern times that it was realized, on the basis of these data, how each evangelist had taken material found in the others and compiled his own specific narration guided by his own personal views.

Great weight was attached to actual collection of material for the narration. It came from the oral traditions of the communities from which it originated on the one hand, and from a common written Aramaic source that has not been rediscovered on the other. This written source could have formed a compact mass or have been composed of many fragments of different narrations used by each evangelist to construct his own original work.

More intensive studies in circa the last hundred years have led to theories which are more detailed and in time will become even more complicated. The first of the modern theories is the so-called 'Holtzmann Two Sources Theory', (1863). O. Culmann and the Ecumenical Translation explain that, according to this theory, Matthew and Luke may have been inspired by Mark on the one hand and on the other by a common document which has since been lost. The first two moreover each had his own sources.

Culmann criticises the above on the following points:

- Mark's work, used by both Luke and Matthew, was probably not the author's Gospel but an earlier version.
- The diagram does not lay enough emphasis on the oral tradition. This appears to be of paramount importance because it alone preserved Jesus's words and the descriptions of his mission during a period of thirty or forty years, as each of the Evangelists was only the spokesman for the Christian community which wrote down the oral tradition.

This is how it is possible to conclude that the Gospels we possess today are a reflection of what the early Christian communities knew of Jesus's life and ministry. They also mirror their beliefs and theological ideas, of which the evangelists were the spokesmen.

The latest studies in textual criticism on the sources of the Gospels have clearly shown an even more complicated formation process of the texts. A book by Fathers Benoit and Boismard, both professors at the Biblical School of Jerusalem (1972–1973), called the Synopsis of the Four Gospels (*Synapse des quatres Evangiles*) stresses the evolution of the text in stages parallel to the evolution of the tradition. This implies the consequences set out by Father Benoit in his introduction to Father Boismard's part of the work. He presents them in the following terms:

“...the wording and form of description that result from a long evolution of tradition are not as authentic as in the original. Some readers of this work will perhaps be surprised or embarrassed to learn that certain of Jesus's sayings, parables, or predictions of His destiny were not expressed in the way we read them today, but were altered and adapted by those who transmitted them to us. This may come as a source of amazement and even scandal to those not used to this kind of historical investigation.”

The alterations and adaptations to the texts made by those transmitting them to us were done in a way that Father Boismard explains by means of a highly complex diagram. It is a development of the so-called 'Two Sources Theory', and is the product of examination and comparison of the texts which it is not possible to summarize here. Those readers who are interested in obtaining further details should consult the original work published by Les Editions du Cerf, Paris.

Four basic documents, A, B, C and Q, represent the original sources of the Gospels (see general diagram). Page 76. Document A comes from a Judeo-Christian source. Matthew and Mark were inspired by it.

Document B is a reinterpretation of document A, for use in Pagan-Christian churches: all the evangelists were inspired by it except Matthew. Document C inspired Mark, Luke and John. Document Q constitutes the majority of sources common to Matthew and Luke; it is the, Common Document in the 'Two Sources' theory referred to earlier.

None of these basic documents led to the production of the definitive texts we know today. Between them and the final version lay the intermediate versions: Intermediate Matthew, Intermediate Mark, Intermediate Luke and Intermediate John. These four intermediate documents were to lead to the final versions of the four Gospels, as well as to inspire the final corresponding versions of other Gospels. One only has to consult the diagram to see the intricate relationships the author has revealed.

The results of this scriptural research are of great importance. They show how the Gospel texts not only have a history (to be discussed later) but also a 'pre-history', to use Father Boismard's expression. What is meant is that before the final versions appeared, they underwent alterations at the Intermediate Document stage. Thus it is possible to explain, for example, how a well-known story from Jesus's life,

such as the miracle catch of fish, is shown in Luke to be an event that happened during His life, and in John to be one of His appearances after His Resurrection.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that when we read the Gospel, we can no longer be at all sure that we are reading Jesus's word. Father Benoit addresses himself to the readers of the Gospel by warning them and giving them the following compensation: "If the reader is obliged in more than one case to give up the notion of hearing Jesus's voice directly, he still hears the voice of the Church and he relies upon it as the divinely appointed interpreter of the Master who long ago spoke to us on earth and who now speaks to us in His glory".

How to reconcile this formal finding of the inauthenticity of certain texts with the sentence of the dogmatic constitution on the Divine Revelation of the Council of Vatican II which assures us on the contrary of a faithful transmission of the words of Jesus: "These our Gospels, which it (the Church) unhesitatingly confirms are historically authentic, faithfully transmit what Jesus, Son of God, actually did and taught during his life among men for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up into the heavens"? It is quite clear that the work of the Biblical School of Jerusalem flatly contradicts the Council's declaration.

M. E. Boismard, Synopsis of the four Gospels Synopse des quatre Evangiles, general diagram

Documents A, B, C, Q = Basic documents used in the compiling of the texts.

Intermediate = Intermediate version of the text.

History Of The Texts

One would be mistaken in thinking that once the Gospels were written they constituted the basic Scriptures of the newly born Christianity and that people referred to them the same way they referred to the Old Testament. At that time, the foremost authority was the oral tradition as a vehicle for Jesus's words and the teachings of the apostles. The first writings to circulate were Paul's letters and they occupied a prevalent position long before the Gospels.

They were, after all, written several decades earlier. It has already been shown, that contrary to what certain commentators are still writing today, before 140 A.D. there was no witness to the knowledge that a collection of Gospel writings existed. It was not until circa 170 A.D. that the four Gospels acquired the status of canonic literature.

In the early days of Christianity, many writings on Jesus were in circulation. They were not subsequently retained as being worthy of authenticity and the Church ordered them to be hidden, hence their name 'Apocrypha'. Some of the texts of these works have been well preserved because they "benefited from the fact that they were generally valued", to quote the Ecumenical Translation. The same was true for the Letter of Barnabas, but unfortunately others were "more brutally thrust aside" and only fragments of them remain.

They were considered to be the messengers of error and were removed from the sight of the faithful. Works such as the Gospels of the Nazarenes, the Gospels of the Hebrews and the Gospels of the Egyptians, known through quotations taken from the Fathers of the Church, were nevertheless fairly closely related to the canonic Gospels. The same holds good for Thomas's Gospel and Barnabas's Gospel.

Some of these apocryphal writings contain imaginary details, the product of popular fantasy. Authors of works on the Apocrypha also quote with obvious satisfaction passages which are literally ridiculous. Passages such as these are however to be found in all the Gospels. One has only to think of the imaginary description of events that Matthew claims took place at Jesus's death. It is possible to find passages lacking seriousness in all the early writings of Christianity: One must be honest enough to admit this.

The abundance of literature concerning Jesus led the Church to make certain excisions while the latter was in the process of becoming organized. Perhaps a hundred Gospels were suppressed. Only four were retained and put on the official list of neo-Testament writings making up what is called the 'Canon'.

