

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 Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

IN the year 1894 a 'Seminar' was formed in Oxford for the study of the Synoptic Problem. It met in the 'lodgings' of the Lady Margaret Professor. Three meetings were held in each term, or nine in the year. At the end of sixteen years a volume of papers has been published containing the results of this combined and prolonged study. The volume is entitled *Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, by Members of the University of Oxford (Clarendon Press; 12s. 6d. net).

Professor SANDAY has edited the volume; and he has himself contributed the first essay. But he has done more than that. He has written an Introduction to the book, an introduction of twenty pages, in which he estimates the value of its contents. The estimate is not intended to relieve the student of the Synoptic Gospels from the necessity of reading the essays, and it does not relieve him. On the contrary, it creates a rather keen appetite for their study. But it enables us to distinguish conclusions which have the consent of all, from conclusions which are peculiar to one. And it tells us how it fares at the present moment with that very hardy perennial, the Synoptic Problem.

The first essay, we say, is contributed by Professor SANDAY himself. It had its place determined for it, he tells us, by its subject. 'It is an attempt

to correct in advance some mistakes which may very naturally be made, and to substitute in the mind of the student a right picture for a wrong one of the way in which the Evangelists sat down to their task, from the double point of view of internal or mental conditions, and of external or mechanical.'

But first of all, what *is* the Synoptic Problem, and what makes it so persistent? The Synoptic Problem is to account for the similarities and the differences between the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. It is now practically settled that St. Matthew and St. Luke (never mind the authors at present, think of the Gospels) used two fundamental documents. These were (1) a complete Gospel, practically identical with our St. Mark; and (2) a collection, consisting mainly but not entirely of discourses. It is possible that St. Mark himself used this second document when he wrote his Gospel. But in any case St. Matthew and St. Luke used it. And the greater part of what these two Gospels have in common, if it is not found in St. Mark, must have been taken from this collection. That explains how it is that the first and third Gospels often use identical or almost identical language. This, then, is called the 'Two-Document Hypothesis,' and a good working hypothesis it is. But this is not yet the Synoptic Problem.

The Synoptic Problem arises, not from the resemblances only, nor yet from the differences only, but from the remarkable combination of resemblance and difference. Now the documentary theory accounts very well for the resemblances. That is its strength. But it does not account so well for the differences. That is its weakness. Or, at any rate, as Dr. SANDAY expresses it, 'that is the point at which the strain upon it is most felt.'

Is there any other theory that would explain the differences better? There is the oral theory. The oral theory is the view (held and advocated especially by Dr. Arthur WRIGHT of Cambridge), that our Gospels as we have them are not based upon earlier written documents, but that until the time at which they were committed to writing, the substance of them had been transmitted orally. Well, just as it is the strong point of the documentary hypothesis to explain the resemblances, so is it the strong point of the oral theory to account for the differences. But we cannot have both theories at once. And between the two the majority of scholars (including all the participants in this Oxford Seminar) give their decision for the documentary hypothesis. They believe that it accounts for the larger number of the things which have to be accounted for.

It is not enough, however, to account for a certain number of these things. They have all to be accounted for. That is the task of the Seminar. And in the first essay of this volume Professor SANDAY leads the way. He points out the general conditions under which the Gospels were written.

What are the things which have to be accounted for? The same or similar words are used in one Gospel in one sense, and in another Gospel in another sense. Thus in Mk 11³ (corrected text) the two disciples who are sent to fetch the ass upon which our Lord is to make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, are told

that, if asked what they are doing, they are to say, 'The Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him back again.' But in Mt 21³ all that they are told to say is, 'The Lord hath need of them.' And they are assured that 'straightway he (the owner) will send them' (the ass and the colt). That is one example, and it is remarkable enough.

Again, the same or similar words are sometimes assigned to different speakers. Dr. SANDAY gives three simple examples. In Mk 6¹⁴ and Mt 14² Herod himself says that John the Baptist was risen from the dead; in Lk 9⁷ others say it in his hearing. In Mk 10²¹ Jesus says to the young ruler, 'One thing thou lackest'; in Mt 19²⁰ the ruler puts it as a question, 'What do I lack?' In Mk 15³⁶ it is the man who offers our Lord the sponge soaked in vinegar who says, 'Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to take him down'; in Mt 27⁴⁹ it is not the man who says this, but the crowd of bystanders.

