

Debating the Jesus Seminar

The Historicity and Inerrancy of the Gospels

What is the Jesus Seminar?

- Assembly of liberal biblical scholars who attempt to identify sayings deeds of Jesus
- Robert Funk, Jean Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg and others

Why controversial?

- Periodic news releases/media interviews
- Include Gospel of Thomas
- Use color beads to identify sayings/deeds of Jesus in Gospels
 - Red – That's Jesus
 - Pink – Sure sounds like Jesus
 - Gray – Well, maybe
 - Black – There's been some mistake

What criteria?

- Multiple attestation
- More independent sources
- Dissimilarity
- Embarrassment
- Short aphorisms
- Jesus countercultural, paradoxical
- Only responded to others

How do we respond?

- Know history
- Know what Church teaches
- Challenge assumptions
- Know weaknesses of two source theory

Sources of Evidence

- Biblical (O.T. and N.T.)
- Historical (Early Church and secular)
- Logical and philosophical
- Scientific and archeological

- Miracles
- Church documents

Historical

- All Church Fathers say Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were authors of the gospels
- Comparison with other ancient documents (manuscripts/papyri)
- Early Church Fathers quote freely from gospels/condemn phony documents like Gospel of Thomas
- Gospels/Acts/Josephus comparison

Church Documents

- Providentissimus Deus* – Leo XIII
- Divino Afflante Spiritu* – Pius XII
- Humani Generis* – Pius XII
- Dei Verbum* – Vatican II
- Historicity of the Gospels* – Pontifical Biblical Commission
- Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* – PBC
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Dei Verbum

- “The Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin” (18)
- “Gospels...whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts...” (19)

Historicity of the Gospels

- Erroneous premises –
 - “...Some minimize the authority of the Apostles as witnesses to Christ. Belittling their office and their influence in the primitive community, these people exaggerate the creative power of the community itself.”

Inerrancy of the Gospels

- Providentissimus Deus* – Leo XIII
- Divino Afflante Spiritu* – Pius XII
- Humani Generis* – Pius XII
- Dei Verbum* para 11– Vatican II

How were the Gospels written?

- Markan Priority theory – Mark, Matthew and Luke (using ‘Q’), John
- Jerome Tradition – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- Clementine Tradition – Matthew, Luke, Mark, John

Markan priority theory

- *Mark first because Greek is less refined, shorter, less sophistication, harsher depiction of Apostles*
- Matthew, Luke wrote later (80 – 90 AD) by non-Apostolic men using Q (*Quelle – source in German*)
- John written last by community, not Apostle

Positives

- Advocated by nearly everyone (seminaries, colleges, biblical commentaries)
- *Partially* solves synoptic borrowing observation

Weaknesses

- Totally rejects historical witness of the Early Church
- Rejects common sense argument that first gospel should be written to convert/debate Jews
- Poor Greek argument belies copying quotations from Peter speaking in colloquial Greek
- “Shorter is first” argument has no basis

Jerome theory

- Supported by some Church Fathers (Mark and Luke order sometimes switched)
- Weaknesses – doesn’t seem to fit literary analysis
Clementine theory (2gh)
- In my opinion, best fit for historical evidence and literary analysis
- Matthew written first in Hebrew (mid 40’s)
- Luke next, using eyewitnesses in Judea and Matthew (late 50’s)
- Mark summarizes Peter conflation of Matthew and Luke (early 60’s)
- John, written by apostle, probably prior to 70 AD, last chapter written in 90’s

Historical survey

Papias (125 AD)
Irenaeus (180 AD)
Clement of Alexandria (200 AD)
Tertullian (200 AD)
Muratorian Canon (Rome, late 2nd century)
Anti-Marcion prologues (late 2nd century)

Origen (230 AD)
Eusebius (324 AD)
Jerome (382 AD)
Augustine (410 AD)