In the middle of the Second century A.D., Marcion of Sinope put heavy pressure on the ecclesiastic authorities to take a stand on this. He was an ardent enemy of the Jews and at that time rejected the whole of the Old Testament and everything in writings produced after Jesus that seemed to him too close to the Old Testament or to come from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Marcion only acknowledged the value of Luke's Gospel because, he believed Luke to be the spokesman of Paul and his writings.

The Church declared Marcion a heretic and put into its canon all the Letters of Paul, but included the other Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They also added several other works such as the Acts of the Apostles. The official list nevertheless varies with time during the first centuries of Christianity. For a while, works that were later considered not to be valid (i.e. Apocrypha) figured in it, while other works contained in today's New Testament Canon were excluded from it at this time.

These hesitations lasted until the Councils of Hippo Regius in 393 and Carthage in 397. The four Gospels always figured in it however. One may join Father Boismard in regretting the disappearance of a vast quantity of literature declared apocryphal by the Church although it was of historical interest. The above author indeed gives it a place in his Synopsis of the Four Gospels alongside that of the official Gospels. He notes that these books still existed in libraries near the end of the Fourth century A.D.

This was the century that saw things put into serious order. The oldest manuscripts of the Gospels date from this period. Documents prior to this, i.e. papyri from the Third century A.D. and one possibly dating from the Second, only transmit fragments to us. The two oldest parchment manuscripts are Greek, Fourth century A.D. They are the Codex Vaticanus, preserved in the Vatican Library and whose place of discovery is unknown, and the Codex Sinaiticus, which was discovered on Mount Sinai and is now preserved in the British Museum, London. The second contains two apocryphal works.

According to the Ecumenical Translation, two hundred and fifty other known parchments exist throughout the world, the last of these being from the Eleventh century A.D. “Not all the copies of the New Testament that have come down to us are identical” however, “On the contrary, it is possible to distinguish differences of varying degrees of importance between them, but however important they may be, there is always a large number of them. Some of these only concern differences of grammatical detail, vocabulary or word order. Elsewhere however, differences between manuscripts can be seen which affect the meaning of whole passages”.

If one wishes to see the extent of textual differences, one only has to glance through the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.¹⁷ This work contains a so-called 'middle-of-the-road' Greek text. It is a text of synthesis with notes containing all the variations found in the different versions.

The authenticity of a text, and of even the most venerable manuscript, is always open to debate. The *Codex Vaticanus* is a good example of this. The facsimile reproductions edited by the Vatican City, 1965, contains an accompanying note from its editors informing us that “several centuries after it was copied (believed to have been in circa the Tenth or Eleventh century), a scribe inked over all the letters except those he thought were a mistake”.

There are passages in the text where the original letters in light brown still show through, contrasting visibly with the rest of the text which is in dark brown. There is no indication that it was a faithful restoration. The note states moreover that “the different hands that corrected and annotated the manuscript over the centuries have not yet been definitively discerned; a certain number of corrections were undoubtedly made when the text was inked over.” In all the religious manuals the text is presented as a Fourth century copy. One has to go to sources at the Vatican to discover that various hands may have altered the text centuries later.

One might reply that other texts may be used for comparison, but how does one choose between variations that change the meaning? It is a well-known fact that a very old scribe's correction can lead to the definitive reproduction of the corrected text. We shall see further on how a single word in a passage from John concerning the Paraclete radically alters its meaning and completely changes its sense when viewed from a theological point of view. O. Culmann, in his book, *The New Testament*, writes the following on the subject of variations:

“Sometimes the latter are the result of inadvertent flaws: the copier misses a word out, or conversely writes it twice, or a whole section of a sentence is carelessly omitted because in the manuscript to be copied it appeared between two identical words. Sometimes it is a matter of deliberate corrections, either the copier has taken the liberty of correcting the text according to his own ideas or he has tried to bring it into line with a parallel text in a more or less skillful attempt to reduce the number of discrepancies. As, little by little, the New Testament writings broke away from the rest of early Christian literature, and came to be regarded as Holy Scripture, so the copiers became more and more hesitant about taking the same liberties as their predecessors: they thought they were copying the authentic text, but in fact wrote down

the variations. Finally, a copier sometimes wrote annotations in the margin to explain an obscure passage. The following copier, thinking that the sentence he found in the margin had been left out of the passage by his predecessor, thought it necessary to include the margin notes in the text. This process often made the new text even more obscure.”

The scribes of some manuscripts sometimes took exceedingly great liberties with the texts. This is the case of one of the most venerable manuscripts after the two referred to above, the Sixth century Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis. The scribe probably noticed the difference between Luke's and Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, so he put Matthew's genealogy into his copy of Luke, but as the second contained fewer names than the first, he padded it out with extra names (without balancing them up).

Is it possible to say that the Latin translations, such as Saint Jerome's Sixth century Vulgate, or older translations (Vetus Itala), or Syriac and Coptic translations are any more faithful than the basic Greek manuscripts? They might have been made from manuscripts older than the ones referred to above and subsequently lost to the present day. We just do not know.

It has been possible to group the bulk of these versions into families all bearing a certain number of common traits. According to O. Culmann, one can define:

- A so-called Syrian text, whose constitution could have led to the majority of the oldest Greek manuscripts; this text was widely disseminated throughout Europe from the Sixteenth century A.D. onwards thanks to printing, the specialists say that it is probably the worst text.
- A so-called Western text, with old Latin versions and the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis which is in both Greek and Latin; according to the Ecumenical Translation, one of its characteristics is a definite tendency to provide explanations, paraphrases, inaccurate data and 'harmonizations'.
- The so-called Neutral text, containing the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, is said to have a fairly high level of purity; modern editions of the New Testament readily follow it, although it too has its flaws (Ecumenical Translation).

All that modern textual criticism can do in this respect is to try and reconstitute “a text which has the most likelihood of coming near to the original. In any case, there can be no hope of going back to the original text itself.” (Ecumenical Translation)

4) The Gospels and Modern Science

The General Genealogies of Jesus

The Gospels contain very few passages which give rise to a confrontation with modern scientific data. Firstly however, there are many descriptions referring to miracles which hardly lend themselves to scientific comment. The miracles concern people, the healing of the sick (the insane, blind, paralytic ; the

healing of lepers, resurrection of Lazarus) as well as the purely material phenomena that lie outside the laws of nature (the description of Jesus walking on water that held him up, the changing of the water into wine).

Sometimes a natural phenomenon is seen from an unusual angle by virtue of the fact that the time element is very short: the immediate calming of the storm, the instantaneous withering of the fig tree, the miracle catch of fish, as if all the fish in the sea had come together at exactly the place where the nets were cast.

God intervenes in His Omnipotent Power in all these episodes. One need not be surprised by what He is able to achieve; by human standards it is stupendous, but for Him it is not. This does not at all mean that a believer should forget science. A belief in divine miracles and in science is quite compatible: one is on a divine scale, the other on a human one.