Once more, in one Gospel we may find as part of a speech what in another Gospel is part of a narrative; or we may find as a question in one Gospel what in another is a direct statement. For instance: In Mk 14¹ the Evangelist states that 'after two days was the feast of the passover'; whereas in Mt 26^{1, 2} it is Jesus Himself that says, 'Ye know that after two days the passover cometh.' The question in Mk 4²¹, 'Is the lamp brought to be put under the bushel?' becomes in Lk 8¹⁶ the statement, 'And no man, when he hath lighted a lamp, covereth it with a vessel.'

Still more curious are other cases which Professor SANDAY gathers together miscellaneously. Some of them appear to be contradictory. In Mt 3⁵ we read that 'all the region round about Jordan went out to Jesus,' but in Lk 3³ we are told that Jesus Himself 'came into all the region round about Jordan.' In Mk 6^{19, 20} it is said that Herodias desired to kill John, but could not, because Herod feared him; but in Mt 14⁵

it is said that Herod desired to kill John, but feared the multitude. After these striking examples one is less astonished at cases of inversion of order, such as the transposition of the second and third temptations (Luke placing that on the high mountain before that on the pinnacle of the temple), but they are just as difficult to account for.

How are these things to be explained? It is supposed that St. Matthew and St. Luke had before them documents, and the same documents. How could such differences occur in their use of them? That is the question which Professor SANDAY proposes to answer.

In the first place, he says that the Evangelists did not consider it their duty merely to transcribe the documents before them. They thought of themselves not as copyists, but as historians. 'They are not unconscious of a certain dignity in their calling.' They consider themselves entitled to use their text freely. They do not hesitate to tell the story over again in their own words.

But on the other hand, if they were not mere copyists, neither were the Evangelists historians of the modern and highly developed literary type. St. Luke, it is true, has some ambition in the matter of style. He is even conscious of connecting the events which he narrates with the larger framework of the world's history. But St. Luke also had a further and a different object chiefly in view.

Not even does St. Luke narrate the facts as facts, still less do St. Matthew and St. Mark. And least of all does St. John. Every one of the Evangelists had an eye not only to the facts, but to something to be believed as growing out of the facts. St. Luke writes to strengthen the confidence of his patron Theophilus in the truths in which he had been instructed. St. Mark indicates his object when he calls his work 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' St. Matthew

declares his purpose when he so frequently points out the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. St. John says, 'These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' In short, although they leave the story, as a rule, to produce its own effect, the writers of the Gospels write with an edifying or homiletical purpose in view.

We are accordingly to think of the Evangelists, not as painfully transcribing the texts on which they relied, or feeling themselves in any way called upon to reproduce them verbally, but as setting to work in a spirit independent and yet on the whole faithful, not punctilious and yet not wilfully capricious and erratic, content to tell their story very much as it came, sometimes in the words of their predecessors, and sometimes in their own.

It often happens that in the course of the discussion of some great problem one particular text of Scripture emerges and assumes unexpected importance. When the critical study of the Old Testament entered its first stages of popularity there was great searching of heart over the declaration in Jeremiah (7²²), 'For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.' At present the chief subject of debate is the eschatological element in the Gospels. And the text which has unexpectedly risen into prominence is Mt 11^{12, 13}, 'And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.'

Professor E. F. SCOTT has written a book on the eschatological problem. It is a notable book. There is no aspect of that difficult and disturbing question which he has failed to consider. The discussion is, moreover, as free from traditional fetters as any one would expect it to be who has read the author's book on the Fourth Gospel. About the middle of the volume, which is entitled

The Kingdom and the Messiah (T. & T. Clark; 6s. net), Professor SCOTT finds himself face to face with the passage quoted from St. Matthew, and under the necessity of explaining it.

Why is this passage so important in the discussion of the eschatology of the Gospels? Professor SCOTT will tell us.

