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THE ELEMENTS OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK

(CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

CHRIST AND THE BIBLE (INTER-VARSITY PRESS)

THE RENEWAL AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND (SPCK)

THE GOODNESS OF GOD (INTER-VARSITY PRESS)

EASTER ENIGMA (PATERNOSTER PRESS)

*A Fresh Assault
on the Synoptic Problem*

*REDATING
MATTHEW,
MARK
& LUKE*

John Wenham

Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke
A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem
By Wenham, John

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Softcover ISBN-13: 978-1-7252-7664-2

Publication date 4/13/2020

Previously published by IVP, 1992

To PETER

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, which has had a long gestation, owes a great debt to a host of kind people who from time to time have read part or the whole of the manuscript and have made helpful suggestions. These include Christopher Band, Michael Goulder, Donald Guthrie, Peter Head, John Leach, Malcolm McDow, Howard Marshall, Tom Martin, Anthony Meredith, Bernard Orchard, Alan Padgett, Paul Rainbow, Andrew Saville, Alberic Stacpoole, Michael Thompson. It is somewhat invidious to make distinctions, but I feel I should give special thanks to five readers whose comments were particularly helpful: Fred Bruce, Martin Davie, Earle Ellis, Jim Scott, and my son David. I also owe a great debt to the two typists who faithfully typed and retyped for me: Elizabeth Carras in the early stages, and Lynne Knott who worked with marvellous selflessness in the later stages. I am also most grateful to my copy-editor David Mackinder, and to the staff of Hodder & Stoughton, who have been uniformly helpful throughout, and to Martin Davie, David Lambourn and Joe Martin for help in proof-reading. If this book proves to be of service to the church of God, a big share of the thanks will be due to all these folk.

John Wenham

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)</i>
Aland	K. Aland, <i>Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum</i> (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1964)
Alexander	L. C. A. Alexander, <i>Luke-Acts in Its Contemporary Setting</i> , Oxford D.Phil. dissertation, 1977
Alford	H. Alford, <i>The Greek Testament</i> , 4 vols (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 7th ed., 1874)
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Apol. 1</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
BAG	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , rev. and augmented F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago Press, 1979)
Balleine	G. R. Balleine, <i>Simon Whom He Surnamed Peter</i> (London: Skeffington, 1958)
Barnes	A. S. Barnes, <i>Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic Age</i> (London: Methuen, 1938)
Bellinzoni	A. J. Bellinzoni (ed.), <i>The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal</i> (Macon: Mercer UP, 1985)
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>

Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke

- Birks T. R. Birks, *Horae Evangelicae*, ed. H. A. Birks (London: Bell, 1892)
- BjRL* *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
- BNTC Black's New Testament Commentary
- Bruce Acts Greek F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Greek Text (London: Tyndale, 1951)
- Bruce Acts NICNT F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. ed., 1988)
- Bruce *Chronology* F. F. Bruce, 'Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles' *BjRL* 68 (1968)
- Bruce *Date* F. F. Bruce, 'The Date and Character of Mark' in E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (edd.), *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge UP, 1984)
- Bruggen J. van Bruggen, *Die geschichtliche Einordnung der Pastoralbriefe* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1981)
- Butler B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St Matthew* (Cambridge UP, 1951)
- Buttrick D. G. Buttrick (ed.), *Jesus and Man's Hope*, vol. 1 (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970)
- c.* *circa*
- Carmignac J. Carmignac, *La naissance des Évangiles Synoptiques* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984) – also in *The Birth of the Synoptic Gospels*, ET (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1986)
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- Chapman J. Chapman, *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (London: Longmans, 1937)
- Creed J. M. Creed, *Gospel according to St Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1930)
- Cullmann O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle*,

