

PARALLEL GUIDE 6 The Bible and Biblical Criticism

Summary

How do we know what we know about the Bible? Over the centuries dedicated and pious scholars have struggled with interpretation of the biblical text, its meaning, its sources, and its compilation. This chapter explores that struggle from its early tradition to the doorstep of the twenty-first century. **Learning Objectives** • Identify what scholars mean by the following terms:

[Textual criticism](#)

[Form criticism](#)

[Source criticism](#)

[Redaction criticism](#)

[Modernism](#)

[Post-modernism](#)

[Critical realism](#)

The Synoptic Problem

- Relate the Four Gospels to their historical origins
- Study the Gospels in parallel (see pg. 77)
- Learn the questions raised by the similarities and differences among the Gospels

Assignment to Deepen Your Understanding

1. You encountered biblical criticism in Year One. When you apply this to the New Testament, how does it affect your thinking?
2. Think about how you would explain a critical approach to the Bible to someone who knows the Bible well, yet for whom this would be a new process.
3. What do the differences, parallel quotations, and similarities among the Gospels teach you about Christianity?

Preparing for Your Seminar

Biblical criticism is the careful study of the Bible in all its aspects. Any critique of the New Testament texts brings up questions and new ideas. Come to the seminar ready to explore questions that have arisen for you. What do you find that energizes you in this material in either a positive or negative direction?

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Chapter 6

THE BIBLE AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

We have noted in Chapter Two that from the earliest times it was assumed among the faithful that, however difficult or obscure the Scriptures might sometimes appear, they were always in fact both coherent and relevant to the life of God's people, even if at times somewhat cryptic and requiring interpretation. Perhaps even more important, the Scriptures told a story—Israel's story. Hence they told God's people who, essentially, they were.

For these reasons biblical interpretation has always been important. It was necessary to know what God's word meant. Indeed, the study and interpretation of scripture was a duty incumbent on any who called themselves faithful. Such attitudes were translated by Christians to the Scriptures of the New Covenant also. Broadly speaking, the methods of biblical study remained the same: a willingness, above all, to accept the story; but a willingness also to ask difficult questions, to accept the possibility of allegory and of hidden meanings.

Biblical Criticism since the Enlightenment

These attitudes toward interpretation did not change very much until the eighteenth century and the period of human experience and endeavor known as the Enlightenment. A new confidence in the ability of scientific study to answer our questions in every sphere, and a corresponding impatience with other approaches to knowledge, characterized this period. This certainly had its effects in the field of biblical criticism. What was regarded as properly "scientific" and "historical" study of the Bible now became the paradigm—certainly for any who cared about academic respectability. Just as proper scientific study could give us the facts about the world and show us how to live in it and exploit it, so proper scientific study of the biblical texts could teach us the facts about Jesus and the Christian faith and show us what might be of value in them, what could be salvaged of belief, and how we might live.

Textual Criticism

This approach has achievements to its credit. Two in particular should be named. The first was textual criticism. The problem faced by textual critics is, and was, that there are thousands of New Testament manuscripts dating before the invention of printing. Not even one of them agrees exactly with another. The textual critic is obliged then to ask questions such as: When texts of the New Testament disagree, how do we choose which one to follow? How do we establish "the best text"? What do we mean by "the best text"? Of course these problems had been noticed in earlier centuries, and various attempts had been made to deal with

them. Enlightenment scholars, however, were the first to attempt a systematic and scientific examination of the data. The achievement of people like the great Cambridge scholars B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort is that we now have texts of the New Testament that are in a number of ways likely to be considerably closer to the autographs or original texts than anything that was available before the eighteenth century. (For more about textual criticism, see Note C., pg. 59)

Source Criticism

The second great achievement of Enlightenment biblical criticism was in the field of *source criticism*. In Year One you made use of source criticism to study the Old Testament, particularly when you identified the possible sources of the tradition underlying the Pentateuch (J, E, P, D, and all that!). In New Testament studies source criticism was applied with particular success to the problem of the relationship among the three “Synoptic” (i.e., seeing things from the same point of view) Gospels—namely, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is clear that there is a relationship among these Gospels. They have whole sections in common. The questions are: What is the relationship? Did they each independently make use of a common source? Did one of them copy another? If so, who copied whom?

In this area of inquiry the majority of source critics came up with the following hypotheses:

- 1) The Primacy of Mark: According to this view Mark’s Gospel was the earliest and was used independently by both Matthew and Luke. This now is the opinion of virtually all serious biblical scholars.
- 2) The Two-Source Hypothesis: This view assumes the primacy of Mark and claims further that Matthew and Luke also made use of another source, now lost to us, but normally referred to by scholars as “Q.” Perhaps ninety percent of serious biblical scholars accept this view, although there is a small, but quite vociferous, dissenting body of opinion. (For more about source criticism and the Gospels, see Note D., pg. 61)

A motive for this enterprise was the quest for certainty. It was thought that the earliest texts and the earliest sources could bring us closest to real, objective, scientific knowledge of the historical Jesus as he truly was. With that knowledge the Enlightenment scholar could build a faith upon secure foundations in the teachings of the master himself, freed from the accretions of later tradition and superstition. For a number of reasons the quest did not work. One reason is the nature of the “historical Jesus” that could thus be uncovered. Another was that it became doubtful whether we could gain from the Gospels the kind of certain, scientific historical knowledge that was sought—whether in fact the nature of the texts we have, and the interests of their authors, militated fatally against it.

As the nineteenth century moved into the twentieth, the purposes of the enterprise were already becoming more modest. Form critics, accepting the work of source critics as far as it went, saw nonetheless that it was possible to break up the material of the Gospels further, into separate stories and traditions. They called each of these units a pericope (something that can be cut around). This observation was undoubtedly both correct and valuable. What the form critics saw was that the gospel narratives consisted to a considerable extent of what critics in the time when it was being written would have called *chreia*—their word for a vivid anecdote or maxim.

The form critics then proceeded on the basis of three assumptions:

- 1) that the gospel materials were shaped to meet needs of the church;

2) that the separate stories and traditions acquired shape or “form” while being handed on. In time they lost detail, becoming smooth like pebbles being polished in a stream; and

3) that the units were isolated as they were handed on; their present setting in the Gospels is therefore secondary—perhaps the editorial work of the evangelist. Hence K. L. Schmidt, writing in 1919, distinguished in the Gospels:

- units of tradition
- kerygma (Greek “proclamation”—the outline of a Gospel), and
- other settings, which may be the evangelist’s work. Schmidt called “(c)” the Redaktion (German for “editing;” hence “redaction criticism”).