Personally, I am very willing to believe that Jesus cured a leper, but I cannot accept the fact that a text is declared authentic and inspired by God when I read that only twenty generations existed between the first man and Abraham. Luke says this in his Gospel (3, 23–28). We shall see in a moment the reasons that show why Luke's text, like the Old Testament text on the same theme, is quite simply a product of human imagination.

The Gospels (like the Qur'an) give us the same description of Jesus's biological origins. The formation of Jesus in the maternal uterus occurred in circumstances which lay outside the laws of nature common to all human beings. The ovule produced by the mother's ovary did not need to join with a spermatozoon, which should have come from his father, to form the embryo and hence a viable infant. The phenomenon of the birth of a normal individual without the fertilizing action of the male is called 'parthenogenesis'.

In the animal kingdom, parthenogenesis can be observed under certain conditions. This is true for various insects, certain invertebrates and, very occasionally, a select breed of bird. By way of experiment, it has been possible, for example, in certain mammals (female rabbits), to obtain the beginnings of a development of the ovule into an embryo at an extremely rudimentary stage without any intervention of spermatozoon.

It was not possible to go any further however and an example of complete parthenogenesis, whether experimental or natural, is unknown. Jesus is a unique case. Mary was a virgin mother. She preserved her virginity and did not have any children apart from Jesus. Jesus is a biological exception. [18](#)

The Genealogies Of Jesus

The two genealogies contained in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels give rise to problems of verisimilitude, and conformity with scientific data, and hence authenticity. These problems are a source of great embarrassment to Christian commentators because the latter refuse to see in them what is obviously the

product of human imagination. The authors of the Sacerdotal text of Genesis, Sixth century B.C., had already been inspired by imagination for their genealogies of the first men. It again inspired Matthew and Luke for the data they did not take from the Old Testament.

One must straight away note that the male genealogies have absolutely no relevance to Jesus. Were one to give a genealogy to Mary's only son, who was without a biological father, it would have to be the genealogy of his mother Mary. Here is the text of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 1952: The genealogy according to Matthew is at the beginning of his Gospel:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac
Isaac was the father of Jacob
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers
Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar
Perez was the father of Hezron
Hezron was the father of Ram
Ram was the father of Amminadab
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon
Nahshon was the father of Salmon
Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab
Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth
Obed was the father of Jesse
Jesse was the father of David the king
David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah
Solomon was the father of Rehoboam
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah
Abijah was the father of Asa
Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat
Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram
Joram was the father of Uzziah
Uzziah was the father of Jotham
Jotham was the father of Ahaz
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah
Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh
Manasseh was the father of Amos
Amos was the father of Josiah
Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers

At the time of the deportation to Babylon.

After the deportation to Babylon.

Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel
Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud
Abiud was the father of Eliakim
Eliakim was the father of Azor
Azor was the father of Zadok
Zadok was the father of Achim

Achim	was the father of Eliud
Eliud	was the father of Eleazar
Eleazar	was the father of Matthan
Matthan	was the father of Jacob
Jacob	was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who was called Christ

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations”. (Matthew, I, 1–17)

The genealogy given by Luke (3, 23–38) is different from Matthew. The text reproduced here is from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible: “Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ami, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” The genealogies appear more clearly when presented in two tables, one showing the genealogy before David and the other after him.

Genealogy of Jesus, before David:

According to Matthew:

According to Luke:

1. Adam
2. Seth
3. Enos
4. Cainan
5. Mahalaleel
6. Jared
7. Enoch
8. Methuselah
9. Lamech
10. Noah
11. Shem
12. Arphaxad
13. Cainan
14. Shelah
15. Eber
16. Peleg
17. Reu
18. Serug
19. Nahor
20. Terah
21. Abraham
22. Isaac
23. Jacob
24. Judah
25. Perez
26. Hezron
27. Arni
28. Admin
29. Amminadab
30. Nahshon
31. Sala
32. Boaz
33. Obed
34. Jesse
35. David

(Matthew does not mention any name before Abraham)

1. Abraham
2. Isaac
3. Jacob
4. Judah
5. Perez
6. Hezron
7. Ram
8. Amminadab
9. Nahshon
10. Salmon
11. Boaz
12. Obed
13. Jesse
14. David

Genealogy of Jesus, after David:

According to Matthew According to Luke

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| | 35. David |
| | 36. Nathan |
| | 37. Mattatha |
| | 38. Menna |
| | 39. Melea |
| | 40. Eliakim |
| | 41. Jonam |
| 14. David | 42. Joseph |
| 15. Solomon | 43. Judah |
| 16. Rehoboam | 44. Simeon |
| 17. Abijah | 45. Levi |
| 18. Am | 46. Matthat |
| 19. Jehoshaphat | 47. Jorim |
| 20. Joram | 48. Eliezer |
| 21. Uzziah | 49. Joshua |
| 22. Jotham | 50. Er |
| 23. Ahaz | 51. Elmadam |
| 24. Hezekiah | 52. Cosam |
| 25. Manasseh | 53. Addi |
| 26. Amos | 54. Melchi |
| 27. Josiah | 55. Neri |
| 28. Jechoniah | 56. Shealtiel |
| Deportation to Babylon | 57. Zerubbabel |
| 29. Shealtiel | 58. Rhesa |
| 30. Zerubbabel | 59. Joanan |
| 31. Abiud | 60. Joda |
| 32. Eliakim | 61. Josech |
| 33. Azor | 62. Semein |
| 34. Zadok | 63. Mattathias |
| 35. Achim | 64. Maath |
| 36. Eliud | 65. Naggai |
| 37. Eleazar | 66. Esli |
| 38. Matthan | 67. Nahum |
| 39. Jacob | 68. Amos |
| 40. Joseph | 69. Mattathias |
| 41. Jesus | 70. Joseph |
| | 71. Jannai |
| | 72. Melchi |
| | 73. Levi |
| | 74. Matthat |
| | 75. Heli |
| | 76. Joseph |
| | 77. Jesus |

Variations In The Manuscripts And In Relation To The Old Testament.

Apart from variations in spelling, the following must be mentioned:

a) Matthew's Gospel

The genealogy has disappeared from the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, a very important Six century manuscript in both Greek and Latin. It has completely disappeared from the Greek text and also a large part of the Latin text. It may quite simply be that the first pages were lost. One must note here the great

liberties Matthew has taken with the Old Testament. He has pared down the genealogies for the sake of a strange numerical demonstration (which, in the end, he does not give, as we shall see).

b) Luke's Gospel

Before Abraham: Luke mentions 20 names; the Old Testament only mentions 19 (see table of Adam's descendants in the Old Testament section of this work). After Arphaxad (No. 12), Luke has added a person called Cainan (No. 13), who is not mentioned in Genesis as the son of Arphaxad.

From Abraham to David: 14 to 16 names are found according to the manuscripts.