Abbreviations

	<i>Martyr</i> , ET (London: SCM, 2nd ed., 1962)
<i>De Vir. Ill.</i>	<i>Concerning Illustrious Men</i>
Dodd	C. H. Dodd, <i>The Epistle of Paul to the Romans</i> , Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932)
ed(d).	editor(s), edited by, edition
Edmundson	G. Edmundson, <i>The Church in Rome in the First Century</i> (London: Longmans, 1913)
Ellis GC	E. E. Ellis, 'Gospels Criticism' in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), <i>Das Evangelium und die Evangelien</i> (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983)
Ellis Luke	E. E. Ellis, <i>The Gospel of Luke</i> , NCB (London: Nelson, 1966)
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ET	English Translation
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
Farmer NSS	W. R. Farmer (ed.), <i>New Synoptic Studies</i> (Macon: Mercer UP, 1983)
Farmer SP	W. R. Farmer, <i>The Synoptic Problem</i> (London/New York: Macmillan, 1964)
Farmer Synopticon	W. R. Farmer, <i>Synopticon: The Verbal Agreement Between the Greek Texts of Matthew, Mark and Luke Contextually Exhibited</i> (Cambridge UP, 1969)
Fee	G. D. Fee, 'A Text-Critical Look at the Synoptic Problem' <i>NovT</i> 22 (1980) 12–28
Fitzmyer	J. A. Fitzmyer, <i>Gospel according to Luke</i> , Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1981)
France Evangelist	R. T. France, <i>Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher</i> (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989)
France Gospel	R. T. France, <i>The Gospel according to</i>

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- Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1985)
- Goulder M. D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989)
- GP Gospel Perspectives
- Gundry R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982)
- Harnack A. von Harnack, *The Date of Acts and the Synoptic Gospels*, ET (London: Williams & Norgate; New York: Putnam, 1911)
- Hawkins J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899)
- HDB J. Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898–)
- HE *Historia Ecclesiastica*
- Hemer C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989)
- Hengel *Johannine Q* M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989)
- Hengel *Mark* M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, ET (London: SCM, 1985)
- Hennecke E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ET (London: Lutterworth, 1965)
- Hodges and Farstad Z. C. Hodges and A. L. Farstad (edd.), *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982)
- HTR *Harvard Theological Review*
- Huck-Greeven A. Huck, *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, rev. H. Greeven (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981)

Abbreviations

Hughes	P. E. Hughes, <i>Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians</i> , NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962)
IBD	J. D. Douglas (ed.), <i>Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i> , 3 vols (Leicester: IVP, 1980)
ICC IDB	International Critical Commentary G. A. Buttrick (ed.), <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , 5 vols (New York: Abingdon, 1962-)
Irenaeus ISBE	<i>Against all Heresies</i> G. W. Bromiley (ed.), <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia</i> , vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982)
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
Jameson	H. G. Jameson, <i>The Origin of the Synoptic Gospels</i> (Oxford: Blackwell, 1922)
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSOT	JSOT Press, Sheffield
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Kittel-Friedrich	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (edd.), <i>The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964)
Kümmel	W. G. Kümmel, <i>Introduction to the New Testament</i> , ET (London: SCM, 1975)
Lindsey	R. L. Lindsey, <i>A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark</i> (Jerusalem: Dugith, c. 1971)
LSJ	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , rev. and augmented H. S. Jones (Oxford, 1968)

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Manson	T. W. Manson, <i>Studies in the Gospels and Epistles</i> (Manchester UP, 1962)
Marshall Acts	I. H. Marshall, <i>The Acts of the Apostles</i> , TNTC (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980)
Marshall Luke	I. H. Marshall, <i>The Gospel of Luke</i> , NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978)
Marucchi	O. Marucchi, <i>The Evidence of the Catacombs</i> (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929)
Massaux	E. Massaux, <i>Influence de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée</i> (Leuven UP, 2nd ed., 1986)
Migne PG	Migne's <i>Patrologia Graece</i>
Morgan	R. Morgan and J. Barton, <i>Biblical Interpretation</i> (Oxford UP, 1988)
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
Neiryneck	F. Neiryneck, <i>The Minor Agreements of Matthew and Luke Against Mark</i> (Leuven UP, 1974)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NLC	New London Commentary
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
O'Connor	D. W. O'Connor, <i>Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical and Archeological Evidence</i> (New York/London: Columbia UP, 1969)
ODCC	F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (edd.), <i>Oxford Dictionary of the</i>