The result was that great German form critics such as Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius believed one could learn little from the gospel material about the historical Jesus, who in many ways was forever beyond our grasp. Nevertheless we could discern what needs of the church were served by the material preserved, and thus learn something about the beliefs and attitudes of the primitive Christian community that handed it on. (For more about form criticism, see Note E., pg. 67)

Almost from the beginning questions arose about the form-critical method and its conclusions. The analysis of the units into their various “forms” was really far more subjective and less scientific than was admitted, and even more so the deduction from it of the particular needs of the church that had been served by it.

In the twentieth century we find that critics of redaction criticism asked the question, “Why did the evangelists use their material as they did?” Redaction critics tried to study the editorial work of the evangelists by examining how they used their sources. What can we learn about the beliefs and concerns of Matthew and Luke from the way in which, for example, they have used Mark? The redaction critics presupposed source criticism. For the first time after Bultmann, they began to take seriously the fact that the evangelists might have been authors and theologians, as opposed to mere compilers. (For more on redaction criticism, see Note F., pg. 71)

The Enlightenment View of Knowledge

The entire process of developing approaches to biblical criticism that we have been describing was built largely on an attitude to knowledge that historians of human thought call “Modernism.” Modernism itself was a child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It held three truths to be self-evident:

1) That through careful observation and the use of objective sense data one could know certain things objectively and neutrally about the world. In short, there is such a thing as objective knowledge. God, however, and values were self-evidently not included in that, since there would be no way possible to get at them through sense data.

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2) That the self, the “I,” was autonomous. Cogito ergo sum, said Descartes, “I think, therefore I am”—the looker-on at an external world. As the nineteenth-century poet William Ernest Henley said,

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Echoes iv, “Invictus In Memoriam R. T. H. B.”

. . . and so (incidentally) I need neither an (undemonstrable) God, nor Bible, nor priest, nor anyone else to help me live, and they cannot help me live, and I am bound to no one.

3) That we were making “progress:” modern things (such as modern industry, engineering, and armies) were better than old things, enlightenment reason and philosophy were better than pre-enlightenment (or “medieval”—virtually a term of abuse to modernists) “superstition,” and so on; which inevitably meant that modern “science” was better than pre-enlightenment “faith.”

A person taking such a view of the world (sometimes called “positivist”) tends to look at texts as windows (i.e., as means to see through) to some reality behind them, to which they point.

The problem with applying this to documents such as those in the New Testament is to decide just what is the reality visible through the windows, and how clear the windows are. Does what we see not depend to a considerable extent on what we look for, on the questions we decide to ask? And how do we decide what the “right” questions are? The entire process of New Testament criticism described above actually represents a progressive weakening of expectation: first we expected to see the historical Jesus; then if not Jesus at least the primitive church; then if not the primitive church, at least the mind of the evangelist.

The Post- modernist View of Knowledge

Of course many people even at the end of the twentieth century still think in a “positivist” way: it is the old enemy of faith. Nevertheless, it is beginning to lose its grip as the scientifically respectable view of reality. At a popular level, one of the interesting features of the immensely successful Star Wars and the science-fiction series Star Trek is their quite clearly expressed conviction that mere scientific knowledge is not enough. At a more sophisticated level, if you live in a university city or deal frequently with young and well-educated people, you are aware that many of them quite frequently take a different view of reality from the positivist. The fact

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is that, during the twentieth century, the positivist view of “knowledge” and “the knowable” that we have outlined has come to be debunked—as yet, perhaps, only here and there in the world at large, but already quite thoroughly in the world of the philosopher and the classroom.

In particular, the worldview known as “Postmodernism” accepts none of the three major modernist assumptions, stating rather that:

1) There is no such thing as objective or neutral knowledge. All knowledge is subjective, for there is no knowledge without a knower. Moreover we can know directly nothing but our emotions, our own sense data. This approach to knowledge is called “phenomenalism.” It claims that we all bring a point of view to our observations and our questions, and there is no way we can escape the biases and distortions that causes. We describe things in the way that best suits us.

2) There is no autonomous “I.” Where, after all, is it actually to be found? More likely the “I” is just a floating signifier, a temporary gathering together of forces and impulses, that will be dispersed at death. In short, just as knowledge has collapsed in upon the knower, so the knower her- or himself has disappeared.

3) The modernist “progress” story (what postmodernists call the “meta-narrative,” by which they mean an

overarching story that controls our lives and thought) was simply a self-serving construct, whether in its capitalist or its communist forms. This construct has brought grief to millions, both in the industrialized West and in the (so-called) “underdeveloped” world, where it has allowed Westerners ruthlessly to exploit the less technologically developed. With this meta-narrative as its example, postmodernism goes on to claim that all meta-narratives are suspect. Meta-narratives are simply moves to take power.

Postmodernists tend therefore to regard texts not as windows to something else, but as mirrors (i.e., as mostly giving reflections) of ourselves. What we learn from the texts is conditioned by what we bring to them. In other words, we can really only learn about ourselves from texts.

This, clearly, is not a very satisfactory view for a biblical critic—or, for that matter, for a historian or for anyone who has simply received a letter from home, or is trying to read a map or a set of directions. If all that texts tell us about is ourselves, why bother to write them?

That, in fact, is the trouble with the postmodernist approach: that as it stands, for practical purposes, it is useless. No one, not even a postmodernist most of the time, acts as if it were true. If they did, why would they write books about postmodernism? We can surmise that good philosophy (and, incidentally, good theology) is that which is useful. Philosophies and theologies that are not useful are probably flawed. Just as postmodernism applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to everything, so we must apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to postmodernism. Our initial suspicion is caused

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by the fact that for practical purposes postmodernists do not act like postmodernists. But there is a deeper question—a question that we owe to the postmodernists themselves—and it is this: What kind of meta-narrative does postmodernism imply? Is it not a world where you must just make the best for yourself and care nothing for anything else or anyone else—because there is nothing to care for? At best that sounds suspiciously like a rationalization for a nineteenth- and twentieth-century individualism that ultimately cannot see itself as necessarily related to anything except itself; an individualism that, even when it attempts to preach the word of salvation, can speak only in personal terms of “me” and “Jesus.” At worst it sounds like a normalization and therefore a warrant for an attitude where ultimately there is nothing to love but yourself and your own feelings—an attitude that people with more widely developed sensibilities, such as Dante Alighieri, would have described as damnation. Some modern therapies perfectly symbolize this in the exhortation: “Create your own reality.” Armed with the technology of the personal stereo, the Internet, and virtual reality, it is now actually possible for us to deceive ourselves into thinking we have done just that—until, of course, our computer breaks down. Then we are rudely reawakened by our need for others.

