

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ALL ABOUT

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

This book is about the relationship between the first three Gospels in the New Testament. On the next page I give you two good reasons why it is not worth your while to bother with this book—it is simply a waste of your valuable time. But I also give you a response to those reasons. And you might decide that the response is in fact better than the two good reasons, so that this book *is* worth looking at after all. But first of all, to clarify what it is that we are talking about.

The first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are often called the Synoptics, a word which means “look at them together, each one with the others”. Compare them side by side, as it were. And when you do, you will immediately be impressed by two striking features: their similarities—the bits they have in common; and their differences—the places where they are unlike each another, and even on occasion where they seem to contradict each other.

These similarities are at times quite remarkable and cry out for explanation: there are even places where for quite a few words at a time two Synoptics, or all three, are identical word-for-word. Now if this is in a teaching that Jesus gave or a story that he told, then the explanation could simply be that this is indeed what was said (or reported), and the authors got it right (whatever their sources). But if it is a piece of narrative, a description that some author has written, then this explanation is not adequate, and we need to look for another. The most obvious one that comes to mind is that of a common source: either one Gospel copied from the other, or two of them used another, third, source (written or oral).

But the differences between the Synoptics are also at times quite remarkable and cry out for explanation: for if one used another—if A used B—why does A change so much of B? By accident? To make a point? By way of correction? Under the influence of some external consideration (e.g., a later church tradition or doctrine)? All these possibilities, and more, have been put forward in the wealth of literature

that discusses these issues—the Synoptic Problem, as it has been called. These Synoptic differences are so great and so varied that large numbers of solutions to the Synoptic Problem have been proposed to account for them.

The differences are of three main kinds: differences of points of detail in the stories in which they are found; differences of content in the stories overall (including that some stories or “units” of material—called pericopes—are included in only one Gospel, others in two, and still others in all three); and thirdly, where the Gospels do contain the same pericopes, differences in Synoptic order: that is, differences in the sequence in which they recorded things as happening.

An explanation of Synoptic relationships (that is to say, a solution of the Synoptic Problem) needs to address all these Synoptic features, and it will be—or ought to be—judged on the basis of its explanatory power. That is, on the extent to which it can supply a convincing and satisfactory account of what we observe in these Gospels.

IS THIS BOOK WORTHWHILE?

There are two good reasons for not reading any further in this book.

The first of these is, “This Synoptic Problem was solved years ago, and scholars in general agree on the solution.” Thus Styler (1962: 223) said:

After a century or more of discussion, it has come to be accepted by scholars almost as axiomatic that Mark is the oldest of the three Synoptic Gospels and that it was used by Matthew and Luke as a source. This has come to be regarded as “the one absolutely assured result” of the study of the Synoptic Problem.

The second reason for dismissing the issue is, “What does it matter anyway? We can just get on and read the Gospels and use them without bothering with any question of relationship.” Some would want to add, “They were all three inspired by the Holy Spirit, so you just take each one as it stands.”

In response to the first “good reason” for not bothering further with this issue (or this present book): The Markan Priority hypothesis is so widely accepted not because it explains everything satisfactorily, but because it seems to do a better job than any single alternative thus far on offer. There are indeed lots of problems with Markan Priority as an explanation of the data, and lots of problems with the traditional reasons

given in support of it, reasons going back to B H Streeter, who gave it its classic form in 1924.

It deserves to be noted that a substantial volume of literature exists—some from years ago, and some of recent origin—that casts grave doubt upon the validity of this “Mark first” or Markan Priority explanation. The individual arguments for Markan Priority have all been tested, and assessed, and rebutted, by a variety of authors. A string of monographs and detailed studies has exposed the weaknesses of the grounds for the Markan Priority hypothesis, a hypothesis that has difficulty in explaining observable Synoptic data apart from a resort to subjective opinion, or dependence upon coincidence.

The snag is that while it is pretty easy to find holes in the case for Markan Priority, there have been similar holes to be found in the other explanations that have been proffered.

To cite Styler again: he recognized that the Markan Priority hypothesis was not without its problems. But he holds firmly to the Markan Priority explanation because it has fewer problems than any other explanation. For example: Styler demolishes the view of Bishop Butler (who contends that the order of writing is Matthew-Mark-Luke), and says about this view (1962: 228), “Butler’s treatment of this leaves me quite unconvinced”. In summary, Styler writes, “Our explanation of *his* favourite cases may be cumbersome; but his explanation of *our* favourite cases is incredible”.