First of all he directs our attention to a series of incidents in which Jesus bestows emphatic praise on those who have forced themselves on His help by some aggressive action. Christ recognizes in these persons the religious temper which He was seeking to awaken in men, and which was the necessary condition of all Divine benefits. The paralytic at Capernaum, the Syrophenician woman, Zacchæus, the blind man by the wayside—did not wait passively until Jesus should take knowledge of them, but obtruded themselves upon Him, and compelled His action. He welcomed this importunity. He was willing that His gift should be wrested from Him prematurely; and He discerned, in the eagerness which had anticipated the due time, a spirit of faith.

Jesus is especially pleased with this eagerness when it expresses itself in prayer. For prayer, as He conceives it, is much more than passive surrender to the will of God. The will of God is not unalterable. It is the will of a Father, who is awake to our needs and longings, and who desires that we should plead with Him and prevail. By granting us access to Himself in prayer He has given us control over the mightiest of all powers. To the prayer of faith nothing is impossible. Even to the length of winning for yourself the interposition of God when He seems most unwilling, 'Ask, and ye shall receive.'

Now the chief object of prayer is the coming of the Kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer itself the central petition is 'Thy kingdom come.' But what would be the use of offering this petition if the date of the Kingdom were unalterably fixed,

and if nothing were left to men but to stand by and wait its fulfilment? The very object of the petition is to bring the power of faith to bear upon the Divine purpose. This is the object of the Lord's Prayer as a whole. It is also the meaning of those two remarkable parables which we call the Importunate Widow and the Traveller at Midnight. The Judge and the Friend are reluctant to grant what is asked of them; yet they grant it upon pressure. Jesus represents God, not as unwilling to give, certainly, but as willing to be importuned for the fulfilment of His great purpose. By crying unto Him day and night, by knocking at the door though it seemed barred against them, men had it in their power to move His will and shorten the interval of waiting.

This brings Professor SCOTT to the passage in St. Matthew. There is a similar saying in St. Luke: 'The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it' (16¹⁶). It is no doubt the same saying in another form. Professor SCOTT believes that the true saying is preserved in St. Matthew. He supposes that St. Luke was perplexed by the saying, as all interpreters have been since, and preferred to offer it in a paraphrase of what he considered to be its meaning. And this is a proof that the saying is genuine. 'To the second generation it had already become unintelligible, and could never have found its way into the Gospels unless it had formed an inalienable part of the very earliest tradition.'

What is the meaning of the saying? Before we come to that, we must ask what the saying is. Now the word translated 'suffereth violence' (*βιάζεται*) might be translated actively, 'breaks in,' 'forces itself,' on the attention. And if it were not for the second clause, this might be an easy solution of the difficulty. But the two parts of the sentence are obviously intended to be parallel. We are therefore compelled to translate as in the English versions: 'The kingdom of heaven

suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.' This last phrase, however, could be amended. The true translation of the verb used (*ἀπράζουσι*) is not 'take it by force,' but 'seize hold of it,' 'carry it away as plunder.' Accordingly Professor SCOTT understands that the figure is not that of a citadel to be stormed, but that of a prize just coming within reach, which the bolder spirits immediately capture, without waiting for a signal. In plainer words, John marks the beginning of a new era. In former times the Kingdom was merely prophesied and foreshadowed; now it has come so near that men can hasten their possession of it by a strong effort of their own.

'One of the most hopeful features of the revived interest and enthusiasm which is being displayed in foreign missionary work at the present day, is that a clearer insight has been gained into the characteristics, the capacities, and the requirements of the various races to whom the Christian faith is presented. There has come a deeper recognition of the fact that "the gifts of the nations are the riches of the Church." We are no longer content with the meagre ideal—so ineffective in practice because so wrong in principle—of setting up in China, India, or Central Africa, a mere copy of the English Church at home. The Holy Spirit is continually opening out before our eyes a far wider vision of the "kings of the earth bringing their honour and glory into the Holy City," or, in other words, of the special endowments of every race of men being consecrated to the service of Christ's Church.

'But this ideal will only become a reality when due regard is paid to the history and characteristics of every race, and when the Church acts like a wise parent, not suppressing the natural tendencies of her children, but fostering, training, and sanctifying them, only to find herself enriched in turn by the more abundant life of all her members. Unity in diversity is the very mark of the Catholic Church, just because she is a *living* organism,

and not a mere institution or contrivance for producing external uniformity amongst men. But if this is true, we may go on to ask, does it not apply equally to the Jewish race?'