Yet the postmodernist critique of modernism is valid at some points. For some there is no going back from it—which means we are at an impasse.

Critical Realism

Is there a way through? We might consider the path known among some philosophers as [“critical realism.”](#)) Critical realism seizes upon the strengths of both modernist and postmodernist approaches to reality. On the one hand, it acknowledges (with positivists) the reality of the thing known as other than the knower (hence “realism”). On the other hand, it recognizes that the only way to knowledge is through dialogue and critical reflection by the knower on the thing to be known and the means of knowing (hence “critical”). In other words, critical realism admits (with postmodernists) that all claims to knowledge are provisional.

One aspect of this admission is critical realism’s further assertion that all observation takes place within the framework of the observer’s world-view, which is the “story” we tell about our life and its meaning (or lack thereof), our “narratives” and “metanarratives.” Therefore both modernists and postmodernists have been

wrong to think of data as if they were perceived apart from wider realities. On the contrary, our data come to us laden with wider realities. Our facts come with theories attached and our theories are frameworks to include “facts.” Of course something may cause us to change our “story” or realign it (“conversion”), but that is generally traumatic. What then is knowledge? For the critical realist the distinction between (positivist) “objective” knowledge and (postmodernist) “subjective” knowledge is finally useless. “Knowledge” has to do with perceptions. These may very well be perceptions of things that are really there, but that does not alter the fact that such perceptions also have to do with our assumptions, our stories, our view of our relationship with others and with the creation. The statement “I know X” is not simply a matter of whether there actually is or was an “X,” or whether we can gather any data about “X” (as the positivists thought), although those questions are relevant to it, and

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we are bound to ask them. The statement “I know X” also involves me. Just how I know X is necessarily conditioned by my assumptions, my hopes, and my view of what is possible (my worldview, my “story”). This may not matter much when X is simply something like how an electronic circuit works, or what is the distance from A to B, which generally does not involve much emotion or threaten my sense of personal well-being, or my view of reality, or my way of leading my life, or my hope to survive death. But if X is my spouse, or Jesus of Nazareth, then the way I “know” may be, and undoubtedly is, very much conditioned by my own story, and in its turn it may traumatically affect my story.

In sum, “critical realism” believes there is something to be known, and that our perceptions do have something to do with a reality external to ourselves. Therefore, like positivism, critical realism expects and demands that we test such knowledge by every means at our disposal, including empirical verification/falsification in areas where that is appropriate and possible. Unlike positivism, however, “critical realism” also concedes that such a knowledge, even when checked as thoroughly as possible, can never finally be divorced from our own perceptions as knowers and the “stories” with which we explain the world to ourselves.

Critical Realism and Our Study of the New Testament

What then of the New Testament and our knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth? This is a question to which we return later. For the moment, let us lay down two preliminary positions:

First, if someone asks, “Was Jesus really like the portrait in the Gospels?” One might answer, “Unless you think the Gospel writers were simply liars or writing intentionally narrative fiction (both unlikely), clearly he was the way he is in the Gospels—for those who wrote the Gospels.”

If you then ask, “But what was Jesus really like?” We can say only, “For whom?”—for all knowledge requires a knower. Even the Gospels show that the same Jesus, perceived as performing the same act, could yet be “known” as radically different by his own contemporaries. For instance, they watch him cast out a demon. (“He has Beelzebub and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” (Mark 3:22) “Okay,” you say, “then what was Jesus like for God?” That is hard to answer, since we are not God. “Then what was Jesus ‘really like’ for the Christian community?” We can say something about that, for we are a part of the Christian community. Does all this let us off the positivist challenge: to get as much information as possible—the best literary criticism, the best sociology, the best history, the best intelligence, and so on? According to “critical realism”, No. Where there is information available, we should look at it. Actually there is a great deal we can learn—about Judaism of the first century, about Hellenism and the Roman Empire, about Greek literary form in the period—all or any of which which may improve our understanding of the early texts that speak of Jesus, and increase our knowledge and help to guard us from mere fantasy. Even Jesus is shown in the Gospels rejecting reactions to himself based on insufficient knowledge. It is not enough, he says, to know him as worker of miracles; we must know him as crucified.

When you have done the best literary criticism, historical study, sociology, textual criticism, literary criticism, and so on, of which you are or anyone is capable, you may still end up asking, “But what was he really like?” This is where positivism breaks down, for it cannot or does not face the fact that to answer that question has no meaning apart from a “for someone.” We can only finally answer the question, “What is Jesus like for us?” And the Gospels recognize that with a surprisingly contemporary ring. “Who do people say that I am?” asks Jesus, as he invites the use of information. But the final, million dollar question is direct and personal: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29)

Scripture, Reason, and Tradition

These topics may seem abstractions to you—a waste of time. They are not, however, a waste of time if you claim or wish to be in any way a part of the church’s teaching ministry. All Christians do not need to have thought about these questions, but they have a right to expect that their teachers have faced the intellectual challenges of which they are capable, or at least that the church as a whole has—if only so that those of them who are philosophers or who are puzzled by the nature of knowledge may be able to come to us and be helped. There are philosophers and intellectuals, and even the would-be philosophers and intellectuals who might be described as Homo positivus. They really believe that all serious knowledge must somehow be “provable,” they therefore invite others to “prove” that Christ is the Son of God, or that God exists. Or there is a poor pretense of a preacher who is so totally tied into late-twentieth-century individualism that he is prepared to dismiss a major realm of biblical language, the entire notion of being “in Christ,” as meaningless. These too have a right to the church and to our patience. We will find it easier to be patient with them if we have some idea what is going on.