Styler concludes (1962: 231), “Until some less incredible explanation is forthcoming, the natural conclusion that Mark is prior to Matthew will continue to hold the field.” In my judgement Styler’s analysis remains valid. Most scholars hold to Markan Priority (with or without the postulating of another source designated Q to explain Matthew-Luke agreements), not because they can’t see the problems with that hypothesis, but because it seems to hold up as a better explanation than any alternatives, and can be said to cover more of the observable data.

If we are going to adhere to Markan Priority, we ought at least to be aware (honesty demands it) of the flimsy and dubious nature of the foundation upon which it rests. This present volume sets out all the arguments known to me for Markan Priority, and summarizes the rebuttal of those arguments that competent scholars have given over the years. The reader can then judge whether any objective, factual, valid support for this hypothesis remains.

In the chapters of this book I offer an explanation of Synoptic interrelationships that (I will contend) answers all the problems which exist both with Markan Priority and with those other hypotheses, an

explanation that accords both with internal observable data and external evidence.

But what about the second objection: “What does it matter anyway?” Actually, it matters seriously, for several important reasons.

Firstly, at the academic level: here is a significant issue in New Testament research that has been a focus for Gospel scholarship for more than two centuries. If there is now a hypothesis propounded that has greater explanatory power than those offered hitherto, then it should be examined and assessed, and a verdict given on its validity. All kinds of repercussions flow from the explanation one adopts for Synoptic differences. For example: certain variations of the “literary interdependence” hypothesis will push one towards giving the Gospels a late date, which in turn affects one’s approach to questions of authorship, which interacts with one’s assessment of how close in time are the Gospel writings and the events they record—which then becomes (for some scholars) a measure of their reliability.

In 2000 David Black and David Beck convened a Conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary that gathered together (to quote the conveners) “some of the world’s leading experts in the field of New Testament studies”. The purpose was to assess the current state of scholarship relating to the Synoptic Problem. The papers presented to that Conference have been published (2001) by Baker Academic as *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*, edited by Black and Beck. One point of consensus amongst the differing viewpoints expressed at that Conference was the crucial nature of this issue in New Testament scholarship. Craig Blomberg expresses this consensus when he writes (2001: 40),

... the Synoptic Problem is an important matter. ... When we recognize the solution to the Synoptic Problem to be a central building block in our understanding of how to answer questions about the trustworthiness of the Gospels and the distinctive theologies of each evangelist, we cannot help but appreciate its importance.

Secondly, at the practical/pastoral level: what are we to make of the Gospel accounts where they differ? For example, when Jairus the synagogue ruler came to Jesus, was his daughter still alive (though close to death), or already dead? And regarding the rich ruler who came to Jesus: was he still young, or does his claim to have kept the commandments *from the time of his youth* indicate that he was young no longer? Did Jesus encounter blind Bartimaeus when entering or leaving Jericho? And so on.

Now, if you are, say, preaching about one of these stories, you can avoid all such problems by simply choosing one of the Gospel accounts and ignoring any other version.

Or, another approach suggested is to say that all three accounts are quite independent—there was no literary copying at all, and the differences we see in the stories are exactly the kind of differences that would be found between the accounts of any two (or three) witnesses of the same event. Fair enough, this Complete Independence view could account for the Synoptic differences, but how about those remarkable similarities (of wording, and at times of pericope order) in the Synoptics?

But when one proposes such an approach as this, what we have begun to do then is to start seeking for an explanation for those similarities and differences. And that is exactly what this present book is about: to examine the Gospel material, and to seek an explanation that accounts for the observable data.

At the 2000 Conference I have referred to, there were three points of agreement between all participants. Apart from the consensus that I have just mentioned (that is, the central importance of this issue), the other two were:

(a) that the Complete Independence view of the three Synoptics does not hold up in the light of the data we have; and

(b) that Mark is clearly the middle factor between the two Major Synoptics, so that the two basic alternative hypotheses that correspond with the data are: *either* that Mark was first-written, and was used by Matthew and Luke (i.e., some version of Markan Priority); *or* that Mark was third-written and it used Matthew and Luke as sources (i.e., some version of Markan Posteriority, of Markan Dependence on the other two Gospels). Scot McKnight's assessment (2001: 76 and 77) sums this up:

Whether first or third, Mark is the middle factor. ... We are reasonably confident that Matthew, Mark and Luke are related at the literary level and that it is highly likely that they are mutually dependent, however one might see that relationship or set of relationships.