From David to Jesus. The most important variation is the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis which attributes to Luke a whimsical genealogy taken from Matthew and to which the scribe has added five names. Unfortunately, the genealogy of Matthew's Gospel has disappeared from this manuscript, so that comparison is no longer possible.

Critical Examination Of The Texts

We are here faced with two different genealogies having one essential point in common, they both pass via Abraham and David. To make this examination easier, we shall separate the whole into three critical sections:

- From Adam to Abraham.
- From Abraham to David.
- From David to Jesus.

The Period from Adam to Abraham

Matthew began his genealogy with Abraham so we are not concerned with his text here. Luke alone provides information on Abraham's ancestors going back to Adam: 20 names, 19 of which are to be found in Genesis (chapters 4, 5 and 11), as has already been stated.

Is it possible to believe that only 19 or 20 generations of human beings existed before Abraham? The problem has been examined in the discussion of the Old Testament. If one looks at the table of Adam's descendants, based on Genesis and giving figures for the time element contained in the Biblical text, one can see that roughly nineteen centuries passed between man's appearance on earth and the birth of Abraham.

Today it is estimated that Abraham Was alive in circa 1850 B.C. and it has been deduced from this that the information provided by the Old Testament places man's appearance on earth at roughly thirty-eight centuries B.C. Luke was obviously guided by these data for his Gospel. He expresses a blatant untruth

for having copied them down and we have already seen the decisive historical arguments leading to this statement.

The idea that Old Testament data are unacceptable in the present day is duly admitted; they belong to the 'obsolete' material referred to by the Second Vatican Council. The fact, however that the Gospels take up the same scientifically incompatible data is an extremely serious observation which may be used to oppose those who defend the historical accuracy of the Gospel texts.

Commentators have quickly sensed this danger. They try to get round the difficulty by saying that it is not a complete genealogical tree, that the evangelist has missed names out. They claim that this was done quite deliberately, and that his sole "intention was to establish the broad lines or essential elements of a line of descent based on historical reality." [19](#)

There is nothing in the texts that permits them to form this hypothesis. In the text it says quite clearly: A was the father of B, or B was the son of A. For the part preceding Abraham in particular, the evangelist draws moreover on the Old Testament where the genealogies are set out in the following form: When X had lived n years, he became the father of Y... When Y had lived n years, he became the father of Z..., there is therefore no break. The part of Jesus's genealogy according to Luke, which precedes Abraham, is not acceptable in the light of modern knowledge.

The Period from Abraham to David

Here the two genealogies tally (or almost), excepting one or two names: the difference may be explained by copiers' errors. Does this mean that the evangelists are to be considered accurate? History situates David at circa 1000 B.C. and Abraham at 1800–1860 B.C.: 14 to 16 generations for roughly eight centuries. Can one believe this? One might say that for this period the Gospel texts are at the very limit of the admissible.

The Post-David Period

It is a great pity, but unfortunately the texts no longer tally at all when it comes to establishing Joseph's line from David, and figuratively speaking, Jesus's, for the Gospel. Leaving aside the obvious falsification in the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis concerning Luke, let us now compare what the two most venerable manuscripts have to offer: the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus. In the genealogy according to Luke 42 names are placed after David (No. 35) down to Jesus (No. 77). In the genealogy according to Matthew 27 are mentioned after David (No. 14) down to Jesus (No. 41). The number of (fictitious) ancestors given to Jesus after David is therefore different in the two Gospels. The names themselves are different as well.

This is not all. Matthew tells us that he discovered how Jesus's genealogy split up after Abraham into three groups of 14 names; first group from Abraham to David; second from David to the deportation to Babylon; third from the deportation to Jesus. His text does indeed contain 14 names in the first two

groups, but in the third, from the deportation to Jesus, there are only 13 and not 14, as expected; the table shows that Shealthiel is No. 29 and Jesus No. 41. There is no variation of Matthew that gives 14 names for this group.

To enable himself to have 14 names in his second group, Matthew takes very great liberties with the Old Testament text. The names of the first six descendants of David (No. 15 to 20) tally with the data in the Old Testament, but the three descendants of Ioram (No. 20), given in Chronicles 11 of the Bible as Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, are suppressed by Matthew. Elsewhere, Jechoniah (No. 28) is for Matthew the son of Josiah, although Kings II of the Bible tells us that Eliakim comes between Josiah and Jechoniah.

It may be seen from this that Matthew has altered the genealogical lines in the Old Testament to present an artificial group of 14 names between David and the deportation to Babylon. There is also the fact that one name is missing in Matthew's third group, so that none of the present-day Gospel texts contains the 42 names mentioned. What is surprising is not so much the existence of the omission itself (explained perhaps by a very old scribe's error that was subsequently perpetuated), but the almost total silence of commentators on this subject. How can one miss this omission?

W. Trilling breaks this pious conspiracy of silence in his book *The Gospel According to Matthew* (*L'Evangile selon Matthieu*)²⁰ by devoting one line to it. It is a fact which is of considerable importance because the commentators of this Gospel, including the Ecumenical Translation and Cardinal Daniélou among others, stress the great symbolical significance of Matthew's 3 x 14. This significance was so important for the evangelist that he suppressed Biblical names without hesitation to arrive at his numerical demonstration.

To make this hold good, commentators will, no doubt, construct some reassuring statements of an apologetic nature, justifying the fact that names have been craftily suppressed and carefully avoiding the omission that undermines the whole point of what the evangelist was trying to show.

Commentaries Of Modern Experts In Exegesis

In his book *The Gospels of Childhood* (1967) *Les Evangiles de l'Enfance*)²¹, Cardinal Daniélou invests Matthew's 'numerical schematisation' with a symbolic value of paramount importance since it is this that establishes Jesus's ancestry, which is asserted also by Luke. For him Luke and Matthew are 'historians' who have completed their 'historical investigations', and the, 'genealogy' has been 'taken down from the archives of Jesus family'.

It must be added here that the archives have never been found.²² Cardinal Daniélou condemns out of hand anyone who criticizes his point of view. "It is the Western mentality, ignorance of Judeo-Christianity and the absence of a Semitic outlook that have made so many experts in exegesis lose their way when interpreting the Gospels.

They have projected their own categories onto them: (sic) Platonic, Cartesian, Hegelian and Heideggerian. It is easy to see why everything is mixed up in their minds.” Plato, Descartes, Hegel and Heidegger obviously have nothing to do with the critical attitude one may have towards these whimsical genealogies.

In his search for the meaning of Matthew's 3 x 14, the author expands on strange suppositions. They are worth quoting here: “What may be meant are the common ten weeks of the Jewish Apocalypse. The first three, corresponding to the time from Adam to Abraham, would have been subtracted; seven weeks of years would then remain, the first six would correspond to the six times seven representing the three groups of fourteen and leaving the seventh, started by Christ with whom the seventh age of the world begins.” Explanations like this are beyond comment!