Abbreviations

	<i>Christian Church</i> (Oxford UP, 2nd ed., 1974)
Orchard <i>Synopsis</i>	J. B. Orchard (ed.), <i>A Synopsis of the Four Gospels in Greek</i> (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983)
Orchard <i>Synoptics</i>	B. Orchard and H. Riley, <i>The Order of the Synoptics: Why Three Synoptic Gospels?</i> (Macon: Mercer UP, 1987)
<i>passim</i>	here and there throughout
Pickering	W. N. Pickering, <i>The Identity of the New Testament Text</i> (Nashville: Nelson, rev. ed., 1980)
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
Reicke	B. Reicke, <i>The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels</i> (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986)
Rist	J. M. Rist, <i>On the Independence of Matthew and Mark</i> (Cambridge UP, 1978)
Roberts	C. H. Roberts, <i>Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt</i> , 1977 Schweich Lectures (Oxford UP, 1979)
Robinson	J. A. T. Robinson, <i>Redating the New Testament</i> (London: SCM, 1976)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Sanders	E. P. Sanders, <i>The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition</i> (Cambridge UP, 1969)
Sanders and Davies	E. P. Sanders and M. Davies, <i>Studying the Synoptic Gospels</i> (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989)
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SNTS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas
Stein	R. H. Stein, <i>The Synoptic Problem</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker; Leicester: IVP, 1987)
Stoldt	H.-H. Stoldt, <i>History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis</i> (Macon: Mercer

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- UP; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980),
ET of *Geschichte und Kritik der
Markushypothese* (Göttingen, 1977)
- Streeter B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*
(London: Macmillan, 5th imp.,
1936)
- R. O. P. Taylor R. O. P. Taylor, *The Groundwork of
the Gospels* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946)
- Taylor *Mark* V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St
Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1953)
- Them.* *Themelios*
- Thiede C. P. Thiede, *Simon Peter* (Exeter:
Paternoster, 1986)
- Thompson M. B. Thompson, *The Example and
Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12:1–15:3*,
Cambridge PhD thesis, 1988
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentary
- Torrey C. C. Torrey, *Documents of the
Primitive Church* (New York: Harper,
1941)
- TU Texte und Untersuchungen
- Tuckett *SS* C. M. Tuckett (ed.), *Synoptic Studies*
(Sheffield: JSOT, 1984)
- Tyn B* *Tyndale Bulletin*
- Tyson and Longstaff J. B. Tyson and T. R. W. Longstaff,
Synoptic Abstract, The Computer
Bible, vol. 15 (Wooster, Ohio: College
of Wooster, 1978)
- UP University Press
- v.l. varia lectio (variant reading)
- vol(s) volume(s)
- Walker N. Walker, 'The Alleged Matthaean
Errata' *NTS* 9 (1963) 391–94
- War* *The Jewish War*
- D. Wenham D. Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus'
Eschatological Discourse*, GP 4
(Sheffield: JSOT, 1984)
- Wenham *CB* J. W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*

Abbreviations

- Wenham *EE* (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2nd ed., 1984)
J. W. Wenham, *Easter Enigma*
(Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984)
- Wenham *Luke* J. W. Wenham, 'The Identity of Luke', *EQ*, forthcoming
- Williams C. S. C. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles*, BNTC (London: Black, 1957)
- Zahn T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, ET, 3 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909)
- ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

INTRODUCTION: A RADICAL THESIS

A Radical Thesis

My active interest in the synoptic problem dates from 1937, when Dom John Chapman published his *Matthew, Mark and Luke*¹ in which he argued the 'Augustinian' view of the order of the gospels indicated in his title. My teachers, who held the priority of Mark and the two-document theory, virtually ignored Chapman and seemed to consider it unnecessary to take his arguments seriously. To me his arguments seemed at least as good as Streeter's, whose *The Four Gospels* had become (and was to remain for several decades) the standard work on the subject in English. I was not persuaded of all Chapman's positions, but I was sufficiently persuaded to become an undogmatic Augustinian. I have remained an undogmatic Augustinian ever since, though now I put very little weight on a literary dependence of one evangelist upon another. Rather, each evangelist writes in the way he habitually teaches, literary dependence being minimal in so far as his choice of words is concerned.

I continued to have an amateur interest in the subject over the years and noted with special attention such works as came my way which dissented from the standard view, including those of T. Zahn, H. G. Jameson, B. C. Butler, P. Parker, L. Vaganay, A. M. Farrer, N. Turner, A. W. Argyle, R. T. Simpson, W. R. Farmer, E. P. Sanders, R. L. Lindsey, M.-É. Boismard and J. M. Rist.² In 1979 I found myself in the Synoptic Problem Seminar of the Society for New Testament Studies, whose members were in disagreement over every aspect of the subject. When this international group disbanded in 1982 they had sadly to confess that after twelve years' work they had not reached a common mind on a single issue. My own views had been developing over the years on lines somewhat different from

Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke

those of the other members, and I felt that in spite of the limitations of my reading I ought to try to commit my ideas to paper.