In putting his own position, McKnight acknowledges (2001: 67) that the so-called proofs of Markan Priority put forward by B H Streeter in 1924 are not decisive for Markan Priority as against Markan Dependence, and that either explanation is possible. The choice between them is to be made on the basis of probability. He says (2001: 86), when weighing alternative explanations, "We are dealing with probabilities,

not possibilities. I don't rule out the possibilities. I only ask which is more probable." McKnight's assessment of the evidence brings him down on the side of Markan Priority, which he holds (he says) because of the balance of probabilities.

In fact, he is asking in 2000, as Styler did in 1962, "Where is the more convincing alternative?"

I am offering, for your consideration, such an alternative to Markan Priority.

In putting this forward, I draw attention to the way in which scholars investigating the Synoptic Problem throughout the years seem to be agreed upon the acceptance of one fundamental presupposition. They differ as to the order and interrelationship of the Synoptics; they differ concerning the nature, scope, contents, language, date, and so forth, of the sources, written and oral, lying behind the Synoptics; but they all seem to accept that Matthew, Mark and Luke were written (or, at least, were published) in some particular order, and the nature of the Synoptic Problem is to decide, on the basis of the evidence, what that order was.

This presupposition, regarded virtually as axiomatic, is stated explicitly by William Farmer (1964: 199) in this way:

However important the part oral tradition and other written sources may have played in the composition of the Synoptic Gospels, the problem of determining which was written first, which second, and which third still persists. One of the three was written before the other two. One was written after the first, and before the third. And one was written after the other two.

But I am questioning, Is this necessarily so? I am suggesting that the key to the Synoptic Problem lies in the recognition that *one of the Gospels was written and published in stages, and that that Gospel was Matthew*. That is, the Gospel of Matthew had its beginnings in a series of separate documents authored by the apostle Matthew over a period of some years, which thereafter were circulating independently in the churches, before being edited and expanded by this same apostle Matthew into the Gospel we now have.

Thus the distinguishing characteristic of the position I am presenting is its proposal of the progressive publication of Matthew. To indicate this and differentiate this hypothesis from others with which it partly agrees, I will refer to it throughout by this distinctive feature: the Progressive Publication hypothesis.

It is well worthwhile, then, to see whether this new Synoptic hypothesis can do a better job accounting for the observable data, i.e. has

greater explanatory power than other hypotheses on offer. Indeed, I would contend that when this hypothesis is seriously examined, it will be seen that it meshes well with what we know of the situation in the early church, and with the external evidence of church history, and it explains all the observable data of the Synoptic Gospels.

I intend in this book to indicate how this hypothesis derives from several propositions, which I submit are abundantly supported by the evidence and which together offer the most convincing explanation of all the observable data. This is a new hypothesis in that it has not been presented before in this manner, with its components assembled and defended in these propositions. But almost all of these individual components have in fact been put forward and often advocated vigorously over the decades by competent Gospel scholars, as I shall set forth. What I do now is bring these components all together, show how they interrelate, and draw conclusions from them.

So I offer next, in this chapter, an outline of this hypothesis. I indicate the main areas of observable data with which it interlocks, so that its overall cohesiveness can be seen. Then in the following chapters I look in rather more detail at the evidence upon which it rests. I indicate where and how it is superior to other hypotheses on offer (including how it will explain what they do not). I examine numbers of key Synoptic passages that are much more convincingly explained on this basis. And I show how it offers a simple answer to one of the greatest Synoptic enigmas: the order of pericopes in all three Synoptic Gospels.

THE FIVE PROPOSITIONS OF THE PROGRESSIVE PUBLICATION HYPOTHESIS

There are five propositions upon which this hypothesis rests.

