

*The Evolution of the Gospels*

J. Enoch Powell, a professor of Greek writing in his 1994 book *The Evolution of the Gospels*, applies methods of textual and literary criticism to the Greek text of the Gospel of Matthew. He quickly arrived at the conclusion that the Gospel of Matthew was used by the writers of the gospels of Luke and Mark. This is a controversial opinion as the majority of scholars have favored Mark as the oldest of the gospels, but Powell asserts that “it is possible to demonstrate [his assertion] by rigorous proof.”

Powell’s theory lies on the belief that the author of Matthew had relied upon an underlying text that was “severely re-edited, with theological and polemical intent, and that the resulting edition was afterwards recombined with the underlying text to produce the gospel as it exists.” The book’s introduction begins with the presentation of Powell’s evidence for the primacy of Matthew, which I cannot hope to relay in abbreviated form. Throughout the text, Powell asserts that Mark regarded Matthew as his authoritative source but, when confronted with structural or narrative difficulties, “held himself entitled to see if Luke could help.”

Powell further argues that “divergences from Matthew in Luke and Mark have been shown to represent their critical response” to problems posed in Matthew, which responses Powell asserts were “freely composed” and not based upon any underlying composition. Powell explains that Matthew was not subject “to any smoothing or editorial treatment such as it was later to undergo at the hands of Mark and Luke.” Powell arrives at the conclusion that the alternatives “must have been introduced later into the underlying book for which they were composed, and as that process cannot have been accidental or unintentional, it must represent deliberate acceptance or conflation of contradictory material.” The existence of an underlying book, “itself already a

composite,” is discussed in greater detail throughout the book, which includes Powell’s own translation of Matthew followed by his extensive commentary.

1. J. Enoch Powell. *The Evolution of the Gospel : A New Translation of the First Gospel with Commentary and Introductory Essay*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994.

<https://www.amazon.com/Evolution-Gospel-Translation-Commentary-Introductory/dp/0300054211>.