

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

worthless if God is not in fact angry at sin ; if, because He is love unspeakable, He cannot be wrath as well. But we can only say so if we disregard the voice of the instructed Christian conscience, which tells us plainly that we question God's anger at sin only because we are so little angry at it ourselves. And if the wrath of God be a dread reality, not as a quasi-human passion, but as the reaction of pure holiness against moral evil, then it is possible to hold that right had to be done by that morality which is, as Butler puts it, "the nature of things," and that by His life and death Jesus Christ achieved this great task. There is a homage due to the righteous will of God, which we cannot render of ourselves, but which in the acts and endurences of an historic life He rendered for us. There was a divinely produced increase in the content and significance of the world. And all this is possible, ultimately, because God is the God of history, who in Jesus makes a new start in His connexion with the sinful, thus altering and rectifying, in ethical and spontaneous ways, the relationship which had previously obtained.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

*THE MARKAN NARRATIVE IN THE SYNOPTIC
GOSPELS.*

THE literature of the times reveals a marked increase of attention to the many questions raised by a study of the Synoptic Gospels. This is true whether we consider the history these Gospels contain, or the way they came into being. In the latter connexion we have recently had such works as Harnack's *Sayings of Jesus*, Stanton's *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, and now the collection of admirable Essays on the same subject from a School of Oxford scholars, under the general editorship of Dr. Sanday. These works alone, together with the invaluable *Horæ Synopticæ* of Sir

J. C. Hawkins, and the *Synopticon* of Mr. W. G. Rushbrooke, suffice to bring the whole question before the student of this most important subject. Its importance is seen in the fact that it is in proportion as we discover the method of those who compiled for us these Gospels that the Person of our Lord, the object of our faith, will appear in clearer light.

For some time it has been held that the problem presented by the history of these writings was insoluble, but the patience and reverence of such writers as have been mentioned is inexhaustible, and now it would seem as though some day we may arrive at a fairly general consensus of opinion. At any rate, there is a distinct movement in the direction of solution in dealing with this problem. The generally accepted abandonment of the doctrine of an oral basis for the three Gospels marks a considerable step in advance. So long as this was held to be a probable, or even a possible, explanation it was difficult to follow out the far more likely clue afforded in what is known as "The Two-Document Theory." Dr. Sanday assumes a general acceptance of this as a working hypothesis.

We may, therefore, concentrate attention upon the Markan element common to the three Synoptists as a document, and upon the collection of discourses or "sayings" commonly designated "Q." A question of extraordinary interest will remain in the special source, or sources, used by Luke, but this may be allowed to wait. For if a general agreement as to the two former questions may be arrived at, the greater part of our difficulty will have been removed, and we shall be in a better position to consider the matter peculiar to the Third Gospel.

Now considering the Markan narrative which appears in all three Gospels most scholars accept the priority of the Second Gospel. That is to say, they hold that Mark's Gospel, *as we have it*, was used by the authors of both the

first and the third Gospels. It is to be observed, however, that they do not take up this position without some amount of qualification. Thus Dr. Sanday speaks of this source as being "practically identical" with the canonical Mark, while Sir John Hawkins describes it as "corresponding on the whole" with Mark. It is easy to see that this hesitation or qualification is due to the fact that while the priority of Mark accounts for the points of correspondence between the three, it is contradicted by the fact that the first and the third Gospels differ, sometimes considerably, just in that narrative portion of their writings in which they are supposed to follow Mark. If this Markan narrative is based upon a source not quite the same as canonical Mark, the first step towards a settlement of opinion will be a discussion of those points in which that source differs from the Second Gospel.

We find that such differences are threefold :—

1. Matter contained in Mark is omitted by both Matthew and Luke.
2. Matter contained in Mark is omitted by one or other of Matthew and Luke.
3. Narrative matter not in Mark appears in both Matthew and Luke.

To take only outstanding examples of the first of these.

We find that Mark describes the healing of the blind at Bethsaida (viii. 22-26). He also gives the Parable of the Seed growing secretly (iv. 26-29), and the account of the young man with the linen cloth (xiv. 51-52). None of these appears in the two Gospels which are supposed to be based upon the narrative containing them. Sir John Hawkins includes the story of the healing in a list of passages which seem to limit the power of Jesus, the suggestion being that it was omitted by the other evangelists for this reason. Yet it may be questioned whether there is any real limitation

here, even though a material means was employed in bringing about the cure. There is more limitation in the statement that in a certain place our Lord could do no mighty works because of unbelief (vi. 5), and this appears in the First Gospel. There is no explanation offered for the omission of the other two sections. If the parable is to be explained as indicating Mark's use of Q, the more difficult question is at once raised—how then did both Matthew and Luke omit this important parable when they used Q? For it is admitted that the two last used Q with far greater exactness than did Mark, if indeed he used it at all. The story of the young man with a linen garment is dismissed as a "gratuitous story" which the two later evangelists would omit as irrelevant.