Proposition 1:

Matthew Responds to a Growing Need: Initial Written Accounts

In Jerusalem, the apostle Matthew produced, between the time of Christ and about AD 60, a series of short accounts of different episodes from the life and teachings of Jesus. Of all the eyewitnesses known to us, Matthew would be pre-eminently the best qualified to produce written records of Christ's life. As a former Roman customs official at Capernaum on the Great West Road, the main trade route from Syria and the East to the Mediterranean, he would of necessity be fluent in Greek

and Aramaic, and probably in Latin and Hebrew as well, and would be able to read and write (a far from universal accomplishment in those days). Many scholars have recognized these facts, among them R H Gundry (1975: 174); J N Sevenster (1968: 176-191); and the references they give.

Shorthand had been in use for some time in the ancient world, and it would be a reasonable expectation that Matthew knew and used one of the available shorthand systems in his official taxation work. It is not unlikely that Matthew used these skills in making notes of Christ's deeds and teachings at the time they occurred. The development and use of shorthand in the ancient world is discussed by, amongst others, E J Goodspeed (1959: 86ff., 108ff.); R H Gundry (1975: 182); W Hendriksen (1973: numerous places); B Gerhardsson (1961: 148-156).

In any case it would be highly probable that the apostle Matthew wrote much of the eyewitness material that according to Luke's account (1:1-4) was circulating at the time when Luke was gathering the content for his own Gospel. Luke 1:2 refers to eyewitness material "handed on" to others—*παράδοσις* (*paradidōmi*) in this and similar passages means: "of oral or written tradition: hand down, pass on, transmit, relate, teach".

The alternative would be to say that, of those various documents of which Luke was aware, *none* at all came from the apostles, the very men who were chosen by Christ specifically to be his companions (Mark 3:13-14) and to whom he gave much of his teaching privately (for example, Mark 4:34) and who alone would be in a position to record many of the details of what he said and did, and whom he designated his witnesses (Luke 24:48; John 15:27; Acts 1:8).

It is highly improbable that the apostles would have had no connection at all with the production of the accounts of Christ's life and teaching that began (Luke says) to circulate, or, if it be acknowledged that some of these accounts *did* originate with the apostles, that Matthew had no part in their production.

The circumstances that would give rise to the writing down of such accounts are easy to envisage. Jewish Christians from the churches of Palestine, coming up to Jerusalem for the feasts, would meet with the Christian congregation there and hear the preaching and teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42; 6:2-4). All the first Christians were Jews or proselytes. As late as Acts 21:20 reference is made to the thousands of Jewish believers who are "zealous for the law". In accordance with Judaistic practice the Jewish Christians would go up to Jerusalem regularly for the feasts. In addition, Acts implies that traveling up to Jerusalem by Christians generally was frequent throughout this period (for example, Acts 21:15-16).

Coming in many cases from congregations where there were few eyewitnesses to Christ's life, and where there was a thirst for more information about him, these pilgrims would be eager to take home from Jerusalem a record of what they heard there. Albright & Mann (1971: CLXXIVff.) refer to the “relatively small number of people who had access to the facts of Jesus's ministry”, and they add that because of this and other factors they believe “we must reckon with the desire to record the oral tradition at a comparatively early date”. And if a request were made for a written record of teaching that they had heard from the apostles, the logical member of the apostolic band to provide this for those who asked would be Matthew. And so they went back to their churches with a written account of something Christ did or said: a few sentences of teaching, perhaps, in some cases, or a lengthy story of a complete incident.

The first Christian congregations in Palestine would include some that were Aramaic-speaking, and therefore material that was produced for them in this way would likely be in Aramaic. Papias's information about *λογια* (*logia*) produced by Matthew (as recorded in Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.16; Paul Maier, 1999: 130) indicates the existence of these Aramaic documents written by Matthew. In due course, in view of the number of Hellenist or Greek-speaking Christians in Palestine and nearby areas, there would have arisen a demand for similar material in Greek, and Matthew would soon have found himself asked to meet requests of this kind.

Proposition 2: Many Have Taken it in Hand to Write

But these Matthean accounts would not be the only ones that began circulating. Other eyewitnesses would be motivated to take pen in hand in similar fashion and begin recording the teachings and deeds of Christ of which *they* were aware. We have the evidence of Luke's Prologue to tell us this was so. These accounts would also have been of varying lengths, and written in either Aramaic or Greek. They would circulate side by side with those already written by Matthew, and, doubtless, side by side with oral traditions about Christ.