I have focused on the question of dating because of its intrinsic importance in the evaluation of the New Testament. But the book is in fact an investigation of the whole synoptic problem, considering both internal and external evidence, believing that there is an overall consistency between them.³ Dating plays a significant part in the web of evidence.

The thesis of this book constitutes a radical departure from the commonly held view of the dates of the synoptic gospels. In spite of a few notable exceptions⁴ there is wide agreement among New Testament scholars that no gospel should be put earlier than the late 60s. Usually Mark is placed first at ± 70 and Matthew and Luke somewhat later.⁵ This book will argue that all three are probably to be dated before 55.

The title is of course a conscious echo of J. A. T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament*, though in fact the two books are almost entirely independent in their treatment of the synoptic problem. On two major points, however, I greatly value his advocacy. In essence the argument of my book is quite simple. Its starting-point is the strange ending of the Acts of the Apostles, concerning which Robinson has revived the argument which so powerfully moved A. Harnack. For some nine chapters the book of Acts has been concerned, first with the story of Paul's fateful visit to Jerusalem which led to imprisonment and his appeal to Caesar, and then with the story of his journey to Rome. We are eager to know what happened at Paul's trial, but the author never tells us. He just says: 'he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered'. The only satisfying explanation of the writer's silence concerning the trial, it will be argued, is that when Luke wrote these closing lines it had still not taken place. In other words the end of the story gives the date of the book: *c.* 62. But Acts was preceded⁶ by an earlier treatise, the Gospel according to Luke, and this, it will be argued, can be dated with some assurance in the early 50s.

Introduction: A Radical Thesis

Further, there is wide (and, I am inclined to believe, justified) agreement that the author of Luke's gospel knew the gospel of Mark, which must therefore be dated earlier still. It will be shown that the usual reasons given for dating Mark around 70 have little weight and that it can be placed more satisfactorily in the mid-40s. Here again Robinson has done good service in resurrecting the long-forgotten Bampton lectures of G. Edmundson on *The Church in Rome in the First Century* which showed how strong was the case for the presence of Peter and Mark there in 42–44.

The question of Matthew is more complicated. The universal tradition of the early church is that Matthew 'in the Hebrew dialect' was the first gospel. It will be argued with some reserve that Matthew was indeed the first gospel, and that it may possibly have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and that it was known to Mark. I leave it an open question whether Mark knew Matthew in a Semitic or a Greek form.

A new approach to the synoptic problem is attempted which denies literary dependence as the primary explanation of the likenesses of the gospels and which also questions complete literary independence. The later evangelists are seen as probably writing with knowledge of the earlier gospels – adopting the newly invented genre and in the main following the same order. But they are not seen as systematically altering their predecessors' work. (The difficulty of following and adapting scrolls which did not even have word separation is stressed.) What they write is fundamentally what they themselves are accustomed to teach. So it is a case of some degree of structural dependence and a high degree of verbal independence.

As this book is an argument in favour of the high value of Christian tradition with regard to three major books of the New Testament, I am naturally predisposed towards the traditional authorship of its other books. They have all had able defenders and I shall provisionally assume that their conclusions are satisfactory and then try to see how the case looks when this assumption is made. Though the critical questions are important in themselves they are peripheral to our central argument and I shall not load the book with their detailed discussion.

Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke

Similarly with Acts, I shall provisionally assume that the conclusions of Bernhard Weiss, E. Lekebusch, A. Wikenhauser, Eduard Meyer, Harnack, W. M. Ramsay, W. W. Gasque, Bruce, Marshall, Robinson, Hemer and others are broadly satisfactory, and treat the book as a sound historical source.⁷

Setting a high value on the traditional attributions of authorship of the New Testament books leads naturally to setting a fairly high value on other early Christian traditions. These Christians were fallible and prejudiced like the rest of us, but by and large they were, I believe, honest people trying to tell the truth. It is best, therefore, to treat them as such and to beware of the danger either of lightly rejecting their testimony or of subjecting them to unreasonable hypercriticism.

The text of the gospels to be used is that of Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (13th ed.) and of the rest of the New Testament that of the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, unless otherwise stated. The use of these two great and readily accessible works of scholarship is for the convenience of both writer and reader, though I feel bound to say that I am far from convinced that we should give the Nestle-Aland text the status of a new *Textus Receptus*.⁸ The choice of variant readings, however, is not often important to the argument and the convenience of these editions can safely be made the deciding consideration in the adoption of text.