In opposition to the use of our reason as we reflect on Holy Scripture, there has long existed an anti-rational, anti-intellectual strand in the church. It maintains that it is your job to obey, not to think; to listen to God’s word in faith, not to question it. This strand is visible at times in ancient writers like Tertullian, in some of the Puritans at the time of the Reformation and post-Reformation settlements, and in our own day in some extreme charismatic and evangelical groups. Such an attitude has the appearance of piety and is often well-intentioned. It also deserves our patience. Nevertheless, in its refusal to question itself it is actually quite alien to the Judeo-Christian tradition and appears to have more in common with the mindless ecstasy of some ancient pagan religions. In the biblical tradition arguing about and questioning the word of God runs deep and early—at least as deep and early as Abraham, arguing with God about how many righteous there must be in a city for God to spare it (Gen. 18:22-33). In the biblical tradition sacred words are almost by definition words that need to be interpreted. Our Lord himself is shown in the Gospels clearly using the methods of scriptural exegesis and interpretation that were common in his day (e.g., Matt. 5:21-48). St. Paul does the same in his letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Gal. 4:21-31). The whole New Testament is concerned with nothing so much as a complete new interpretation (midrash) of the Hebrew Scriptures in the light of the experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To come closer to our times: no one could be clearer than the great Anglican theologian Richard Hooker that Holy Scripture presents us with “the oracles of God,” providing us with all that we need for salvation (Laws 1.13.3, 14.1). Nevertheless, Hooker was equally sure that that the Scriptures “presupposed” the moral law of “reason,” human positive laws, human authority and reason confirming scripture and providing for its interpretation (3.8.16). He was fully aware that someone reading the Scriptures and saying that the Spirit commands this or that may be misled—and quotes 1 John 4:1 (“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God”) to make his point. Against these things reason is a protection, but not just any reason. We do not exercise our reason in isolation, and especially not isolation from the

Christian community, the church.

To them who ask why we thus hang our judgment on the church's sleeve, I answer with Solomon, "because two are better than one." "Yea, simply," (saith Basil) "and universally, whether it be in works of nature or of voluntary choice and council, I see not anything done as it should be, if it be wrought by an agent singling itself from consorts. The Jews have a sentence of good advice: "Take not upon thee to judge alone; there is no sole judge, but one only. Say not to others, 'Receive my sentence,' when there is an authority above thine." (Laws 5.8.3, citing Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 68, and Rabbi Ishmael)

The basic principle assumed here is laid down with clarity by at least one writer within the New Testament itself. "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

In short,

1) we do critical, questioning study of scripture because it is incumbent upon us to take God's word written to us seriously, with every atom of our intelligence as well as our love: because we are called on to love the Lord with all our mind as well as with all our heart;

2) we do not do our scholarly study apart from the community of faith: indeed, we depend on the community of faith. Hence there is a sense in which the type of our Christian reading and study of scripture is the liturgical reading, where it forms part of our worship and is by definition in the community.

Note C: Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is basically the attempt to answer the question, "What did the evangelist (or the apostle) actually write?" There exist many thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Greek NT, but no original (or "autograph") of any part of it. No two manuscripts are exactly alike. When two of them give us different versions of the same text, how do we choose between them?

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ized" or "King James Version" (KJV) of 1611 was based on a form of Greek text that is often called the "Textus Receptus" (TR), that is, "the Received Text." Some writers give this text special honor. In fact, it is no more remarkable than any other text of scripture. It is simply a form of the Greek NT that became traditional in the Eastern Church. It was published in the sixteenth century in the West by scholars using the best knowledge and resources then available. Since that time we have come to know more of the extent to which early versions vary and also more of the best ways of comparing and evaluating them. As a result we are in a position to produce a much better text than the translators of the KJV. By "better" we mean something "closer to what the author intended." Yet those who know anything of the commitments and aims of the KJV translators will be well aware that they would have wanted to use such information, had they possessed it. Indeed, they were attacked by conservatives in their own day for using what was then modern knowledge about the biblical text.

Revisions of the KJV were made in the nineteenth century ("Revised Version" [RV], 1881-85), and in the twentieth ("Revised Standard Version" [RSV], 1946-52 and "New Revised Standard Version" [NRSV], 1989). True to the spirit of the King James translators, these revisions made use of new textual knowledge. The RSV and the NRSV, in particular, have achieved remarkable success. In their ecumenical editions (of which the OAB is one) they are now recognized by all the main Christian denominations—a distinction unique among English Bibles.

Naturally, we must keep the importance of work on the text in [proportion](#). No one suggests that as a result of textual criticism, we can produce a new kind of Christianity. But we do learn things about the biblical text that are interesting and sometimes thought-provoking. Thus the TR, which in this case is followed by both the KJV and the RSV, tells how Jesus, faced with a leper, was “moved with pity” (Mark 1:41). But some early manuscripts suggest that Mark may have written “moved with anger,” or, as the New English Bible (NEB) puts it, “in warm indignation” (see also NRSV margin). Which is correct? Certainly the variant makes us think hard about what is meant by the divine wrath.

At John 20:31 most early manuscripts, followed by the NRSV, say that the Gospel was written “that you might have come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.” A few manuscripts, however, read, “that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah,” with the verb “believe” in the present tense (see NRSV margin). The former implies that the Gospel is written to convert its readers; the latter, that it is written to strengthen them in the faith they already hold. Which is likely to be correct? If you look at the NRSV at Romans 5:1, you will find: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God” There is, however, a tiny raised q by the second “we,” which refers to marginal reading q; and marginal reading q tells us that “Other ancient authorities read let us.” Here is a perfect example of a problem in textual criticism. Was Paul telling us, as the margin suggests, of something we should try to do? Or was he telling us, as the main body of the text suggests, of something that God had already done for us? Certainly we should have to preach very different sermons on this text according to which reading we chose.

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You can start thinking about the problems of textual criticism for yourself simply by keeping an eye on the NRSV margin or notes and noting whenever they say that “other ancient authorities” say something different from the main translation. Then you can consider the differences between the two versions and wonder why the translators finally preferred the one they chose. Of course, this is only a beginning. Textual criticism is a complicated subject. It is also fascinating, if you enjoy detection.

Textual criticism is sometimes called “lower criticism” in contrast to other kinds of “higher criticism.” This is not because it is regarded as inferior, but because it is the foundation for other kinds of study.

Note D: Source Criticism

The Synoptic Problem

For New Testament studies the relationship of the first three Gospels is the most important single application of source criticism. There is clearly a relationship between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is not just that they tell basically the same story (we could also say that of the Gospel According to John). Nor is it just that they have a common approach. Even in an English translation, we see that they differ from the approach of John’s Gospel. They have whole sections in common, even in small details of the wording. Almost the whole of Mark, the shortest of the three, appears either in Matthew or in Luke, or in both. For this reason the three are often called the “Synoptic” Gospels—meaning that they narrate the gospel “from the same point of view or under the same general aspect” (OED 2, “synoptic”). All this leads naturally to the supposition that there is some kind of literary connection between them, that they copied each other or that they were dependent on a common written source rather than on a common oral tradition. But what was the precise connection? Who copied whom? Or were they all dependent on a common source? This is what scholars call “the synoptic problem.” We may conveniently divide it into parts.