These two paragraphs have been quoted from an article in *Church and Synagogue*. *Church and Synagogue*, which is a magazine devoted to the study of Jewish subjects in relation to Christianity, has begun a new series. Henceforth it is to appear in an enlarged form, and three times in the year in place of quarterly as hitherto, and it is to be published by Messrs. Skeffington (1s. 6d., or 4s. per annum, post free). The first number of the new series, issued in February, contains an article on 'The Ideal of a Hebrew Church.' It is from this article that the two paragraphs are quoted.

It is the belief of the author of the article that we have not dealt fairly with the Jews. Well, that is admitted pretty freely now. But her meaning (for the author is a lady) is, not that we have been unjust to them because they refused to become Christians, but that we have made it nearly impossible for them to become Christians by insisting always that if they did so they must cease to be Jews. The Apostle Paul had a bitter controversy with those who would have the Gentiles become Jews before they could be recognized as Christians. Miss DAMPIER'S controversy is with those who insist upon it that the Jews must become Gentiles the moment they embrace Christianity. Is that necessary?

What are the things that a Jew must observe in order to remain a Jew? MISS DAMPIER'S way of putting the question is: 'What will be the characteristics of a Hebrew Christian Church?' That is to say, if a Jew becomes a Christian, what may he retain of his Judaism without being less really a Christian? She answers that he may retain the observance of fasts and festivals, his daily worship, his Sabbath observance, circumcision, and possibly even his dietary laws.

She says that he may continue to observe the Jewish fasts and festivals. 'Pre-eminent amongst the Jewish festivals stands unquestionably the great feast of the Passover. No other festival has ever taken hold of the Jewish imagination, or rooted itself in the Jewish consciousness, like this festival of Israel's freedom. There is scarcely a service in the Jewish Prayer-Book in which mention is not made and thanks rendered for God's signal deliverance of His people. It is the outstanding feature of Israel's history, of which every Jew is to be continually reminded. Is it reasonable then, when a Jew accepts Christianity, that all this should drop out of sight? Because he has learnt the full meaning of the Passover, and has come to know in his own spiritual experience the true Paschal Victim—the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world—is he therefore to think less of the actual facts of his nation's past history, in which he can now see not only facts of past history, but facts which mirror forth an ever-present reality?'

MISS DAMPIER does not mean, of course, that the Passover sacrifice should be retained. That has been discontinued since the destruction of the Temple. What she means is that the Christian Jew should be permitted to commemorate the most momentous event in the history of his race in the same way and with much the same form of service as the Jews have made use of through countless generations.

And what is true of the Passover, she holds to be true of the other great festivals, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Pentecost was both a harvest festival and also, in later times, a commemoration of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. To its

agricultural side is due the decorating of the synagogue with flowers and the reading of the Book of Ruth. Surely, says Miss DAMPIER, both these practices might find a fitting place in a Hebrew Christian Church. Nor need any Christian protest against the commemoration of the giving of the Law. Was it not a Divine gift to Israel? The Jewish Christian would have a special cause for gratitude, because he would recognize, as no Gentile Christian can ever do, the meaning of St. Paul's words, 'the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.'

The Feast of Tabernacles had also a double significance. It was a thanksgiving for the ingathering of the fruits, and it commemorated the life led by the Israelites in the desert, when they had to dwell in tabernacles or booths. The Church of England, says Miss DAMPIER, has been rather specially tolerant of Harvest Festivals, even when they have expressed themselves in a somewhat exaggerated form. The service for the Feast of Tabernacles, with its ringing Hosannas and its sense of fellowship with the Old Testament saints, seems particularly close to the Christian spirit.

In this way Miss DAMPIER passes under review the festivals and fasts of the Jews, the form of daily worship, the observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, and the dietary laws. In respect of the last, she admits that their retention does present some difficulties. But she observes that their more minute regulations, such as the non-mixture of meat and milk, which play such an important part in the life of the observant Jew, are Rabbinical rather than Biblical; and she does not propose to continue Rabbinical Judaism.