The various churches would in the process of time accumulate numbers of these short accounts and would add to their own collections by exchanging copies with other churches around them. We know that this occurred in the case of Paul's Epistles, and there is no reason for it happening in relation to the Pauline documents and not also in the case

of the documents of the incidents and sayings from the life of Christ to which Luke refers. In fact the Prologue to Luke's Gospel looks like a reference to the very situation that I have just outlined.

An obvious question may strike us: If there were circulating in the churches a host of short documents from the thirties to the fifties (as Luke indicates and as this present hypothesis now elaborates), how would it happen that none of them survived for us now to find?

Let us remember that none of the original New Testament documents has been preserved: that everything we possess is a copy of a copy. Why should any scribe have wished to copy some partial piece of text once the full Gospels of Matthew and Luke were published? The part would be absorbed in the whole. Any Gospel segments we may yet find are almost certainly going to be parts of or extracts from the canonical Synoptic Gospels as we have them.

But supposing they aren't—supposing that some family (say), possessing one or more such original documents as here suggested, were to copy them and pass them down the generations and a copy of such an early document were to come to light today, how would we know? It would simply look like a section of the later Gospel into which it became incorporated. It is an interesting thought, and perhaps worthy of further investigation, whether any of the Synoptic Gospel fragments which we possess could be a copy, not of part of a complete Gospel, but of a pre-Gospel document of exactly the kind under discussion. If such were the case—if we had any such extract amongst the multitude of early Gospel manuscripts that have been found—how would we know? A section of such a document could look the same as a part of a complete Gospel. So perhaps this could be so. But again I ask: How would we know?

Proposition 3: Luke Collects His Material

During his travels in company with Paul, Luke made notes of the various things said and done, and these, when written up, became the second half of his book the Acts of the Apostles. At some point he also formed the intention of investigating the period before his personal involvement. The opportunity for this came during AD 56 to 58, the years while he was in the Palestine area and Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 24:27).

For this work, he was interviewing eyewitnesses and collecting the information that he used in writing the first half of the Acts. It was also his opportunity to prepare, similarly, to undertake the second task that at some stage he had decided to pursue: to write an account of the ministry and message of Jesus.

In his Prologue to his Gospel he relates that he carried out a very thorough and careful investigation of everything connected with the life of Christ. Whatever documents were available to him, he collected at this stage (perhaps he had begun collecting them even earlier). He took them with him to Rome, managing to keep them safe during his shipwreck on Malta on the way there.

There is widespread agreement with this understanding of the implications of Luke's Prologue that I have just given. The distinctive proposition that I am putting is that these documents that Luke collected did *not* (as some people would think) include Mark's Gospel, for this had not yet been written, but that amongst the eyewitness material to which Luke himself refers were numerous separate short accounts written by the apostle Matthew.

Proposition 4: Publication of the Two Major Synoptic Gospels

Meanwhile, while Luke was on his way to Rome with Paul, in Jerusalem Matthew produced further material, and then decided to issue a "collected edition" of his records of the deeds and teaching of Jesus. He used the basic outline of Christ's life as his framework, but within this he made only a very limited attempt to assemble his material in the order in which the events occurred or the teaching was given. More frequently the basis on which he arranged his material was *topical* rather than *chronological*. Given, then, the different plan on which Matthew constructed his Gospel by comparison with Luke, it is not surprising to see particular events or sayings being placed differently in these two Gospels.

The evidence from an examination of the First Gospel indicates that Matthew, in compiling his material for his Gospel, used what he had previously written (rewriting it in Greek—as distinct from just translating it—where he had originally written in it Aramaic), adding some extra stories where thought desirable (including his opening chapters, and his distinctive material in the Passion narrative), and providing his "program notes" linking one block of material with the next.

Albright & Mann (1971: CLXV) point out,

What we appear to have in Matthew's gospel is a kind of teacher's guide, a collection of blocks of material from the private instruction of Jesus to the inner circle, together with other material from public teaching, and the whole assembled in a rather loose chronological framework.

The place of publication of the finished Gospel would have been Jerusalem.

Meanwhile Luke, in Rome with Paul, and working from the material he had collected in Palestine, composed his Gospel, completing and publishing it in AD 60 or thereabouts. (I explain the case for this date in the next chapter.)

So: did Luke see Matthew's Gospel? As a completed Gospel? No, he did not. The arguments that scholars have put forward against Luke using Matthew's Gospel are valid. But then, so also are those arguments to which Farmer has pointed us, for Luke to have known Matthew, because of passages showing close identity between the two Gospels.