The Primacy of Mark

As we have noted (see Source Criticism p. 56), Mark, Matthew, and Luke have sections in common, even details of wording. There are also, of course, minor differences, and the differences are significant. Where

Matthew and Luke differ from Mark in parallel passages, they are usually a little more sophisticated than Mark. For example, in his anxiety to emphasize that Jesus did not begin to heal the sick until the Sabbath had ended, Mark created a tautology (repeating the same words or ideas): “that evening, at sundown” (1:32). Obviously, if it were evening, it must have been sundown! Both Matthew and Luke have the same account, but without the repetition (Matt. 8:16, Luke 4:40). There are elements in Mark’s narrative that might be difficult or offensive to some readers; for example, the disciples’ aggressive words to Jesus during the episode of the storm on the lake: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38) In both Matthew and Luke, the disciples are much more polite (Matt. 8:25, Luke 8:24). This tends to suggest that Matthew and Luke are both developments of Mark, rather than the other way around.

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When they “improve” on Mark, Matthew and Luke scarcely ever agree. In smoothing out Mark’s repetition, Matthew says “that evening,” and omits “at sundown,” whereas Luke writes “when the sun was setting,” and omits “that evening” (Matt. 8:16, Luke 4:40). In dealing with the words of the disciples on the lake, Luke has them say, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” (8:24), whereas Matthew has them say “Lord, save us; we are perishing” (8:25). Indeed, Matthew and Luke do not even always agree about which passages in Mark they will choose to “improve.” Matthew is clearly troubled by Jesus’ words to the rich young ruler (“Why do you call me good?” [Mark 10:18]), and alters them to, “Why do you ask me about what is good?” (Matt. 19:17), but Luke seems to see no problem. This phenomenon (and there are many other examples) suggests to us that Matthew and Luke are independent developments of Mark, rather than the scenario that Matthew revised Mark, and then Luke made use of Matthew.

We may then picture the relationship of the three Gospels as follows:



This, briefly, is the argument for what scholars call “the primacy of Mark.” Matthew and Luke have a great deal of other material in common that is not present in Mark. A good deal of it consists of Jesus’ teaching—for example, the reply to John the Baptist’s messengers (Matt. 11:4-11, 16-18, closely paralleled by Luke 7:22-28, 31-35) or Jesus’ prayer of thanksgiving (Matt. 11:25-27 // Luke 10:21-22). As with the passages that are paralleled in Mark, there is often almost verbal identity. Obviously, the theory of independent copying from Mark will not account for this. How then do we explain it?

Scholars have suggested that Matthew and Luke must each have had access to a second source besides Mark, consisting mostly of Jesus’ sayings. This document is often referred to as “Q,” short for the German word Quelle, meaning “source.” Granted this possibility, the theory that Matthew and Luke worked independently is further supported by the fact that they hardly ever agree as to where the Q sections should come in the story. When they do agree, as in the account of the Baptist’s preaching (Matt. 3:7-10 // Luke 3:7-9) or of Jesus’ temptations (Matt. 4:1-11 // Luke 4:1-13), the chances are that this was simply the obvious place to put the material.

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This leads us to this theory of relationship for the Synoptic Gospels:



In brief, this is the “two-source hypothesis” (also called the “two-document hypothesis”). “Q” appears to have been a collection of sayings of Jesus, together with some sayings of John the Baptist. There seems good reason to date “Q” quite early, about 50 CE.

Some scholars suggest that in its original form “Q” might be an example of wisdom literature. Early examples of this include Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and 30-31. Later representatives are documents such as the rabbinic Pirke Aboth and the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. As such, “Q” would have concentrated on presenting Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, a sage. The story of the temptation (which many critics find to be the oddity in “Q”) might have served as the narrative prologue to such a work, showing Jesus’ qualifications

to teach his wisdom.

1) testimonies to fulfill the promises from the Hebrew Scriptures (“thus it came to pass,” [1:22-23; 4:14-16]; under this heading we may also include Matthew’s version of Jesus’ genealogy [1:1-17]);

The Four- Source Hypothesis: “M” and “L”

When all possible Mark and “Q” material are removed from Matthew, much remains. Three types of material can be distinguished:

2) stories about Jesus (such as the birth stories [1:18-2:23]); and

3) sayings of Jesus (e.g., much of the Sermon on the Mount [5:17-24a, 27-30] and some parables, such as the Unmerciful Servant [18:23-35]).

Scholars usually refer to the material under (3) above, and sometimes to all three types of material, as “M,” by which they mean Matthew’s special source(s). When all possible Mark and “Q” material is removed from Luke, there is still a great deal left. Three types of material (apart from the birth stories, which in Luke are generally treated separately) can be distinguished:

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1) parables (such as the Good Samaritan [10:25-36], the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son [15:8-32]);

2) stories about Jesus (such as the accounts of the woman who was a sinner [7:36- 50] and of the women who accompanied Jesus [8:1-32]);

3) Luke’s version of the Passion story, which has been regarded by some scholars as basically independent of Mark; or at least the peculiarly Lukan elements in his version of the Passion (such as Jesus’ prayer for his persecutors [23:34]).

Scholars usually refer to this material as “L,” by which they mean Luke’s special source.

With all this in mind, we should now make a diagram of our theory of the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels as follows:



This, in brief, is the “four-source hypothesis.”

The Proto- Luke Hypothesis

Burnett Hillman Streeter, the British biblical scholar responsible for perhaps the fullest and most complete statement of the four-source hypothesis, believed that it was possible to identify the sources of the sources. According to Streeter, Christianity in the ancient church had five major centers. Each had its own traditions about Jesus (Streeter 1924, 230-235). None of these traditions would likely have been lost, and so each is probably preserved somewhere in our Gospels. The five centers were Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Caesarea, and Rome. By tradition John is associated with Ephesus and Mark with Rome. That leaves three sources and three centers. For various reasons Streeter concluded that “L” was to be linked with Caesarea, “M” with Jerusalem, and “Q” with Antioch.