The commentators of the Ecumenical Translation, New Testament, also give us numerical variations of an apologetic nature which are equally unexpected, for Matthew's 3 x 14:

- 14 could be the numerical total of the 3 consonants in the Hebrew name David (D=4, V= 6), hence $4+6+4= 14$.
- $3 \times 14 = 6 \times 7$ and “Jesus came at the end of the sixth week of Holy history beginning with Abraham.”

For Luke, this translation gives 77 names from Adam to Jesus, allowing the number 7 to come up again, this time by dividing 77 by 7 ($7 \times 11 = 77$). It is quite apparent that for Luke the number of variations where words are added or subtracted is such that a list of 77 names is completely artificial. It does however have the advantage of adapting itself to these numerical games.

The genealogies of Jesus as they appear in the Gospels may perhaps be the subject that has led Christian commentators to perform their most characteristic feats of dialectic acrobatics, on par indeed with Luke's and Matthew's imagination.

5) Contradictions and Improbabilities in the Descriptions

Each single the four Gospels contains a large number of descriptions of events that may be unique to one Gospel or common to several if not all of them. When they are unique to one Gospel, they sometimes raise serious problems. Thus, in the case of an event of considerable importance, it is surprising to find the event mentioned by only one evangelist; Jesus's Ascension into heaven on the day of Resurrection, for example. Elsewhere, numerous events are differently described, sometimes very differently indeed, by two or more evangelists.

Christians are very often astonished at the existence of such contradictions between the Gospels, if they ever discover them. This is because they have been repeatedly told in tones of the greatest assurance that the New Testament authors were the eyewitnesses of the events they describe! Some of these disturbing improbabilities and contradictions have been shown in previous chapters. It is however the

later events of Jesus's life in particular, along with the events following the Passion, that form the subject of varying or contradictory descriptions.

Descriptions Of The Passion

Father Roguet himself notes that Passover is placed at different times in relation to Jesus's Last Supper with His disciples in the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel. John places the Last Supper 'before the Passover celebrations' and the other three evangelists place it during the celebrations themselves.

Obvious improbabilities emerge from this divergence: a certain episode becomes impossible because of the position of Passover in relation to it. When one knows the importance it had in the Jewish liturgy and the importance of the meal where Jesus bids farewell to his disciples, how is it possible to believe that the memory of one event in relation to the other could have faded to such an extent in the tradition recorded later by the evangelists?

On a more general level, the descriptions of the Passion differ from one evangelist to another, and more particularly between John and the first three Gospels. The Last Supper and the Passion in John's Gospel are both very long, twice as long as in Mark and Luke, and roughly one and a half times as long as Matthew's text. John records a very long speech of Jesus to His disciples which takes up four chapters (14 to 17) of his Gospel.

During this crowning speech, Jesus announces that he will leave his last instructions and gives them his last spiritual testament. There is no trace of this in the other Gospels. The same process can work the other way however; Matthew, Luke and Mark all relate Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, but John does not mention it.

John's Gospel Does Not Describe The Institution Of The Eucharist

The most important fact that strikes the reader of the Passion in John's Gospel is that he makes absolutely no reference to the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper of Jesus with His Apostles. There is not a single Christian who does not know the iconography of the Last Supper, where Jesus is for the last time seated among His Apostles at table.

The world's greatest painters have always represented this final gathering with John sitting near Jesus, John whom we are accustomed to considering as the author of the Gospel bearing that name.

However astonishing it may appear to many, the majority of specialists do not consider John to have been the author of the fourth Gospel, nor does the latter mention the institution of the Eucharist. The consecration of the bread and wine, which become the body and blood of Jesus, is the most essential act of the Christian liturgy.

The other evangelists refer to it, even if they do so in differing terms, as we have noted above. John

does not say anything about it. The four evangelists' descriptions have only two single points in common: the prediction of Peter's denial and of the betrayal by one of the Apostles (Judas Iscariot is only actually named in Matthew and John). John's description is the only one which refers to Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the beginning of the meal.

How can this omission in John's Gospel be explained? If one reasons objectively, the hypothesis that springs immediately to mind (always supposing the story as told by the other three evangelists is exact) is that a passage of John's Gospel relating the said episode was lost. This is not the conclusion arrived at by Christian commentators.

Let us now examine some of the positions they have adopted. In his *Little Dictionary of the New Testament* (*Petit Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament*) A. Tricot makes the following entry under Last Supper (*Cène*). "Last meal Jesus partook of with the Twelve Disciples during which he instituted the Eucharist. It is described in the Synoptic Gospels" (references to Matthew, Mark and Luke). "...and the fourth Gospel gives us further details" (references to John).

In his entry on the Eucharist (*Eucharistie*), the same author writes the following. "The institution of the Eucharist is briefly related in the first three Gospels: it was an extremely important part of the Apostolic system of religious instruction. Saint John has added an indispensable complement to these brief descriptions in his account of Jesus's speech on the bread of life (6, 32–58)." The commentator consequently fails to mention that John does not describe Jesus's institution of the Eucharist.

The author speaks of 'complementary details', but they are not complementary to the institution of the Eucharist (he basically describes the ceremony of the washing of the Apostles' feet). The commentator speaks of the 'bread of life', but it is Jesus's reference (quite separate from the Last Supper) to God's daily gift of manna in the wilderness at the time of the Jews' exodus led by Moses.

John is the only one of the evangelists who records this allusion. In the following passage of his Gospel, John does, of course, mention Jesus's reference to the Eucharist in the form of a digression on the bread, but no other evangelist speaks of this episode. One is surprised therefore both by John's silence on what the other three evangelists relate and their silence on what, according to John, Jesus is said to have predicted.

The commentators of the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, New Testament, do actually acknowledge this omission in John's Gospel. This is the explanation they come up with to account for the fact that the description of the institution of the Eucharist is missing: "In general, John is not very interested in the traditions and institutions of a bygone Israel. This may have dissuaded him from showing the establishment of the Eucharist in the Passover liturgy".

Are we seriously to believe that it was a lack of interest in the Jewish Passover liturgy that led John not to describe the institution of the most fundamental act, in the liturgy of the new religion?

The experts in exegesis are so embarrassed by the problem that theologians rack their brains to find prefigurations or equivalents of the Eucharist in episodes of Jesus's life recorded by John. O. Culmann for example, in his book, *The New Testament (Le Nouveau Testament)*, states that “the changing of the water into wine and the feeding of the five thousand prefigure the sacrament of the Last Supper (the 'Eucharist')”. It is to be remembered that the water was changed into wine because the latter had failed at a wedding in Cana. (This was Jesus's first miracle, described by John in chapter 2, 1–12. He is the only evangelist to do so).

