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THE INTERPRETATIVE VALUE OF THE SYNOPTIC SOURCE ANALYSIS

ARTHUR G. SELLEN
BROWN UNIVERSITY

IT is generally agreed that Mark was used as the framework of Matthew and Luke. But there is, so far, no consensus of scholarship to account for the non-Markan parallels in Matthew and Luke unless the tendency of a large number of New Testament scholars to accept some form of the Q hypothesis be called a consensus.

Harnack's reconstruction of the teaching source that Matthew and Luke had in common has been set aside. He followed the Matthean order in building up his Q and as a result has only a heap of interesting ruins. It is significant to note that Harnack regarded his own findings as "a heterogeneous collection of discourses and sayings, the most part bound together in groups."

New Testament scholars have since discovered that by following the Lukan order in parallel material they can construct a source that has logical sequence. In contradistinction to Harnack we find that Hawkins, Stanton, Streeter, Allen, Castor, and Patton have included some narrative material. All of them agree almost to a verse in their selection of material common to Matthew and Luke; it is when they try to include material peculiar to either—careful guessing at best—that they differ in their findings.

Of all the reconstructions of the Q document, or Logia, I have found the work done by Streeter and Castor to be the best. But even their results when weighed in the balance are

found to be wanting, for the Q hypothesis does not really solve the synoptic problem. J. V. Bartlett has pointed out "the presence in various parts of Luke of a source parallel with Mark even in sections which at first sight appear dependent on Mark alone." In view of the fact, moreover, that most modern scholars ascribe to Luke a close following of his sources and the additional fact that Luke has eleven doublets and yet lays claim to tracing "the course of all things accurately from the first," there is, I think, need for a more adequate theory than the Q hypothesis.

President Burton's solution in his *Principles of Literary Criticism and the Synoptic Problem* is more adequate than the Q hypothesis. In addition to Mark, which served as a framework, Matthew and Luke have four sources: G, or Galilean document, with vivid narrative used by both Matthew and Luke; P, or Perean document, also used by both; document M, presumably the Logia of Matthew, used by Matthew alone; some minor sources for the infancy, passion, and resurrection narratives. H. B. Sharman, in his *Teachings of Jesus about the Future*, has shown by a further analysis of M that some of the material belongs to special sources. Burton's P document has been worked over by Dean R. Wickes, who points out in his *Sources of Luke's Perean Section* that P contains two documents one of which Matthew had while Luke used both. Burton's analysis as revised by Sharman and Wickes is, in my opinion, the best solution of the synoptic problem.

As one reviews the history of synoptic discussion, the question arises as to the interpretative value of the source analysis. It is obvious that the analysis has an academic interest and value and that scholars will continue to work at the problem if for no other reason than intellectual curiosity. But is there no value beyond that? Or can we say that the synoptic source analysis is essential to a true interpretation of Jesus and his message?

Judging from the method of procedure used by most scholars who attempt to write a life of Jesus, one is forced to draw the conclusion that they discuss the synoptic problem because academic considerations demand that some treatment of that

problem be included. But how many use the analysis as a basis for interpretation? There is the recognition of some source as the earliest and most authoritative, but a total disregard of that fact when Jesus and his work are discussed. Material is chosen to uphold a given position regardless of whether it be part of the earliest source or an editorial insertion.

There is, I believe, real need for a life of Jesus based on a thorough-going study of the sources. No one who would write accurately and authoritatively on the life of Jesus can ignore the work done for him by all of the scholars mentioned, and particularly the analyses made by Burton, Sharman, and Wickes. In addition to a careful study and mastery of the source analysis it is also necessary to follow any given subject for study consistently through the sources to note whether there be divergences. Sound conclusions can hardly be arrived at by any method less rigorous.