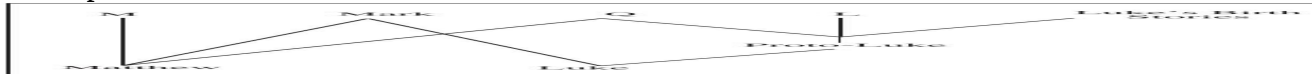
On the basis of the four-source hypothesis we should assume that the writer of Luke took hold of Mark, “Q,” “L,” and the sources of the birth stories, and composed a narrative out of them, selecting now from one, and now from another. However, it is possible to take the hypothesis one stage further, and Streeter did so (199-222). A close examination of the text of Luke, which we cannot make here, led him to the following observations:

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- 1) if we remove the Markan sections of Luke’s Gospel, it appears that the nonMarkan parts can be read as a fairly continuous story, whereas the Markan parts cannot;
- 2) the Lukan Passion story seems to be basically non-Markan, with some Markan insertions, such as the story of Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26 // Mark 15:21); and 3) in general, throughout Luke’s Gospel, “L” and “Q” materials seem to be interwoven with each other, as though a writer had been selecting now from one source and now from another; but material from “Q” or “L” seems rarely to be combined with material from Mark.

These observations led Streeter to formulate the “proto-Luke hypothesis.” According to this hypothesis Luke first wrote a gospel by combining “L” and “Q.” This was the “first” form or version of his Gospel—in other words, “Proto-Luke.” Afterward he added to it passages from the Gospel According to Mark, which he had presumably discovered later.

According to the proto-Luke version of the four-source hypothesis, we should diagram of the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels as follows:



Evaluating the Four- Source Hypotheses

Obviously the four hypotheses move in a descending scale of certainty.

- 1) Markan primacy is virtually demonstrable.
- 2) The “Q” hypothesis is highly probable. But we do not possess “Q,” and so of course we can never be quite sure that it existed or what was in it, if it did. Granted the Markan primacy, it is obvious that sometimes Matthew uses parts of Mark that Luke omits, and sometimes Luke uses parts of Mark that Matthew omits. This never causes us difficulty, because we have Mark to check by. Presumably, if the “Q” hypothesis is right, Matthew and Luke did the same with “Q.” But since the only way we can guess that “Q” existed is from the fact that Matthew and Luke have material in common, we can never be sure whether the material they do not

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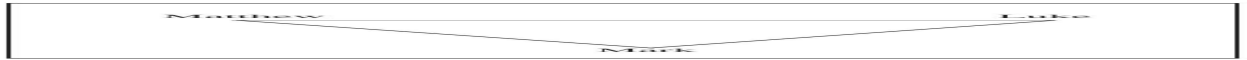
have in common is from “Q” or not. Thus material that we designate “M” or “L” may be “Q” material that the other evangelist chose not to use. Hence attempts to reconstruct “Q” (e.g., Kloppenborg et al. 1990), or even to discuss how “Q” itself may have evolved from earlier sources (e.g., Kloppenborg 1987) often have about them an element of fantasy.

- 3) Clearly, the “M” and “L” parts of the hypothesis are much less certain than “Q”: First, because we have no way of being entirely sure that any particular passage we assign to them was not originally in “Q,” and second, because when we do feel fairly sure that it was not, we have no way of knowing what was the evangelist’s source for it. Was it written? Or oral? (Traditionally, people have spoken of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a source for Luke, and Joseph as a source for Matthew.) Was it one source? Or many? We cannot answer with certainty any of these questions for either evangelist.

4) The “Proto-Luke” hypothesis, which depends on the other three hypotheses, is clearly the least certain of all. It has not found a great deal of acceptance among Lukan scholars. Soon after its promulgation one important commentary on Luke dismissed it in a footnote (Creed 1930, lviii, 1); more recently Luke T. Johnson does not appear to think it worth mentioning (1991), and Joseph Fitzmyer is noncommittal (1981, 89-91).

Streeter spoke of four “documents.” We prefer to speak of four “sources” because, apart from Mark, we really cannot be sure what the sources were, particularly “L” and “M.” They could have been bodies of oral tradition, or even, in the case of “M” and “L,” just isolated elements of tradition that the evangelist collected and valued. There is no way of telling.

The best-known alternative to the two- and four-source hypotheses is a theory that was proposed in the eighteenth century by a scholar named Johann Griesbach. According to the Griesbach hypothesis, Luke used Matthew, and Mark used both Matthew and Luke.



This theory has the advantage that it fits with a long church tradition that Matthew was the earliest Gospel. It also has the obvious advantage that it avoids the need for a hypothetical “Q”. On the other hand, the problems of Griesbach’s hypothesis are equally apparent. Why did Mark write at all, since he has virtually nothing new to say? Did he, as has been suggested, think it necessary to emphasize the agreements in the Christian message in view of differences between Matthew and Luke? If so, then why did he not leave out over fifty passages on which Matthew and Luke manifestly did not agree (e.g., the whole of Mark 6:45-8:26)? Or was Mark trying to provide a sort of “readers’ digest” version of the gospel? In that case, why, after leaving out so much, did he lengthen the material that he did include? There is still force in Streeter’s comment that Mark cannot have used Matthew because “only a lunatic” would leave out “the Sermon on the Mount and practically all the parables” (1924, 158).

With all its uncertainties, and despite the fact that we cannot press it quite as far as Streeter did, the four-source hypothesis, and even some form of the Proto-Luke theory, still fit the evidence before us a great deal better than anything else that has been suggested.

Note E: Form Criticism

The Basic Form Critical Questions

The study of our written sources (“source criticism”) takes us back to documents—or at least to hypothetical documents—which, as we have seen in the case of “Q,” some scholars are prepared to date as early as 50 CE. Is it possible for us to go back even farther? What happened in the period when Christian tradition was handed on orally? Can we be sure that when we hear the Gospels we are hearing the voice of the historical Jesus? Or are we just hearing the voice of the evangelists and their community?

The Assumptions of Form Criticism

Form critics attempt to tackle these problems based on three assumptions. Form critics assume that the stories and sayings of Jesus as we now have them in the Gospels are there to meet the needs of the church. With this there seems no possible reason to disagree. Indeed, the evangelists themselves claim that this is so. Luke says that he has written “an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth

concerning the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:3-4).

John speaks even more clearly both of the things he has left out and the things he has put in:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe [or “go on believing”] that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

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In other words, the evangelists write to teach, to explain, and to promote belief. As we examine the Gospels, it is not difficult to guess at other motives, even though they are not named. The careful arrangement of Matthew makes it especially suitable for reading in church. This has led many to suggest that one of Matthew’s reasons for writing was to meet the needs of the congregation at worship. Again, stories like that of the Baptist’s question at the baptism (Matt. 3:14-15) and the bribing of the guards (Matt. 28:11-15) offer answers to difficult or hostile questions: “Why did Jesus have to be baptized by John?” “How can we be sure the disciples didn’t steal the body?” In other words, these stories serve an apologetic purpose. **Stories Acquiring a Shape or Form**

Form critics assume that while the gospel traditions were still being handed on orally, they were already acquiring a certain shape or “form.” This form can be recognized. In Mark 2:1-3:6, for example, we have a series of short stories about Jesus: the healing of the paralytic (2:1-12); the call of Levi (2:13-17); the question about fasting (2:18-22); plucking grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28); the man with the withered hand (3:1-6).