Now that either St. Matthew or St. Luke should, for what we may call editorial reasons, omit one or other of these would not be strange; but that writing separately as they did they should fix upon precisely these sections for omission is difficult to believe. This difficulty is immensely increased when they are seen to agree in omitting all those "vivid touches" which in the Second Gospel do so much to bring the personality of our Lord before us. That they should be omitted because they were thought to lower the dignity of our Lord can scarcely be maintained when it is observed that His shrinking from the Cup in the hour of His Passion is given by all three, and the Apostles certainly appear in a compromising light on that occasion.

The two editors may have used their judgment in altering words and expressions, but it is to be observed that expressions which may have seemed harsh or outlandish gain in vividness where they seem to lose in being strange. This is specially true of such expressions as *σχιζομένους* (i. 10), and *πραΐαι πραΐαι* (vi. 40), and that both Luke and Matthew should invariably fix upon such words for omission

does not seem to us likely, especially when we see that they do not carry the principle of emendation through. For example: *πρωτοκαθεδρίας* only appears in ecclesiastical writers, but it is found in all three of our evangelists (Mark xii. 39=Matt. xxiii. 6=Luke xi. 43). *ἐκολόβωσε* is a very rare word, but it appears in Mark xiii. 20=Matt. xxiv. 22. *τέρατα* is not found in the Synoptic Gospels except at the place where it is evidently taken from the Markan narrative (Mark xiii. 22=Matt. 24, 25). So with *ἀγρυπνεῖτε*: Luke accepts the word from his Markan source (xiii. 33=Luke xxi. 36), but it appears nowhere else in the three Gospels.

Under the second head of differences we have matter contained in the canonical Mark, but omitted by one or other of the two later Evangelists. It will be sufficient under this heading to consider the much-discussed Lukan omission (Mark vi. 45-viii. 26). The passage contains much that would make it peculiarly appropriate to Luke, with his appreciation of the Gentile mission of St. Paul, and with his marked sympathy with women. The passage contains, in addition to the story of the Syrophenician Woman, much teaching on ceremonial defilement, which would commend it to a follower of Paul. Yet Luke omits it. Sir John Hawkins considers that this was due partly to the desire of the Evangelist to curtail a manuscript already too long, and partly because the use of the term "dog" would be offensive to Gentile readers. Dr. Sanday agrees with this conclusion.

Yet with all due deference to such authority, we would urge that the passage after all contained the most striking vindication of the Gentile claim to a share of the children's feast. The point of the whole story was that *in spite of the contempt* felt by the Pharisees and the Jews generally, a contempt well known already to all Gentiles, and, therefore, the less likely to offend them when restated in the story, Christ agreed with the woman that the blessings of the covenant

were for the Gentiles also. If there was no alternative explanation available for the fact of the non-appearance of this passage we might accept that it was due to the necessity to shorten the narrative, though even then it would be strange that Luke should choose this passage so peculiarly "Pauline" for omission.

In the third class of differences we must again confine our attention to a single instance. Matthew and Luke agree in giving an account of the healing of the son (servant) of a centurion (Matt. viii. 5-10=Luke vii. 1-9).

The non-appearance of this section in the Second Gospel becomes a difficulty in the way of those who hold that canonical Mark was before the first and the third Evangelists. How on this supposition did the story come before them? The answer generally given is that it was taken from Q. But this answer raises the further difficulty that in that case Q contained narrative as well as Logia. It must thus have been to all intents and purposes a "gospel," and its disappearance becomes as inexplicable as that of the Ur-Markus would have been, had such a document existed. But waiving for the present the question of the contents of Q, we notice that the incident as related in the First Gospel belongs to a section introduced by the formula, "When Jesus had ended these sayings." Now this phrase, or its equivalent, occurs invariably where the Evangelist passes from discourse to narrative of events. It occurs at the close of each of the five great blocks of sayings which form the outstanding feature of the First Gospel—a fact which has great significance in connexion with Matthew's contribution to the Gospel which bears his name. Further, the incident is sandwiched between the story of the healing of the leper, and the recovery of Peter's wife's mother, which are distinctly Markan sections. The only apparent reason for attributing the section to Q is that it is difficult to accept it as

Markan when it is not found in canonical Mark. But this is due to the assumption that the Second Gospel as we have it was before the other two Evangelists, and it will be shown later on in this article that we are not shut up to this theory, and that there is another which altogether avoids the difficulties raised by referring the section to Q.

