

Can we trust the Gospels?

Eyewitnesses, set down in order.

In short. The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, “whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms,” faithfully hand on what Jesus really did and taught.¹ They are the heart of all the Scriptures, our principal source for his life and teaching.²

Key points

- The Church unhesitatingly affirms the historicity of the four Gospels.¹
- They were formed in three stages: the life of Jesus, the apostles’ oral tradition, and the written Gospels.¹
- God is the author of Scripture, and the human writers were true authors.^{3,4}
- They were written so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.⁵

Try this, this week

1. **Read Luke 1:1–4 slowly.** Notice the words “eyewitnesses” and “in order”.
2. **Read Mark in one sitting.** It is the shortest Gospel.
3. **Note one thing about Jesus that surprises you.**
4. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.** Paul lists witnesses who saw the risen Christ, many still living when he wrote.

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us. According as they have delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word: It seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mayest know the verity of those words in which thou hast been instructed.”

Luke 1:1–4, Douay–Rheims

Watch out: what this does not mean

- Scripture is not read in isolation: it must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.⁸
- Truth is presented differently in historical, prophetic and poetical texts, so the reader must take literary genres into account.⁹

Common questions

Who wrote the Gospels?

The Catechism says the Gospels were written by men who were among the first to have the faith and wanted to share it with others.⁶ Luke writes that many had set forth a narration of these things, as they were delivered by those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.”⁷

Why do the Gospels differ in details?

The Catechism explains that the sacred authors selected certain of the many elements handed on, and synthesized or explained others with an eye to the situation of the churches.¹ They did this “always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus.”¹

Remember: Read one whole Gospel before deciding what you think.

Sources

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| 1. CCC 126 | 6. CCC 515 |
| 2. CCC 125 | 7. Luke 1:1–2 (Douay–Rheims) |
| 3. CCC 105 | 8. CCC 111 |
| 4. CCC 106 | 9. CCC 110 |
| 5. CCC 514 | |

Quotation above: Luke 1:1–4, Douay–Rheims. Catechism: official text on vatican.va.

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