Chapter Eight examines in detail the case for the proposition that Luke knew, and used, Matthew (central to the Two-Gospel school of Farmer and his supporters), together with the evidence against it. This apparently conflicting evidence, considered in its totality, supports the explanation that Luke read and used the *sections of Matthew* that had been in circulation in the churches, and of which he had obtained copies in his collecting of information.

As the evidence indicates that neither Matthew nor Luke saw the completed Gospel written by the other prior to publishing his own, this points to the publication of both of them in the same year. Thus AD 60 would also be the publication date for Matthew.

Thus we come logically to conclude that material originally written by the apostle Matthew and circulated during the period between the time of Christ and AD 60 became incorporated independently in *both* of the Major Synoptics, the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke, though neither of these writers saw the finished Gospel of the other before the publication of his own.

Proposition 5: Mark Produces A Special-purpose Gospel

Mark was not an eyewitness of the life of Christ, but (as Papias and other Fathers have told us) he was an associate of the apostle Peter, and he wrote his Gospel based on Peter's preaching (Maier, 1999: 73; 129-130). The early church Fathers identify the date of the writing of Mark as being about AD 65. The place was Rome.

By this time also the Gospels of Matthew and Luke had begun to circulate amongst the churches, and Mark used them both as the basis of his Gospel. We can describe the Synoptic relationship as "Markan Dependence": Mark's Gospel is dependent upon, and derived from, the other two.

That is to say, Mark had three sources for his Gospel: what he heard from Peter, and the written Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is the purpose of this present book to demonstrate that this is the explanation of the Gospel of Mark to which the evidence points.

Mark is the shortest Gospel, and yet Mark's account of any given pericope is invariably the longest—except for places where Mark omits teaching or speeches that Matthew or Luke (or both) include at this point, or else Mark gives this teaching in part only. Mark's greater pericope length is because he conflates Matthew and Luke, and adds-in a plethora of further points of detail not to be found in the other two Gospels but drawn from his third source: what he had learned from Peter.

Mark consists almost entirely of "action stories" that show Jesus healing, performing miracles, engaged in conflict with his opponents, and so on: such teaching as there is either arises out of these situations or is illustrative of the teaching aspect of Jesus's ministry, and in any case is always related directly to one or more of the main themes of Mark. In his Gospel, he does not assume the post-Easter faith, as do Matthew and Luke. Mark traces the journey of the disciples from doubt and disbelief, and aims to take his readers and hearers on that same journey. His Gospel is an evangelistic tool—a resource book for evangelists—aimed at introducing Jesus to the interested outsider. It was intended to be used as a source-book in evangelistic preaching, and even to be read aloud wherever people gathered.

So Mark had a specific linguistic program and purpose in view. While skillfully conflating the accounts of Matthew and Luke, Mark transformed their more literary wording into clear and simple, everyday language—into the language of conversation and preaching—changing some of their vocabulary into the vernacular used by his hearers, and rendering the whole into simple, straightforward sentences. In fact (as Streeter himself has most perceptively noted, 1924: 163), Mark worded his Gospel in the colloquial spoken Greek of Rome and its Empire.

Mark is quite consistent in producing his Gospel: he includes material that is in Matthew and Luke which was in accord with his themes, and he *excludes the rest*. Mark's Gospel sets out the *kerygma* being preached to unbelievers. It is "pure" *kerygma*, while Matthew and Luke are combinations of *kerygma* and *didache*. Mark's Gospel climaxes with the cross, and with the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God—which Mark does not teach earlier. His motivation in producing his Gospel is exactly the same as that of those Christians today who publish extracts from Scripture in modern speech for use in evangelistic

outreach: for like those who do this today, Mark knew that the rest of the Gospel story was readily available in the church for those who became interested.

It is straightforward to explain the order of Mark's Gospel:

(a) In accordance with his intention to produce a Gospel of the deeds rather than the teaching of Jesus, Mark therefore adopted a framework that avoided the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Plain, and Luke's Central Teaching Section. This Markan framework consists of two parts: first, following the order of Luke's Gospel to Mark 6:14 (Herod's comment about Jesus), and thereafter the order of Matthew's Gospel.