In the case of the feeding of the five thousand, this was the number of people who were fed on 5 barley loaves that were miraculously multiplied. When describing these events, John makes no special comment, and the parallel exists only in the mind of this expert in exegesis. One can no more understand the reasoning behind the parallel he draws than his view that the curing of a paralyzed man and of a man born blind 'predict the baptism' and that 'the water and blood issuing from Jesus's side after his death unite in a single fact' a reference to both baptism and the Eucharist.

Another parallel drawn by the same expert in exegesis concerning the Eucharist is quoted by Father Roguet in his book *Initiation to the Gospel (Initiation à l'Évangile)*. “Some theologians, such as Oscar Culmann, see in the description of the washing of the feet before the Last Supper a symbolical equivalent to the institution of the Eucharist...” It is difficult to see the cogency of all the parallels that commentators have invented to help people accept more readily the most disconcerting omission in John's Gospel.

Appearances Of Jesus Raised From The Dead

A prime example of imagination at work in a description has already been given in the portrayal of the abnormal phenomena said to have accompanied Jesus's death given in Matthew's Gospel. The events that followed the Resurrection provided material for contradictory and even absurd descriptions on the part of all the evangelists. Father Roguet in his *Initiation to the Gospel (Initiation à l'Évangile)*, page 182, provides examples of the confusion, disorder and contradiction reigning in these writings:

“The list of women who came to the tomb is not exactly the same in each of the three Synoptic Gospels. In John only one woman came: Mary Magdalene. She speaks in the plural however, as if she were accompanied: 'we do not know where they have laid him.' In Matthew the Angel predicts to the women that they will see Jesus in Galilee. A few moments later however, Jesus joins them beside the tomb.

Luke probably sensed this difficulty and altered the source a little. The Angel says: “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee...” In fact, Luke only actually refers to three appearances...” John places two appearances at an interval of one week in the upper room at Jerusalem and the third beside the lake, in Galilee therefore, Matthew records only one appearance in Galilee.”

The commentator excludes from this examination the last section of Mark's Gospel concerning the

appearances because he believes this was 'probably written by another hand'. All these facts contradict the mention of Jesus's appearances, contained in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (15, 5–7), to more than five hundred people at once, to James, to all the Apostles and, of course, to Paul himself.

After this, it is surprising therefore to find that Father Roguet stigmatizes, in the same book, the 'grandiloquent and puerile phantasms of certain Apocrypha' when talking of the Resurrection. Surely these terms are perfectly appropriate to Matthew and Paul themselves: they are indeed in complete contradiction with the other Apostles on the subject of the appearances of Jesus raised from the dead.

Apart from this, there is a contradiction between Luke's description, in the Acts of the Apostles, of Jesus's appearance to Paul and what Paul himself succinctly tells us of it. This has led Father Kannengiesser in his book, *Faith in the Resurrection, Resurrection of Faith (Foi en la Resurrection, Resurrection de la Foi)*, 1974, to stress that Paul, who was 'the sole eyewitness of Christ's resurrection, whose voice comes directly to us from his writings²³, never speaks of his personal encounter with Him Who was raised from the dead'... except for three extremely, 'he refrains moreover from describing discreet references...it.'

The contradiction between Paul, who was the sole eyewitness but is dubious, and the Gospels is quite obvious. O. Culmann in his book, *The New Testament (Le Nouveau Testament)*, notes the contradictions between Luke and Matthew. The first situates Jesus's appearances in Judea, the second in Galilee.

One should also remember the Luke–John contradiction. John (21, 1–14) relates an episode in which Jesus raised from the dead appears to the fishermen beside the Sea of Tiberias; they subsequently catch so many fish that they are unable to bring them all in. This is nothing other than a repetition of the miracle catch of fish episode which took place at the same spot and was also described by Luke (5, 1–11), as an event of Jesus's life.

When talking of these appearances, Father Roguet assures us in his book that 'their disjointed, blurred and disordered character inspires confidence' because all these facts go to show that there was no connivance between the evangelists²⁴, otherwise they would definitely have coordinated their stories. This is indeed a strange line of argument. In actual fact, they could all have recorded, with complete sincerity, traditions of the communities which (unknown to them) all contained elements of fantasy. This hypothesis is unavoidable when one is faced with so many contradictions and improbabilities in the description of events.

Ascension Of Jesus

Contradictions are present until the very end of the descriptions because neither John nor Matthew refer to Jesus's Ascension. Mark and Luke are the only one to speak of it. For Mark (16, 19), Jesus was 'taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God' without any precise date being given in relation to

His Resurrection. It must however be noted that the final passage of Mark containing this sentence is, for Father Roguet, an 'invented' text, although for the Church it is canonic!

There remains Luke, the only evangelist to provide an undisputed text of the Ascension episode (24, 51): 'he parted from them²⁵ and was carried up into heaven'. The evangelist places the event at the end of the description of the Resurrection and appearance to the eleven Apostles: the details of the Gospel description imply that the Ascension took place on the day of the Resurrection. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke (whom everybody believes to be their author) describes in chapter 1, 3 Jesus's appearance to the Apostles, between the Passion and the Ascension, in the following terms:

"To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God." The placing of the Christian festival of the Ascension at forty days after Easter, the Festival of the Resurrection, originates from this passage in the Acts of the Apostles. The date is therefore set in contradiction to Luke's Gospel: none of the other Gospel texts say anything to justify this in a different way.

The Christian who is aware of this situation is highly disconcerted by the obviousness of the contradiction. The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, New Testament, acknowledges the facts but does not expand on the contradiction. It limits itself to noting the relevance the forty days may have had to Jesus's mission. Commentators wishing to explain everything and reconcile the irreconcilable provide some strange interpretations on this subject.

The Synopsis of the Four Gospels edited in 1972 by the Biblical School of Jerusalem (vol. 2, page 451) contains, for example, some very strange commentaries. The very word, Ascension is criticized as follows: "In fact there was no ascension in the actual physical sense because God is no more 'on high' than he is 'below'" (sic). It is difficult to grasp the sense of this comment because one wonders how Luke could otherwise have expressed himself.

Elsewhere, the author of this commentary sees a 'literary artifice' in the fact that "in the Acts, the Ascension is said to have taken place forty days after the resurrection". This 'artifice' is "intended to stress the notion that the period of Jesus's appearances on earth is at an end". He adds however, in relation to the fact that in Luke's Gospel, "the event is situated during the evening of Easter Sunday, because the evangelist does not put any breaks between the various episodes recorded following the discovery of the empty tomb on the morning of the resurrection...", "...surely this is also a literary artifice, intended to allow a certain lapse of time before the appearance of Jesus raised from the dead." (sic)

The feeling of embarrassment that surrounds these interpretations is even more obvious in Father Roguet's book. He discerns not one, but two Ascensions! "Whereas from Jesus's point of view the Ascension coincides with the Resurrection, from the disciples' point of view it does not take place until Jesus ceases definitely to present Himself to them, so that the Spirit may be given to them and the period of the Church may begin." To those readers who are not quite able to grasp the theological

subtlety of his argument (which has absolutely no Scriptural basis whatsoever), the author issues the following general warning, which is a model of apologetical verbiage:

“Here, as in many similar cases, the problem only appears insuperable if one takes Biblical statements literally, and forgets their religious significance. It is not a matter of breaking down the factual reality into a symbolism which is inconsistent, but rather of looking for the theological intentions of those revealing these mysteries to us by providing us with facts we can apprehend with our senses and signs appropriate to our incarnate spirit.”

