

Lecture 7. The Synoptic Problem III: Double Tradition and Q

1. Review

- The Synoptic Problem is the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship.
- There are four basic kinds of material: Triple Tradition, Double Tradition, Special Matthew, Special Luke
- In Triple Tradition, Mark is the middle term. Two major explanations for Mark as middle term: Marcan Priority; Marcan Posteriority.
- Marcan Priority: an element in the **Two-Source Theory** and the **Farrer Theory**.
- Marcan Posteriority: **Griesbach Theory**: Luke used Matthew, Mark used both.
- Most scholars see Marcan Priority as preferable. Arguments in favour include: the pattern of additions and omissions; harder readings; dates of the Gospels; editorial fatigue.

2. Double Tradition

- But if the Priority of Mark provides a good explanation for Triple Tradition material, what are we to make of Double Tradition (200-250 verses common to Matthew and Luke, not found in Mark)?
- Two major explanations in the contemporary literature:
 - (1) If Matthew and Luke used Mark *independently* of one another, then they must have had another source for the double tradition material.
 - This hypothetical source is called **Q** (German *Quelle* means source)
 - Mark and Q are the two sources that make up the **Two-Source Theory**.
 - (2) Luke used Matthew for this material

- On this theory there is no need for Q – Luke simply takes over the double tradition material directly from Matthew
- Named the **Farrer Theory**, after Austin Farrer, an Oxford theologian who wrote “On Dispensing with Q” in 1955.

3. Arguments for Q

- The Q theory originated with the attempt, in the 19th Century, to identify the *logia* (oracles) of Jesus mentioned by Papias in the early second century. But now most scholars take Papias’s reference to the *logia* as reference to Matthew’s Gospel.
- Contemporary argument for Q is largely negative: it attempts to show that Luke is highly unlikely to have known Matthew, and therefore their mutual knowledge of a hypothetical source is more likely.

(a) Luke’s Order

- Luke’s order of the double tradition is inexplicable on the assumption that he was working with Matthew.
- Luke has disrupted Matthew’s fine order, including Matthew’s neat ordering of the double tradition into five big blocks.
- In particular, Luke has ruined the literary masterpiece of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Why would he do this?

(b) Luke’s Ignorance of Matthew’s Additions to Mark

- Luke appears to be ignorant of Matthew’s modifications of Mark in triple tradition material, something that is inexplicable if Luke knew Matthew.
- e.g. Luke omits Matt. 12.5-7 (in the Cornfield on the Sabbath); 14.28-31 (Peter walks on water); 16.7-9 (Jesus commends Peter)

(c) Luke’s Ignorance of M

- Luke is apparently ignorant of the Special Matthew material, or he would have included it, e.g. Matthew’s Birth Narrative, and especially the Magi.

(d) Alternating Primitivity

- Sometimes Matthew, sometimes Luke appears to have the more primitive version of a given double tradition saying. This is inexplicable on the assumption that Luke knew Matthew.
- Text book examples include the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6.9-13 // Luke 11.2-4) and the Beatitude on the Poor (Matt. 5.3 // Luke 6.20)

Arguments (a) and (d) are especially important, the twin pillars of the case.

But are there answers to these points?

4. The Case Against Q

- A minority of scholars has insisted that there are plausible answers to all the points made above, in particular **Michael Goulder** (1927-2010) and to a lesser extent, **E. P. Sanders**, and in recent years me. This theory is named **Farrer Theory** or **Mark without Q**. This is a summary of how I answer the points above:

(a) Luke's Order

- The preference for Matthew's order is simply a value judgement. Luke had his own narrative strategy, e.g. the attempt to create a plausible biographical narrative in which the sayings did not go on for so long.
- Luke's tendency to abbreviate long discourses in his sources is already evident from his use of Mark, e.g. he halves the length of Mark's parable chapter (4) in Luke 8.

(b) Luke's Ignorance of Matthew's Additions to Mark

- This argument is fallacious. Luke *does* show knowledge of Matthew's additions to Mark, but these places (John the Baptist, Temptation, Mustard Seed, Beelzebub Controversy etc.) are called "Mark-Q overlap" and get overlooked by those making this argument.
- The examples given are in any case problematic, e.g. of course Luke misses out Peter's walking on the water – he misses out that whole story from Mark!

(c) Luke's Lack of M

- Of course Luke lacks M material. If he had included it, it would be Q material!
- There are good reasons for thinking Luke omitted M, e.g. his dislike of Magi.

(d) Alternating Primitivity

- Arguments for Luke's secondary nature are often overlooked, e.g. one would expect Luke to adjust Matt. 5.3 the way he does in Luke 6.20 (Blessed are the poor in spirit / blessed are the poor) because that is characteristic of his writing in general – champion of the poor / eschatological reversal.
- One should not confuse literary priority with age of traditions – it is highly likely that Luke had access to oral traditions of material that he also found in his literary sources Mark and Matthew, e.g. Lord's Supper in Mark and Lord's Prayer in Matthew.

But is there anything more positive? What positive indicators are there that Luke might have known Matthew as well as Mark?

(e) Minor Agreements

- If Luke knew Matthew, then he must have known how Matthew redacted Mark. So does Luke show knowledge of any of Matthew's modifications of Mark in triple tradition? Indeed he does – they are called the **minor agreements**, e.g.: Matt. 26.67-68 // Mark 14.65 // Luke 22.64, . . . *Who is it who smote you?*

(f) Major Agreements

- There are also major agreements between Matthew and Luke, but these tend to be missed because they go into a special category called "Mark-Q overlap" (see above).
- This is a category in which Mark ceases to be the middle term and instead, Matthew is the middle term. These are passages which blur the distinction between double tradition and triple tradition. The Farrer Theory understands these passages are places where Luke prefers Matthew to Mark in triple tradition.

5. What next?

- Synoptic Problem provides an ideal jumping off point for the study of **redaction criticism**, next time.