With regard to the question of chronological framework, I have not attempted any fresh investigation of the problems involved, since absolute dating is not of importance to this thesis, and I shall normally quote dates without calling attention to their approximate character. The chronological scheme on the next page is based on a pre-publication version of the 1991 edition of F. F. Bruce's *Acts of the Apostles* (Greek Text),⁹ though I take leave to differ from him with regard to the date of Peter's escape from prison, which I put in 42 rather than 43.¹⁰ I have also added dates for the Pastoral Epistles, following the conclusions of J. van Bruggen's interesting study.¹¹ Bruce's dating, in so far as it concerns Paul from his conversion to his Roman imprisonment, is entirely corroborated by Hemer's recent study.¹²

Chronological Table

Crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost	30
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1–22; Gal. 1:15–17)	c. 33
Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30; Gal. 1:18–20)	c. 35
GOSPEL OF MATTHEW	c. 40
Accession of Herod Agrippa I; death of James son of Zebedee; Peter's imprisonment and escape to Rome (Acts 12:1–17)	42
Death of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:20–23)	March 44
Peter goes to Antioch	44
GOSPEL OF MARK	c. 45
Famine in Judea (Acts 11:28)	45–48
Barnabas and Paul visit Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; Gal. 2:1)	c. 46
Barnabas and Paul evangelise Cyprus and South Galatia (Acts 13:4–14:26)	c. 47–48
<i>Letter to the Galatians</i>	c. 48
Apostolic Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:6–29)	c. 49
Paul, Silas and Timothy take the gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:9–17:14; 1 Thess. 1:5–2:2)	c. 49–50
Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1–18; 1 Cor. 2:1–5)	50–52
<i>Letters to the Thessalonians</i>	50
Gallio becomes proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12)	51
Paul's hasty visit to Judea and Syria (Acts 18:22)	52
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–20:1)	52–55
GOSPEL OF LUKE	c. 54
<i>First Letter to the Corinthians</i>	55
Paul in Macedonia and Illyricum (Acts 20:1f; Rom. 15:19)	55–56
<i>Second Letter to the Corinthians</i>	56
Paul in Achaia (Corinth) (Acts 20:2f)	56–57
<i>Letter to the Romans</i>	57
Paul's arrival and arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–33)	57
Paul detained at Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32); <i>1 Timothy</i> , <i>Titus</i>	57–59
Paul sets sail for Italy (Acts 27:1f)	59
Paul arrives in Rome (Acts 28:14–16)	60
<i>Philippians</i> , <i>2 Timothy</i> (cf. 1:17)	c. 60–61

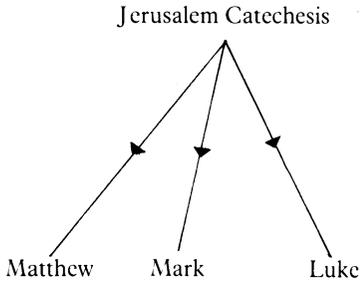
Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (cf. Acts 28:30)	62
Great fire of Rome	July 64
Neronian persecution of Roman Christians	c. 64–67
Death of Peter and Paul	c. 67
Outbreak of Jewish War	66
Destruction of Jerusalem	70

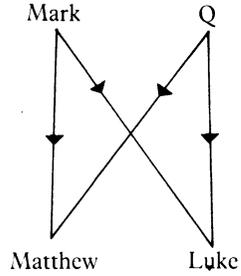
Theories about synoptic relationships

It may be helpful to give in somewhat simplified diagrammatic form some of the theories which will be discussed:

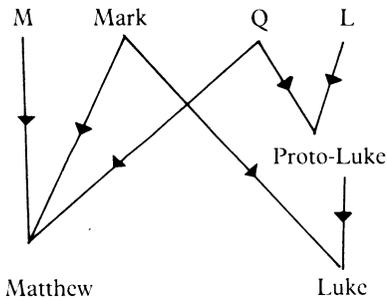
1. Oral Theory



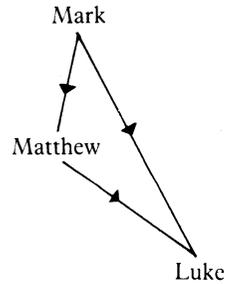
2. Two-document Theory



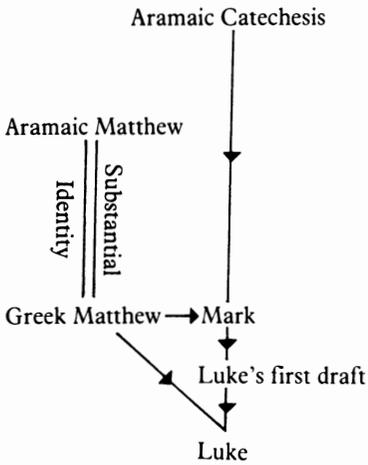
3. Four-document Theory (Streeter)