[Jesus's Last Dialogues, The Paraclete Of John's Gospel](#)

John is the only evangelist to report the episode of the last dialogue with the Apostles. It takes place at the end of the Last Supper and before Jesus's arrest. It ends in a very long speech: four chapters in John's Gospel (14 to 17) are devoted to this narration which is not mentioned anywhere in the other Gospels. These chapters of John nevertheless deal with questions of prime importance and fundamental significance to the future outlook. They are set out with all the grandeur and solemnity that characterizes the farewell scene between the Master and His disciples.

This very touching farewell scene which contains Jesus's spiritual testament, is entirely absent from Matthew, Mark and Luke. How can the absence of this description be explained? One might ask the following, did the text initially exist in the first three Gospels? Was it subsequently suppressed? Why? It must be stated immediately that no answer can be found; the mystery surrounding this huge gap in the narrations of the first three evangelists remains as obscure as ever.

The dominating feature of this narration, seen in the crowning speech, is the view of man's future that Jesus describes, His care in addressing His disciples, and through them the whole of humanity, His recommendations and commandments and His concern to specify the guide whom man must follow after His departure. The text of John's Gospel is the only one to designate him as Parakletos in Greek, which in English has become 'Paraclete'. The following are the essential passages: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete.” (14, 15–16)

What does 'Paraclete' mean?

The present text of John's Gospel explains its meaning as follows: “But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14, 26). “he will bear witness to me” (15, 26). “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment...” (16, 7–8). “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He

will glorify me..." (16, 13–14).

(It must be noted that the passages in John, chapters 14–17, which have not been cited here, in no way alter the general meaning of these quotations). On a cursory reading, the text which identifies the Greek word 'Paraclete' with the Holy Spirit is unlikely to attract much attention. This is especially true when the subtitles of the text are generally used for translations and the terminology commentators employ in works for mass publication direct the reader towards the meaning in these passages that an exemplary orthodoxy would like them to have.

Should one have the slightest difficulty in comprehension, there are many explanations available, such as those given by A. Tricot in his Little Dictionary of the New Testament (Petit Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament) to enlighten one on this subject. In his entry on the Paraclete this commentator writes the following:

"This name or title translated from the Greek is only used in the New Testament by John: he uses it four times in his account of Jesus's speech after the Last Supper²⁶ (14, 16 and 26; 15, 26; 16, 7) and once in his First Letter (2, 1). In John's Gospel the word is applied to the Holy Spirit; in the Letter it refers to Christ. 'Paraclete' was a term in current usage among the Hellenist Jews, First century A.D., meaning 'intercessor', 'defender'... Jesus predicts that the Spirit will be sent by the Father and Son. Its mission will be to take the place of the Son in the role he played during his mortal life as a helper for the benefit of his disciples. The Spirit will intervene and act as a substitute for Christ, adopting the role of Paraclete or omnipotent intercessor."

This commentary therefore makes the Holy Spirit into the ultimate guide of man after Jesus's departure. How does it square with John's text? It is a necessary question because a priori it seems strange to ascribe the last paragraph quoted above to the Holy Spirit: "for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

It seems inconceivable that one could ascribe to the Holy Spirit the ability to speak and declare whatever he hears. Logic demands that this question be raised, but to my knowledge, it is not usually the subject of commentaries. To gain an exact idea of the problem, one has to go back to the basic Greek text. This is especially important because John is universally recognized to have written in Greek instead of another language. The Greek text consulted was the Novum Testamentum Graece.²⁷

Any serious textual criticism begins with a search for variations. Here it would seem that in all the known manuscripts of John's Gospel, the only variation likely to change the meaning of the sentence is in passage 14, 26 of the famous Palimpsest version written in Syriac²⁸. Here it is not the Holy Spirit that is mentioned, but quite simply the Spirit. Did the scribe merely miss out a word or, knowing full well that the text he was to copy claimed to make the Holy Spirit hear and speak, did he perhaps lack the audacity to write something that seemed absurd to him?

Apart from this observation there is little need to labour the other variations, they are grammatical and do

not change the general meaning. The important thing is that what has been demonstrated here with regard to the exact meaning of the verbs 'to hear' and 'to speak' should apply to all the other manuscripts of John's Gospel, as is indeed the case.

The verb 'to hear', in the translation is the Greek verb 'akouô' meaning to perceive sounds. It has, for example, given us the word 'acoustics', the science of sounds. The verb 'to speak' in the translation is the Greek verb 'laleô' which has the general meaning of 'to emit sounds' and the specific meaning of 'to speak'. This verb occurs very frequently in the Greek text of the Gospels.

It designates a solemn declaration made by Jesus during His preaching. It therefore becomes clear that the communication to man which He here proclaims does not in any way consist of a statement inspired by the agency of the Holy Spirit. It has a very obvious material character moreover, which comes from the idea of the emission of sounds conveyed by the Greek word that defines it.

The two Greek verbs 'akouô' and 'laleô' therefore define concrete actions which can only be applied to a being with hearing and speech organs. It is consequently impossible to apply them to the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, the text of this passage from John's Gospel, as handed down to us in Greek manuscripts, is quite incomprehensible if one takes it as a whole, including the words 'Holy Spirit' in passage 14, 26. "But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name" etc. It is the only passage in John's Gospel that identifies the Paraclete with the Holy Spirit.

If the words 'Holy Spirit' (to pneuma to agion) are omitted from the passage, the complete text of John then conveys a meaning which is perfectly clear. It is confirmed moreover, by another text by the same evangelist, the First Letter, where John uses the same word 'Paraclete' simply to mean Jesus, the intercessor at God's side²⁹. According to John, when Jesus says (14, 16): "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete", what He is saying is that 'another' intercessor will be sent to man, as He Himself was at God's side on man's behalf during His earthly life.

According to the rules of logic therefore, one is brought to see in John's Paraclete a human being like Jesus, possessing the faculties of hearing and speech formally implied in John's Greek text. Jesus therefore predicts that God will later send a human being to Earth to take up the role defined by John, i.e. to be a prophet who hears God's word and repeats his message to man. This is the logical interpretation of John's texts arrived at if one attributes to the words their proper meaning.

The presence of the term 'Holy Spirit' in today's text could easily have come from a later addition made quite deliberately. It may have been intended to change the original meaning which predicted the advent of a prophet subsequent to Jesus and was therefore in contradiction with the teachings of the Christian churches at the time of their formation; these teachings maintained that Jesus was the last of the prophets.