Undertaking, some time ago, a study of the religion of the historic Jesus I was anxious to avoid the usual proof text method and set out to develop a sound technique. My first task was to arrive at some solution of the synoptic problem. Burton's theory as revised by Sharman and Wickes commended itself to me. I then arranged my sources in their order of historicity, in which task I was guided by the work done by Burton and Sharman. G was placed first with P second. Using Professor Bacon's analysis of Mark I called all Markan material showing no editorial influence MK and placed that next in order. Document M followed by MKR—Markan material showing editorial influence, LkS and MtS—special Lukan and Matthean material—complete the list.

The categories chosen for the study of Jesus' religion are as follows: Jesus' relation to God as it affected his self-consciousness, worship, and relation to his fellows; Jesus' conception of sin, faith, and salvation; Jesus' teachings about the future; and his treatment of the problem of evil.

The procedure adopted was to follow each category through the seven sources to discover how each source treated it. Comparisons were then made, differences noted, and conclusions drawn.

Throughout the research every individual passage was

examined critically. This added bit of technique saved me from the all too usual indiscriminate inclusion of many passages which should be set aside on critical grounds.

My method of procedure brought out no marked differences in Jesus' conception of the superhuman except that document M and Matthew stress God's residence in heaven; twenty of the twenty-two references in this category are in Matthew.

It is significant to note that the name Son of man is never used in the two earliest and most trustworthy sources with a Messianic connotation.

The sources differ in their treatment of Jesus' relations to the rulers of his day. The earliest sources, G and P, picture Jesus as being on intimate terms with the Pharisees. He dined with them and some of their number came to warn him that Herod was seeking his life. All of the conflicts mentioned were over points of doctrine. In common with the Pharisees Jesus was often engaged in interpreting the law. He differed from them only in his method of procedure. Instead of appealing to tradition or using casuistry Jesus tried to find the principle involved in a given law and applied it anew in every case. Nowhere in G or P do the Pharisees attempt to injure Jesus. The early Markan material has the Pharisees raising the question about the legality of tribute to Caesar but it recognizes that the priests were the ones who plotted to kill Jesus. It was to them that Judas betrayed his master. The late Markan material,—MKR—however, has the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus at the opening of his ministry, Mk. 3 4-6. A study of the early sources makes it clear that Jesus' death was brought about by the priests because he had cleansed the temple as a protest against their exploiting the religious piety of loyal Yahweh worshippers.

The source MKR must always be carefully scrutinized and compared with the earlier documents, for it changes even so fundamental a conception as faith. Professor Bacon, in his *Beginnings of Gospel Story*, points out how the editor of Mark misunderstood the incident of crossing the sea, for he transforms Jesus' absolute faith in God into a mere power to silence storms or to walk the sea.

There are divergent notes in nearly every approach one makes to the sources, but the outstanding differences occur in the report of Jesus' sayings about the future, changes that can be detected and corrected by a careful examination and comparison of document with document or of gospel with document. Document P, for example, suffered changes when incorporated into Matthew, the Matthean parallel to Lk. 17 22-37 being given a distinct eschatological turn. Document M is decidedly eschatological; it contains the account of the final judgment and the interpretations of the parables of the sower and darnel.

In speaking of the differences that occur Sharman says: "On few other themes in the teaching of Jesus will there be found such numerous and notable modifications of the words of Jesus as are detectable in those which deal with the various aspects of the Future."

It so happens that some of Jesus' teachings about the future have implications that concern other fields. An example of what I mean is the story of Lazarus, the beggar, who after death rested in the bosom of Abraham. The rich man, on the other hand, was in torment. Sharman would leave out this parable on critical grounds. Were the story included, Jesus would be teaching a philosophy of compensation as an answer to the problem of evil, a note foreign to his philosophy of life.

Enough detail has been exhibited to show the interpretative value of the synoptic source analysis if it be followed carefully and faithfully. The procedure that I have outlined is slow and at times somewhat tedious, but it is sure. It enables one to regain, as nearly as possible, the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus and to detect and avoid the changes that occur because of the march of events or the personal equation of those who report his life and teachings.