(b) Into the Lukan part of his framework he added four sections from Matthew: Mark 1:16-20; 3:22-35E; 4:30-34; 6:1-6. Into his Matthean framework he added four short sections that he drew from Luke, consisting of material not paralleled anywhere in Matthew: 6:30-31; 9:38-41; 11:18-19; 12:41-44E. These insertions were placed into Mark's Gospel at the same point at which they occurred in his source (Luke).

The figure that is customarily given for unique verses in Mark is usually 50 to 56 verses, but I have found on my count that the equivalent of 155 verses of Mark (or 23½%, just under one quarter of the Gospel) consists of material that could not have been derived from either Matthew or Luke, because it's not there (or, to state this data in the Markan Priority way, verses that consist of Markan material that was not then used either by Matthew or by Luke in their respective Gospels). This comprises for the most part a wealth of small but vivid details not found in the Major Synoptics, details that had lodged in Mark's memory from the preaching of Peter, and with which he has enlivened his stories.

CONCLUSION

I submit that all of the difficulties, problems and inadequacies of the Markan Priority view are met completely by the Progressive Publication hypothesis (including Markan Dependence) as I have outlined it. I contend that there is nothing inherently improbable in any part of this hypothesis, while it is in accord with all the known facts, and is compatible with the external traditions about authorship. It provides a framework within which it is readily possible to explain all the observable phenomena of the Synoptic Gospels.

This view that I am putting forward has no need of Q. We can recognize *all* the material in Matthew and Luke that shows evidence of a common literary source, as having been based upon documents written

by Matthew and progressively circulated over the years, documents that were amongst all those collected by Luke, to which Luke refers in his Prologue, and that he utilized in writing his own Gospel.

This hypothesis shares with the William Farmer Two-Gospel school the belief in Markan Posteriority (i.e. that Mark's Gospel was written third, and used Matthew and Luke as sources). But apart from this one similarity, it is a very different approach. In particular, contrary to the Two-Gospel school, I find the evidence to be strongly against the idea that Luke ever saw Matthew's Gospel in its final form: there are many sections of Luke's Gospel that can be accounted for only on the basis that Luke had *not* seen Matthew's Gospel.

It is to be noted that the Progressive Publication of Matthew hypothesis is not dependent upon coincidence, or assuming that which is to be proven, or circular argument, and it involves a minimum of subjective assumptions. It meets fully the various criticisms that have been leveled in the past against other forms of the Markan Posteriority or Griesbach explanation.

This hypothesis accounts for the interrelationship amongst the three Synoptic Gospels solely in terms of the three men known to us from the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, without hypothesizing other authors in order to account for this interrelationship. But it also recognizes and encompasses the role of the other eyewitnesses/writers, together with Luke's own investigations, to whom and to which Luke refers in his Prologue. And it rests also upon the well-attested tradition in the early church Fathers that Peter's preaching stands behind Mark's Gospel.

A tremendous amount of New Testament scholarship has proceeded upon the assumption of Markan Priority. The very existence and extent of this body of scholarship will tend in itself to create an inertia resistant to the suggestion that we may need to think again about "the one absolutely assured result of the study of the Synoptic Problem". In this connection there is food for thought in the words of Vincent Taylor (1952:76), comments that he wrote about other Synoptic research (which he rejected), but comments that I find very apposite here in relation to Markan Priority (which he accepted):

There is no failure in Synoptic criticism, for, if we reject a particular suggestion worked out with great learning and ability, we are compelled to reconsider the evidence on which it is based and seek a better explanation, knowing that a later critic may light upon a hypothesis sounder and more comprehensive still.

That, I suggest, is how we should regard the idea of abandoning the hypothesis of Markan Priority, in the light of the case I present for the Progressive Publication of Matthew's Gospel.

This then is the outline of the Synoptic explanation to which I find the evidence points. The remainder of this present book considers in more detail the grounds of support to be adduced for these five propositions—and, in looking at the data, compares the explanatory power of this hypothesis with the alternative hypotheses that have been put forward.

There is a possible misunderstanding of this five-fold thesis that I wish to guard against. The last thing that I would want to suggest is that I consider the Gospel writers to have been no more than compilers, assembling a collection of previous documents; or even editors, carrying out the task of editing such material. They were indeed in every sense *authors*, with an aim and a purpose in their work. And the evaluation of that purpose and of their interests and their theology, and so forth, is a valid exercise. But in their writing, their authoring, they drew upon documents that they had at hand.

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