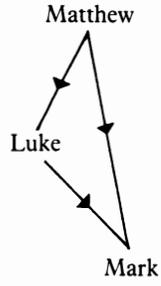
4. Markan priority, no Q (Goulder)



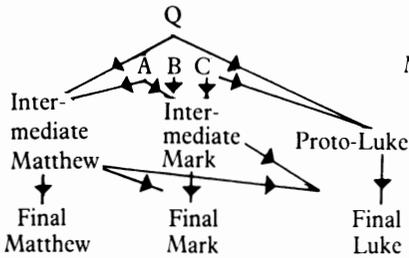
5. Successive dependence: Augustinian (Chapman's version)



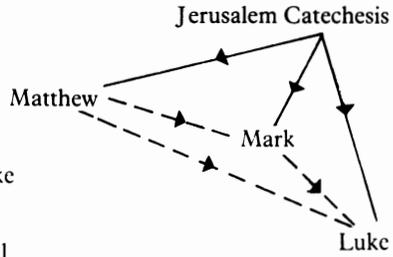
6. Two-gospel theory (Griesbach)



7. Multiple Source Theory (Boismard)



8. Oral Theory with some measure of successive dependence (Wenham)



1

THE INTRACTABLE PROBLEM

Chapter summary

The likenesses and differences between the three gospels present a problem of almost infinite complexity. The view that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and a lost source Q is still held as a working hypothesis by most scholars, but with decreasing confidence. There is no new consensus among the dissentients. There can be no solution using faulty methods, but there is an answer, because the synoptic problem concerns something that actually happened.

For nearly a hundred years the search has been for literary solutions. Before that, belief in a common form of basic oral instruction was popular, Westcott being its most notable expositor. His views were eclipsed by the Oxford School: Sanday, Hawkins and Streeter. It is, however, perfectly possible for oral tradition to be accurately transmitted, and the oral theory has been revived by Rist, Reike, Scott and Chilton. But complete independence seems unlikely on three grounds: 1.) It means that a long list of pericopes was memorised, but was demonstrably not regarded as sacrosanct. 2.) It requires that the three gospels were published almost simultaneously. 3.) It seems to be contrary to church tradition.

There is a third way which stresses verbal independence with a measure of structural dependence.

Hans-Herbert Stoldt began his book *History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis* with these words:

The critical analysis of the sources of the Gospels is justifiably regarded as one of the most difficult research problems in the history of ideas . . . one can truly say that no other enterprise in the

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history of ideas has been subjected to anywhere near the same degree of scholarly scrutiny.

When the three gospels are compared an almost infinitely complex range of likenesses and unlikenesses is found, which resolutely refuse to fit into any tidy scheme of relationships. There is no need to spell them out; they are all too well known to those who have looked seriously into the matter. The degree of complexity can be seen in W. R. Farmer's *Synopticon*, which takes the three gospels in turn and shows the points of agreement between them by means of a colour code, which is capable of showing the relations in nine different ways.¹ These agreements show that there is *some* connection between them; the question is, what?

It is true that throughout this century the great majority of scholars have held to some form of the two-document hypothesis,² believing that Mark came first and that Matthew and Luke independently built their gospels out of Mark and another source or sources known as Q. Probably, judging by the attitude of the members of recent gospels conferences, most scholars who have examined this theory critically have not been particularly impressed with its logical weight,³ yet they find no other theory convincing, and, since life is short, they have been content to go along with the majority and accept it as a working hypothesis.

But throughout the century there has been a steady stream of scholars who have been so dissatisfied with the theory on which they have been brought up that they have felt bound to try to do better, and a number have got to the point of publishing their findings.⁴ Yet, not only has no new consensus emerged, but the debate has reached such an impasse that the problem begins to look insoluble. In 1985 A. J. Bellinzoni assembled a collection of the most significant articles in *The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal*. In its final essay J. B. Tyson concluded: 'After reading these essays it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that nothing convincing has emerged from this long and tortuous discussion.'⁵

The problem is insoluble if a solution is sought along the

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wrong lines. As M. D. Goulder has said: 'Not tens but hundreds of thousands of pages have been wasted by authors on the Synoptic Problem not paying attention to errors of method.'⁶ Much of the argumentation is worth very little, because so many of the arguments are reversible: they can be argued either way with approximately equal cogency.⁷ This makes it essential to look for those arguments which have real weight. Another methodological snare is the temptation to fit the facts to a procrustean bed through looking for the wrong sort of solution.