Form critics point out that the stories have obvious beginnings: “When he returned to Capernaum . . .” (2:1); “Jesus went out again beside the sea . . .” (2:13); “Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting . . .” (2:18). They all have obvious endings: a comment by the crowd, “We have never seen anything like this!” (2:12); a word from Jesus, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick . . .” (2:17) (a very common type); or a comment by the narrator that heightens or explains the significance of the story: “The Pharisees went out, and immediately conspired . . .” (3:6).

It seems hard to quarrel with this kind of division. The stories are easy to separate from each other. Anyone who follows a church lectionary or uses daily Bible study notes is accustomed to such separation. No one would dream, for example, of proposing a section of Mark for study that went from 1:6 to 1:16. It would be ridiculous to isolate a passage that started in the middle of one story and ended in the middle of another.

Form critics refer to each story, or unit of tradition, as a “pericope,” (pronounced per íko pay), a Greek word meaning “something that can be cut around.” Before the material came to be written down each pericope would have been repeated and retold many times. In the course of such repetition, while sometimes there may have been additions, the tendency would have been for the traditions to lose extraneous detail and to become smoothly rounded and concise, just as pebbles in a stream tend to lose their corners as they move along in the current.

Isolated Units

Form critics assume not only that the units were smoothed, but also that they were isolated. This means that any narrative or other framework in which they are now embedded is secondary. K. L. Schmidt, a Swiss scholar, was among the founders of form criticism. He said that it was necessary to distinguish three things: (a) the units of tradition; (b) the “kerygma” outline (that is, the pattern of Christian procla-

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mation); and (c) other kinds of setting for the units, which may be the work of the evangelist or the evangelist's predecessors. Schmidt called (c) by the German word "Redaktion," that is, "editing."

If you read through the stories in Mark 2:1-3:6, you see that a common theme runs through them. They show Jesus in various, and gradually mounting, degrees of conflict with the establishment. Presumably they were arranged in this way, either by Mark or by Mark's source, to make this point, but the arrangement cannot be taken as any indication of the actual historical order in which such a set of events may have occurred. In other words, according to Schmidt, if we want to come close to the events as they actually happened, we must almost totally ignore the framework in which they are set, the historical value of which is now seen as slight. Schmidt made an exception for the Passion narrative, in which he found a coherence and consistency unlikely in a collection of units that were joined together.

Main Types of the Units of Tradition

Form critics generally divide the units of tradition into four main types. Different form critics give different names to these types, but perhaps the most helpful for us are those given by the English form critic Vincent Taylor. He speaks of pronouncement stories, sayings, miracle stories, and stories about Jesus. (In addition to these classifications, Rudolf Bultmann further classified the sayings of Jesus into five types.)

In pronouncement stories the interest does not lie in the narrative or in the situation, but in the astounding word of Jesus for which the story is a setting. Thus in the question about divorce (Mark 10:2-9) everything moves toward the teaching (vv. 5b-9).

In stories about Jesus and miracle stories, by contrast, it is not what Jesus says that is of interest, but what he does. Examples of stories about Jesus are the confession of Peter and the first prophecy of the Passion (Mark 8:27-33) and the rejection at Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6a). Examples of the miracle story are the storm on the lake (Mark 4:35-41) and the feeding of the multitude (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10).

While interest in preserving pronouncement stories (and, of course, sayings) would clearly involve the community's need to know how to live, interest in the Jesus stories and miracle stories would obviously be bound up much more with satisfying curiosity and sheer delight in a good tale. In short, the concern in the pronouncement stories and sayings is more with what the rabbis call "halakhah," (the interpretation of legal material and how one is to act) and the concern in the stories and miracle stories is with "haggadah" (stories to help us understand more about God).

Of course, the distinction does not work absolutely. Many form critics would admit that the story of the paralytic and forgiveness (Mark 2:1-12) is a combination of two types, since it contains both a mighty act by Jesus and an important saying. It might be argued that even the stories of the confession and the rejection do contain quite important sayings. But the form critics' point would be that, nonetheless, it is the action that is central to interest here rather than just the saying. What is striking about the story of the paralytic is that the interest seems to be almost evenly balanced.

Martin Dibelius and Rudolph Bultmann

The early form critics Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann presented different views of the original setting in which this material was found. Dibelius thought that the original setting in the life of the church (German: Sitz im Leben, "setting in life") to which most of the material should be traced was the missionary preaching or the work of storytellers. Bultmann traced it to debates in the Christian community and much of it to the

Hellenistic community. Bultmann and, to a lesser degree, Dibelius were both skeptical about the historical value of most of the material and felt that very little of it originated in actual historical events in the life of Jesus.

Vincent Taylor

The British form critic Vincent Taylor was much more cautious, not only about the origin of the materials, but also about their historicity. He pointed out that there is no necessary connection between, on the one hand, the possible or probable setting in which a unit of tradition was preserved and the reasons for its preservation, and, on the other, the historicity of that unit. The historicity of the unit is to be asserted or denied on many grounds—the nature of the material, style, coherence with the other teaching of Jesus, what can be known of contemporary Judaism, etc.—of which the questions raised by form criticism are only a part.

Questioning the Form Critical Assumptions

Form criticism is valuable because it asks questions about the shape of our material and its purpose. Such questions can be very illuminating, when we consider the form critical work that has been done on the parables.

We should note, however, that recent research into other kinds of oral transmission, such as that of heroic poetry, has given us cause to question some of the earlier formcritical assumptions. For example, it is not as clear as form critics have claimed, that extraneous detail is usually smoothed away in the course of oral transmission. On the contrary, there is evidence that changes normally include saying the same thing in fewer or more lines, and even the adding of detail. Nor is it clear that a narrative framework should always be regarded as secondary. On the contrary, some research into oral transmission indicates the conservatism of oral tradition. The basic story is carefully preserved.