6) Conclusions

The facts recorded here and the commentaries quoted from several extremely eminent Christian experts in exegesis have refuted affirmations of orthodoxy supported by the line adopted by the last Council on the absolute historical authenticity of the Gospels.

These are said to have faithfully transmitted what Jesus actually did and taught. Several different kinds of argument have been given. Firstly, quotations from the Gospels themselves show flat contradictions. It is impossible to believe two facts that contradict each other. Neither can one accept certain improbabilities and affirmations that go against the cast-iron data provided by modern knowledge. In this respect, the two genealogies of Jesus given in the Gospels and the untruths implied in them are quite conclusive.

These contradictions, improbabilities and incompatibilities pass unnoticed by many Christians. They are astonished when they discover them because they have been influenced by their reading of commentaries that provide subtle explanations calculated to reassure them and orchestrated by an apologetic lyricism. Some very typical examples have been given of the skill employed by certain experts in exegesis in camouflaging what they modestly call 'difficulties'.

There are very few passages indeed in the Gospels that have been acknowledged as inauthentic although the Church declares them canonic. According to Father Kannengiesser, works of modern textual criticism have revealed data which constitute a 'revolution in methods of Biblical exegesis' so that the facts relating to Jesus recorded in the Gospels are no longer 'to be taken literally', they are 'writings suited to an occasion' or 'combat writings'.

Modern knowledge has brought to light the history of Judeo-Christianity and the rivalry between communities which accounts for the existence of facts that today's readers find disconcerting. The concept of eyewitness evangelists is no longer defensible, although numerous Christians still retain it today.

The work done at the Biblical School of Jerusalem (Fathers Benoit and Boismard) shows very clearly that the Gospels were written, revised and corrected several times. They also warn the reader that he is "obliged in more than one case to give up the notion of hearing Jesus's voice directly".

The historical nature of the Gospels is beyond question. Through descriptions referring to Jesus however, these documents provide us above all with information about the character of their authors, the spokesmen for the tradition of the early Christian communities to which they belonged, and in particular about the struggle between the Judeo-Christians and Paul: Cardinal Daniélou's work is authoritative on these points.

Why be surprised by the fact that some evangelists distort certain events in Jesus's life with the object of

defending a personal point of view? Why be surprised by the omission of certain events? Why be surprised by the fictitious nature of other events described?

This leads us to compare the Gospels with the narrative poems found in Medieval literature. A vivid comparison could be made with the Song of Roland (Chanson de Roland), the most well-known of all poems of this kind, which relates a real event in a fictitious light. It will be remembered that it describes an actual episode: Roland was leading Charlemagne's rear-guard when it was ambushed on the pass at Roncevaux. The episode which was of minor importance, is said to have taken place on the 15th August, 778 according to historical records (Eginhard).

It was raised to the stature of a great feat of arms, a battle in a war of religion. It is a whimsical description, but the imaginary element does not obliterate one of the real battles that Charlemagne had to fight in order to protect his frontiers against the attempts made by neighbouring peoples to penetrate his borders. That is the element of truth and the epic style of narrative does not remove it.

The same holds true for the Gospels: Matthew's phantasms, the fiat contradictions between Gospels, the improbabilities, the incompatibilities with modern scientific data, the successive distortions of the text, all these things add up to the fact that the Gospels contain chapters and passages that are the sole product of the human imagination. These flaws do not however cast doubt on the existence of Jesus's mission: the doubt is solely confined to the course it took.

[1.](#) Pub. Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1973

[2.](#) Pub. Desclée and Co., Paris.

[3.](#) Pub. Editions du Cerf, Paris

[4.](#) Pub. Beauchesne, Coll. 'Le Point théologique'. Paris. 1974

[5.](#) Pious XII was Pope from 1939 to 1959

[6.](#) One could note here that all these writings were later to be classed as Apocrypha, i.e. they had to be concealed by the victorious Church which was born of Paul's success. This Church made obvious excisions in the Gospel literature and retained only the four Canonic Gospels.

[7.](#) Pub. Editions du Cerf et Les Bergers et les Mages, Paris.

[8.](#) Pub. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1967

[9.](#) The three Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

[10.](#) The fact that it is in contradiction with Luke's Gospel will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

[11.](#) The Samaritans' religious code was the Torah or Pentateuch; they lived in the expectation of the Messiah and were faithful to most Jewish observances, but they had built a rival Temple to the one at Jerusalem.

[12.](#) It has been thought that the Judeo-Christian community that Matthew belonged to might just as easily have been situated at Alexandria. O. Culmann refers to this hypothesis along with many others.

[13.](#) An American film which parodies the life of Jesus.

[14.](#) In another part of his Gospel Matthew again refers to this episode but without being precise about the time (16, 1-4).

The same is true for Luke (11, 29-32). We shall see later on how in Mark, Jesus is said to have declared that no sign would be given to that generation (Mark 8, 11-12).

[15.](#) It is not possible to establish a comparison with John because he does not refer to the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper prior to the Passion.

[16.](#) Words.

[17.](#) Nestlé-Aland Pub. United Bible Societies, London, 1971

[18.](#) The Gospels sometimes refer to Jesus's 'brothers' and 'sisters' (Matthew 13, 46–60 and 64–68; Mark 6, 1–6; John 7, 3 and 2, 12). The Greek words used, adelphoi and adelphai, indeed signify biological brothers and sisters; they are most probably a defective translation of the original Semitic words which just mean 'kin'. In this instance they were perhaps cousins.

[19.](#) A. Tricot, Little Dictionary of the New Testament (Petit Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament in “La Sainte Bible”, Desclée, Pub. Paris)

[20.](#) Pub. Desclée, coll. 'Parole et Prière', Paris.

[21.](#) Pub. Editions du Seuil, Paris.

[22.](#) Although the author assures us that he knows of the existence of these supposed family archives from the Ecclesiastic History by Eusebius Pamphili (about whose respectability much could be said), it is difficult to see why Jesus's family should have two genealogical trees that were necessarily different just because each of the two so-called 'historians' gave a genealogy substantially different from the other concerning the names of those who figure among Jesus's ancestors.

[23.](#) 'No other New Testament author can claim that distinction', he notes.

[24.](#) It is difficult to see how there could have been!

[25.](#) i.e. the eleven Apostles; Judas, the twelfth, was already dead.

[26.](#) In fact, for John it was during the Last Supper itself that Jesus delivered the long speech that mentions the Paraclete.

[27.](#) Nestlé and Aland. Pub. United Bibles Societies, London, 1971.

[28.](#) This manuscript was written in the Fourth or Fifth century A.D. It was discovered in 1812 on Mount Sinai by Agnes S.–Lewis and is so named because the first text had been covered by a later one which, when obliterated, revealed the original.

[29.](#) Many translations and commentaries of the Gospel, especially older ones, use the word 'Consoler' to translate this, but it is totally inaccurate.