Yet the problem is a real one to which there *is* an answer. It is not like a discussion of the contents or order of Q, where no one knows for certain whether a Q-document ever existed. The three gospels exist, there is *some* relation between them; if this relation could be correctly stated all the data would be satisfactorily explained without remainder. Has something gone wrong with our methodology?

It will be noticed that the research of the last hundred years has been dominated by a belief in direct literary connections, yet a century ago the then reigning view (at least in the English-speaking world) relied on common oral tradition to explain the likenesses between the gospels. H. Alford wrote: 'I do not see how any theory of mutual interdependence will leave to our three Evangelists their credit as able or trustworthy writers, or even as honest men: nor can I find any such theory borne out by the nature of the variations apparent in the respective texts.'⁸ B. F. Westcott's *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (1860), which had reached its seventh edition by 1887,⁹ was the most influential advocate of the oral theory, and its influence continued strongly for most of the latter half of the century.

Westcott acknowledged that 'the explanation of the phenomena which [the Synoptic gospels] present is sought by universal consent in the presence of a common element' (177). He considered that this common element derived from the fact that the Twelve devoted themselves to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4), remaining 'together at Jerusalem in close communion long enough to shape a common narrative, and to fix it with the requisite consistency' (157). This was a ministry to Judeans,

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Galileans and Jews from the whole Diaspora. During this period, 'out of the countless multitude of Christ's acts, those were selected and arranged . . . which were seen to have the fullest representative significance' (157). In recounting the words spoken by Jesus and others a close unanimity was preserved, but in narrative each evangelist developed his individual style (183), making it 'a separate organic whole' (189).¹⁰

It was W. Sanday and his Oxford school who, towards the end of the nineteenth century, began to establish the two-document theory which became increasingly the received orthodoxy of the English-speaking world in the twentieth century, as it had already become in Germany.¹¹ It was felt that precise, detailed and objective work, as exemplified in J. C. Hawkins' *Horae Synopticae* (Oxford, 1899), gave hope of a 'scientific' solution to the problem, such as the oral theory could never provide. Precise, statistical studies to determine the redactional relationship between documents have formed a major part of the work on the problem throughout this century.¹²

That the relationship is primarily literary rather than oral has been the assumption underlying most of the work of the present century.¹³ This is strikingly illustrated by Farmer in *The Synoptic Problem*, where Westcott is dismissed in a footnote.¹⁴ It was illustrated even more strikingly by Sanders and Davies in 1989, who simply say that the synoptists 'often share the same Greek vocabulary, suggesting literary dependence' (vii) – they barely allude to the oral theory. After reviewing elaborated forms of the two-source hypothesis advocated by F. C. Grant and R. Funk and the multiple source hypothesis of M.-É. Boismard (with four sources and three intermediate 'gospels'), they too favour a complicated literary source theory – which, however, decisively rejects Q.¹⁵

The difficulty of distinguishing oral and literary relationships

The great question is: Have we been justified in placing so much emphasis on documentary relationships? Lying behind this is

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the even more basic question: Can one distinguish documentary dependence from indebtedness to a common oral tradition? A frequently used method of approach is simply to look at the parallel narratives and ask oneself about the closeness of parallelism. If the wording is largely different, one rejects a literary connection; if the wording has a good deal in common yet is not very close, one keeps an open mind; but as soon as there is identity of expression for more than about a dozen words in succession, one leaps to the conclusion that the connection must be literary. But this is not a safe conclusion. Even in our print-ridden era many Christians know a large number of ringing passages from the gospels and can quote them in their favourite version verbatim: 'Foxes have holes . . .', 'The harvest truly is great . . .', 'Ask and it shall be given you . . .', 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . .' Much more would Greek-speaking Christians in the first century have memorised many of the sayings of Jesus in whatever form they were commonly taught.