If it be urged that the presence of a certain amount of reported speech in the section shows it to partake of the general characteristics of Q, it may be pointed out on the other hand that narrative does not exclude conversation such as we have in this incident, and that there is all the difference in the world between such conversation as we have here and the short pithy aphorisms which make up the Sermon on the Mount.

Other similar Markan omissions are to be found in the reference to the sheep (son) falling into a pit on the Sabbath (Matt. xii. 11-12=Luke xiv. 5-6) and the account of the death of Judas (Matt. xxvii. 3-8=Acts i. 18-19). But lack of space prevents our dealing with these. A general conclusion may, however, be drawn from these three classes of differences to the effect that they make the theory of canonical Mark as a source used by the first and third Evangelist very difficult, and we may well ask, before we accept it, whether there is no other explanation possible.

Now the theory of an Ur-Markus—that is, of an original Gospel used by all three Evangelists—has never gained any great amount of acceptance in England. It is wrecked on the plea that if such a Gospel ever existed it is strange that no reference to it should ever have been made in patristic writings. It is difficult to believe that it could so completely have disappeared. We do not advocate that theory here. There is, however, a modification of it which would secure the relief which it undoubtedly offers in such differences as we have been considering, and yet avoid the difficulty of its

disappearance. It consists in an application of the Proto, Deutero, and Trito Mark, with which Dr. Arthur Wright has made us familiar, not to an oral tradition as he does, but to documents.

May not the true explanation be found in the repetition of Mark's "Memoirs of Peter's preaching" by himself? Critics have not ignored altogether the possibility of some such explanation. Dr. J. Weiss holds that the canonical Mark is not identical with the Mark which lay before the first and third Evangelists. Dr. P. W. Schmiedel considers that, in the light of secondary passages, the canonical Mark is a later edition, and Dr. Salmon maintains that in our Mark we have what is "at once the oldest and the youngest of the Synoptics." Wendling considers that the present Mark is made up of three layers. He finds in the Gospel the work of a historian, a poet, and a theologian. We cannot follow this critic in that view, but taking the Markan narrative as we find it in all three Gospels we may trace a threefold character, due to the process of development in the thought and purpose of the writer, or it may be of the great preacher whose amanuensis he was. The simple narrative of events "terse and unadorned" would by frequency of repetition in public statement tend to become adorned with just those expressions which, as we have seen, make the Second Gospel so picturesque and vivid, while the growth of interpretation in the Christian Church would increase the amount of doctrinal matter, and cause the story to be recognised as a "Gospel." All these features exist in canonical Mark, but they are to be explained, not as the work of three writers imposed one upon another, but as the natural growth of the story as it was told or written down again and again.

Dr. Sanday himself seems to feel that there must have been some earlier manuscript of the Gospel in existence and that from it we may derive the sections in which there is a com-

bination of Matthew and Luke against Mark. Canonical Mark, he holds, to be a recension of that text. If the differences were merely verbal there would be very much to be said for this, but when we see that they consist also of considerable sections, the theory scarcely seems tenable. The possibility, however, of Markan narrative having come before the first and third Evangelists in a form similar to, and yet differing from, what we have in the canonical Mark may be claimed to be another step in the direction of recognising the possibility that more than one edition of Mark's Gospel was extant in the earliest days. Dr. Blass has made us familiar with the theory that Luke wrote more than one edition both of the Gospel that bears his name, and also of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. He accounts for the marked differences that exist between the Western and the Neutral Texts of those books in this way. We do not purpose to do more here than refer to this theory by way of making the point that such a thing was possible, and considering the method of producing literature in earliest days we should say that it was highly probable. If, then, Mark prepared his Gospel for the different congregations with which he was connected in earliest days in Caesarea, later on in Alexandria, and last of all in Rome, we have a simple yet most effective method of accounting for the general likeness belonging to all three versions of the Markan narrative and also for the points of difference.