There are other reasons for preferring one form of critical opinion of the gospel materials to another. Earlier non-biblical research tended to talk of “folk” verse (e.g., “folk epic”), viewing oral poetry as the creation of “folk,” that is, the community. Bultmann’s suggestion that gospel traditions are the product of debates in the early Christian community clearly reflects such a view. In the general study of oral tradition, however, no one has ever been able to show how a community or people as a whole could compose a poem, and the “folk” opinion is now generally discredited. Modern research suggests rather that individual “bards” are the real developers and maintainers of traditions, a conclusion that accords perhaps better with Dibelius’ view that “Christian preachers” and “storytellers” had originally done the same for Christian tradition. It is surely not too farfetched to see in preachers and storytellers the “bards” of the young Christian faith. This is not to suggest that the community plays no part in the creation of oral tradition. Spoken words, if they are to be successful, must strike immediate chords in the hearers. Yet the fact remains that individuals—the poet, the bard, the preacher, the prophet—will strike the chords.

Finally, we note that the written text of the NT is itself, in a real sense, “oral.” By this we mean that, like most texts written in antiquity, it was written to be read aloud (cf. Col. 4:16). Undoubtedly there are differences in consciousness between cultures that experience language primarily as sound, as something alive in the ear. Cultures like our own experience much of language—and particularly much of the language we regard as most significant—as words and lines on a page (that is, as “literature”). We cannot avoid this distinction; but we can at least note that it exists. In some cases, particularly the more difficult parts of the NT text (e.g., Matt. 11:20-27), if we could hear the tone in which the material was originally uttered—a tone that was no doubt perfectly well known to those who first wrote it down—the passage would become very much clearer.

Note F: Redaction Criticism

K. L. Schmidt distinguished the units of tradition from the kerygma and the redaction. By redaction (“editing”) he meant, broadly, the editorial work of the evangelists and their predecessors. Redaction criticism to a considerable extent presupposes the conclusions drawn from both source and form criticism.

If we accept that the evangelists used earlier sources and units drawn from oral tradition, the redaction critic asks, “What, then, did the evangelists do with this material? How has it been edited, and with what end in view? What are the particular aims of the Gospels as finished products? What special theological interests or beliefs do they reflect?” In other words, the redaction critic is interested in the relationship between the inherited tradition and later understanding of it. The redaction critic takes the evangelists seriously as theologians and teachers in their own right.

We can perhaps best appreciate this approach by testing it. Consider the following example. It contains passages from the three Synoptic Gospels, covering part of what they say about the work of John the Baptist. The text is that of the NRSV, but the passages have been arranged side by side, so that they can be compared easily. Assuming then, for the purposes of argument, the conclusions of at least the “two- source” part of the “four-source” hypothesis, let us try to see what the later evangelists have done.

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The Gospel Text in Parallel



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Matthew

For the first few verses (Matt. 3:1-11), Matthew appears to be following Mark. He has omitted Mark’s “beginning of the gospel” because, of course, his Gospel has already begun (Matt. 3:1; cf. Mark 1:1). On the other hand, he names John the Baptizer at once, before saying what prophecy he fulfills. This is perhaps a more logical way of proceeding than Mark’s (Mark 1:2-4). In general, if we examine Matthew as a whole, we see that he likes to work in an orderly fashion. Now comes a change of very great importance. Whereas Mark summarized John’s preaching as “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4), Matthew gives it in direct speech: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” (Matt. 3:2) These are precisely the same words that Matthew will later attribute to Jesus in his summary of Jesus’ preaching. The effect of this change is to make very forcibly, from the beginning, the point that Jesus has come as a fulfiller of the Jewish Torah, not a destroyer (cf. Matt. 5:17). For Matthew the message of Jesus is continuous with what has gone before.

Matthew quotes from Isaiah that John the Baptizer is seen as fulfilling the promise (Matt. 3:3). Such a use of the Hebrew Scriptures is often referred to as a “proof text.” But note what an interesting change Matthew has made. He has omitted Mark’s “See, I am sending my messenger . . .” (Mark 1:2). Why? Probably because Matthew knows his Bible better than Mark and he is aware that, despite what Mark says, these words are not from Isaiah at all! It is just the kind of thing that Matthew, with his special interest in Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism, would want to get right. Next comes the description of John and the account of many coming for baptism. Here, too, Matthew seems to follow Mark, except that again Matthew is more logical. He attaches the description of the Baptizer’s appearance to the first mention of him. He then goes on to tell what happened, rather than bringing John on the scene as Mark does, telling what happened, and adds the

description of John's appearance as an afterthought (Matt. 3:4-6; cf. Mark 1:4-6).

Now Matthew seems to have turned to "Q." The words he attributes to John the Baptizer are virtually identical to those given by Luke, but there is one major difference in his way of introducing the words. A study of Matthew's Gospel suggests that he did not like the Pharisaic party (e.g., Matt. 23). It is typical of him that he should show John's stinging rebuke as addressed to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees.

Luke

Luke, like Matthew, has omitted Mark's introduction, but for different reasons. Instead, he provides an extensive introduction of his own (Luke 3:1-2a). This introduction sets the beginning of Christianity on the world stage. Scholars have long recognized Luke's concern to emphasize the universality of Christianity. This passage is an illustration of that concern.

Luke

Like Matthew, Luke proceeds at once to bring John on the scene, taking time to remind us, however, that John is "the son of Zechariah"—a link with his version of the birth of Jesus (Luke 1-2)—and to tell us what John did. In Luke's case the reason

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for the rearrangement is perhaps not so much that he is more orderly than Mark as that he is simply a better storyteller.

Then comes the proof text. Luke omits the opening words, presumably for the same reason as Matthew did. At least we can be fairly sure that Luke took the trouble to check the quotation in his LXX because he has gone on to quote a little more of the passage than either Matthew or Mark. Why has he done this? The answer is in the last words of his extended quotation: "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). Once more the scope of the gospel is seen to be universal. It is exactly what we would expect Luke to emphasize.

Luke clearly does not think the description of John's clothing worth including and perhaps does not understand why Mark has it. Instead, he proceeds immediately to his "Q" source for the preaching of John.

Luke has no particular animosity against Pharisees, and he sometimes shows them in quite positive relationships with Jesus and the young church (Luke 13:31; Acts 5:34; 23:9). It is not surprising that he sees John's rebuke merely as addressed to "the crowds" (Luke 3:7). As students of Luke's Gospel have long observed, he is very interested in ordinary working people. Therefore, it is also not at all surprising that he should continue with material about John's advice to "tax collectors" and "soldiers" (Luke 3:10-14). Perhaps this material was in "Q." That would fit with Luke's method, which seems generally to be one of staying with one source for a while; however, since Matthew does not include the material, we cannot be sure.

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