There is no reason therefore why sayings of dozens of words in length should not occasionally be found in identical or nearly identical form and yet have no literary connection. As far as the wording of the individual pericopes is concerned, nearly all (if not all) could be explained by oral tradition. There are a few passages where the wording is so close for so long that it is difficult not to suspect literary dependence. The most noteworthy example is the γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν sermon, which in Matthew (3:7–10) has sixty-three words and in Luke (3:7–9) sixty-four, with only three small differences between them. This is not a verbatim sermon of the Baptist, but a highly condensed summary which both authors must have got ultimately from a common source. Such a passage, given as part of the oral instruction, was easily memorised and could have been preserved intact in two retentive memories over a period of years. The passage concerning the faithful and wise steward in Luke 12:42–46 remains very close to Matthew 24:45–51 for more than a hundred words, but the two versions cannot be described as nearly identical, since some 15% of the words show differences. Such a concise and memorable parable could well have been preserved with that degree of similarity along two lines of

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oral transmission from a single telling or from two slightly different tellings.¹⁶

In recent years there have been at least four brave souls (J. M. Rist, B. Reicke, J. W. Scott and B. Chilton) who have defied the modern consensus with regard to literary dependence and have declared their belief in the complete independence of two or more of the gospels. In 1978 Rist's SNTS monograph appeared under the title *On the Independence of Matthew and Mark*,¹⁷ in which the author denied all literary dependence in the case of these two gospels. Rist was severely criticised by some reviewers, as for example by M. D. Goulder who said:

The widely held belief that Matthew and Mark are related literarily rests on the following facts. (1) There are 661 verses in Mark, 606 of which, on a conservative count, have parallels in Matthew. (2) There are 11,078 words in Mark, the material parallel to which is given in 8,555 words in Matthew; of which 4,230 words are identical both in form and in sequence . . .

. . . what is even more disturbing is his failure to use the argumentation which is common to the books he does refer to: all modern discussion includes the mention of word-counts, parallel usage elsewhere in the Gospel, etc.¹⁸

Others, equally wedded to the notion of literary dependence, were respectful. J. B. Orchard spoke of 'powerful advocacy' in a 'learned study'; T. R. W. Longstaff of the book's 'great strengths'; W. R. Farmer said that the 'book is full of vigorous and original argumentation'.¹⁹ But (as we shall see) the author's reversion to total independence faces difficulties.

We shall look into the question of the order of the pericopes on pp. 44–7 (showing the closeness of Mark and Luke) and on pp. 89, 101–8 (showing the closeness of Mark and Matthew, in spite of three 'dislocations'). The closeness of order constitutes an objection to the notion of complete independence. Rist is inclined to allow 'that there are no particularly compelling reasons for denying that the author of Luke knew Mark' (4), but in the case of Matthew he considers that the sequence of pericopes in some parts of the preliterate tradition must have been firmly secured (13) and held in the memory (16). This

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means in Matthew 14–28 and Mark 6:14–16:8 seventy items all in order²⁰ (except for a minor difference in the way the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig-tree are related), and this in spite of various omissions or additions by one or other evangelist. Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, it seems more likely that one evangelist followed the other or that both followed a common written source, than that a standard order for reciting the oral tradition had been memorised, *but not consistently adhered to*.

In 1986 B. Reicke published his *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels*, in which he argued the literary independence of all three gospels and dated them about 60 (180). He holds that Luke's prologue refers *exclusively* (45) to oral traditions 'delivered to us'; these traditions he considers were moulded over a long preliterate period (x) and were then collected at about the same time by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Luke and Mark were together in Caesarea (165, 170) and Luke indicates in his prologue that he knew that Mark and others were collecting material at the same time as he (166), yet Reicke insists that none of the three evangelists made use of the work of either of the others. He speaks of 'artificial source theories' (169); literary dependence is 'unnatural' (85), has 'bizarre consequences' (184), and there is a 'labyrinthian distribution of similarities and discrepancies . . . so that an irrational zigzag pattern emerges' (109). When, however, he comes to the question of the order of the pericopes, he can only say that 'some fundamental recollections . . . were apt to be kept in a certain order' (49).

J. W. Scott was made a PhD of St Andrew's University in 1986 for a dissertation arguing Luke's independence of Mark and Matthew. His unpublished thesis *Luke's Preface and the Synoptic Problem* is noteworthy for its learning, clarity and independence of thought.²¹ The first nine chapters are devoted to exegesis of the preface, which, he maintains, makes no reference to Mark or Q, since, according to literary custom, Luke would have referred to them had he used them. He claims rather, in accordance with an interpretation widely favoured by the fathers, to have been a follower of all the apostles, probably having lived in Jerusalem for a considerable time in the 40s. He