Reverting by way of illustration to the points already mentioned in this article as creating difficulty, we notice that such a miracle as that of the healing of the blind at Bethsaida, such a parable as that of the seed growing secretly, and such an incident as that of the young man that escaped naked from the hands of the soldiers that took Jesus prisoner, are easily explained as not omissions made by Matthew and Luke, but additions made either by Peter or Mark as the

story grew in the course of their ministry under the directing control of the Holy Spirit, who brought everything to their remembrance of what their Lord had done or said. The story of the Syrophenician woman would fail to find a place in the Third Gospel because it was not in the earliest edition used by Luke. The growth of the Gentile Church, accompanied as that was by Paul's revolt from the whole theory of things clean and unclean according to Mosaic law, had invested the incident with new and important significance, and so it would find its place in the later editions. The application of this theory to the story of the healing of the Centurion's son is of special importance, as it affects not only our conception of the Markan source but also that of the source designated "Q." We have already suggested that this incident belongs far more to the category of "narrative" than to that of "discourses," and that to relegate it to Q raises as many difficulties as it removes. The theory of three editions of the Markan narrative allows us at once to see that it may have been included in the earlier editions and yet be excluded from the third. Nor need we be always anxious to account for such omissions. The advantage of simplicity in dealing with such matters is very great, and something should always be allowed to the judgment of the Evangelist in including or omitting incidents in his telling of the story.

The account of the Baptism and Temptation of our Lord as given in the three Gospels bristles with difficulties for those who believe that canonical Mark was before the first and third Evangelists. Where did these last obtain the full details on these matters, so conspicuously missing from the Second Gospel?

Again recourse is had to Q, and with a similar result. It makes Q to be far more of a Gospel, properly so called, than a collection of discourses; and it raises further difficulties

when we see that there is a difference in detail between the account in the First and that in the Third Gospel. If both of these used Q, how is it that they differ from one another as they do? But according to the three editions theory we can understand that the story of the Baptist's mission, of his baptism of our Lord and of the Temptation, so closely connected with it, would be given in far greater detail in the earlier editions, while in a later edition prepared for sojourners in Rome to whom such matters would be remote and comparatively uninteresting, the barest reference to these events by way of introduction to the ministry of our Lord would suffice. At the same time the fact that the first and third Evangelists used different editions of the Markan narrative would account for points of difference between these two. It thus becomes unnecessary to exhaust ingenuity to explain why the order of the temptations of our Lord differs in the two Gospels, or why the account of the preaching of the Baptist is so much fuller in the Third than it is in the First Gospel. It is easy to multiply examples of the relief afforded in this section alone by this theory which we venture to emphasise. Space forbids our doing this, and it must suffice to call attention to the matter, and to plead that a more thorough application of this theory be made before accepting as conclusive that canonical Mark was used by the compilers of the First and Third Gospels.

One other matter remains to be considered in connexion with the Markan narrative. Did the author use the document known as Q? In the essays, to which such frequent reference has been made, Mr. Streeter, followed by Dr. Sanday, says that he did. But no one will surely contend that "narrative" excludes "sayings." It must be remembered that these priceless sayings of our Lord were for the most part *obiter dicta*. Matthew's collection of them has made us think of them as being definite and formal

discourse. There is good reason for accepting that such arrangement of these sayings as we have both in the First and the Third Gospel was more a matter of editorial work, and that the words were first spoken as our Lord performed His works of healing, or entered into the intercourse that each day afforded. Mark, as he describes such work and intercourse, would mention what Jesus said on each occasion, and it is unnecessary to say either that any word in the Second Gospel, reminiscent of what we find in the Sermon on the Mount, is a "mutilation" of Q, or that he "probably only quoted from memory." After all the author of the "sayings" is not Matthew, but Jesus, and in describing so much of the wonderful history as seemed to him sufficient for his purpose Mark might well state, sometimes in slightly differing form, what Jesus said on occasions without our supposing that he was dependent on the Logia.

We have no space in this article for dealing with the other most interesting questions that belong to Q, and the special sources that seem to have been used by Luke. We may rejoice that the vexed questions that have gathered so long around the Synoptic Gospels are now presented to us in such a way as to make a solution appear far more probable than it did only a few years ago. Solution of this problem contains the promise of even greater things. It is well that the Essays so well put before us by Dr. Sanday should close with one on the eschatological problem. The nearer we come to a conclusion as to the sources of the three Gospels, the more easy will it be to discuss the significance of such apocalyptic references as they contain.

W. W. HOLDSWORTH.