

CHAPTER 6

GOSPELS IN GENERAL; SYNOPTIC GOSPELS IN PARTICULAR

This Chapter deals with two interrelated problems. There is a serious debate about the extent to which the literary genre of a Gospel is unique to Christianity or is a modification of the pattern of Jewish lives of the prophets or of Pagan biographies.¹ The answer in part depends on the relationship of the Gospels to Jesus: Does the earliest canonical Gospel derive from memories of what Jesus did and said in his lifetime, or is it mostly an imaginative creation retrojecting beliefs about the postresurrectional Jesus into his lifetime? The first three subdivisions of this Chapter will treat general Gospel questions: *Use of the word "gospel"*, *Origin of the Gospel genre*; and the *Three stages of Gospel formation*.

Beyond the general picture there are questions about the Synoptic Gospels in particular. The very close parallels among these three Gospels suggest borrowing from one another, but in what direction? Was Mark the earliest Gospel, so that Matt and Luke drew upon it? Or was Mark a digest from Matt and Luke? Were Matt and Luke written independently of each other, or did the Lucan writer draw on Matt (as well as on Mark)? Two final subdivisions will treat the *Synoptic problem* and the *Existence of "Q."*

Use of the Word "Gospel"

In NT times *euaggelion* ("good announcement," the word we translate "gospel") did not refer to a book or writing but to a proclamation or message. This is understandable given the background of the term. Words related to it were employed in non-Christian Greek for good news, especially news of victory in battle; and in the imperial cult the emperor's birth and presence constituted good news for the Roman world. LXX words related to *euaggelion* translate words from the Hebrew *bsr*, which has a similar range of proclaiming good news, especially of Israel's victory or God's victory. More widely it can cover the proclamation of God's glorious acts on behalf of Israel.

Scholars debate whether Jesus himself used "gospel" to describe his proclamation of the kingdom. Certainly his followers did, with an emphasis that the good news involved what God had done in Jesus. In Rom 1:3-4 Paul describes his gospel in terms that were probably already known to the Romans; it comprises the twofold identity of Jesus, namely, from the seed of David according to the flesh, and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection of/from the dead. More commonly for Paul the heart of the gospel is centered in Jesus' suffering/death/resurrection and its power for justification and ultimately salvation (Rom 1: 16).

Mark 1: 1 opens his account with the words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The good news of what God has done, once proclaimed to Israel, will now be proclaimed in and through Jesus Christ to all the nations (13: 10). It involves the kingdom or rule of God that is made present in Jesus' forgiving sins, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, calming storms—a kingdom/rule proclaimed in his teachings and parables that seek to point out and counteract human obstacles. Jesus is a king whom God makes triumphant even when enemies have crucified him. While neither Matt nor Luke begins in the same way as Mark, their basic gospel outlook is much the same. Matt has Jesus proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (4:23; 9:35; 24:14), and Luke uses the verbal form *euaggelizein* ("to proclaim the good news") to describe this activity (8: 1; 16:16). Since both these writings commence with two chapters of infancy story, their version of the good news also involves the marvelous conception and birth of Jesus (e.g., Luke 2:10). Although John has content about Jesus similar to that of the Synoptics, neither *euaggelion* nor the verbal form appears. However I John (1:5; 3: 11) uses the related term *aggelia* ("message") which may have been the Johannine designation for what we know as the Gospel according to John.

¹ The debate centers on the Synoptic Gospels since the more radical wing of scholarship does not consider John a Gospel in the sense in which the others are (p. 362 below).

The 2d century furnishes attestation of *euaggelion* employed for Christian writings.² The plurality of written gospels necessitated the utilization of distinguishing designations, and so by the end of the 2d century titles were prefaced to the canonical Gospels in the pattern "The Gospel according to . . ." (For the debate about the number of authentic Gospels, see p. 13 above.) The existence of gospels beyond the canonical is a question complicated by issues of terminology: (a) Relatively few noncanonical works call themselves gospels. For instance, the *Protevangelium* (i.e., Protogospel) of *James*, most of the Nag Hammadi collection, and what we have of the *Gospel of Peter* do not describe themselves as "gospel"; (b) The title "gospel" has been used to refer to noncanonical works independently of their self-designation. Sometimes the usage is neutral and intended simply to designate a work about Jesus, as distinct from epistles, apocalypses, etc. Sometimes the usage is tendentious, wishing to claim for a noncanonical work rank equal to that of a canonical work. In antiquity this might have been a claim of those whom the larger church designated as heretics; today it is sometimes the practice of revisionist scholars trying to dethrone the canon. As an example of the wideness of use, under the title *The Complete Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992) R. J. Miller (ed.) gives the text of seventeen works (plus some loose sayings): the four canonical Gospels, two completely hypothetical reconstructions (a collection of signs from John, and Q from Matt and Luke); four fragments of papyrus that bear no self-designation; two works about Jesus' infancy, neither of which designates itself a gospel; four Nag Hammadi collections of sayings, none of which in its own text designates itself a gospel;³ and *the Secret Gospel of Mark* that Clement of Alexandria describes as a conflated form of canonical Mark.

Because of these terminological complications it may be useful to keep distinct two categories: "Jesus material" (infancy and passion narratives, sayings collections, miracle collections, discourses attributed to the risen Jesus-without arguing whether or not they were called "gospels" in antiquity or should be called that today); and "gospels," i.e., full narratives such as we encounter in the four canonical writings (covering at least a span of public ministry/passion/resurrection, and combining miracles and sayings).⁴ Let me emphasize that this distinction is only a judgment of utility for the sake of the following discussion about the genre of full narrative "gospels," not a prejudicial judgment relative to the value or antiquity of the "Jesus material "

Origin of the Gospel Genre

How did the idea of writing the Gospels come about? Did it have its origin in the OT? Was it an imitation of a Greco-Roman genre? Was it a unique creative insight of Mark, with the implication that Matt, Luke, and John then copied Mark's approach? Or was it rather a natural development from early Christian preaching so that the basic idea could be pre-Markan and more widespread? Scholars have tended to advocate with exclusiveness one or the other of those approaches.⁵ Let me explain elements that contribute to the various solutions, holding open the possibility of combining some of them.

ORIGIN IN THE OT AND JEWISH DEVELOPMENTS DERIVATIVE FROM THE OT. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture*, contends that the structure of the Synoptic Gospels was dictated by the OT story of God's dealing with Israel. In the Book of Jeremiah, one has the prophet's background and dating (1: 1-3), a report of his call (including a reference to God's planning before he was born: 1:4-10), an account of his words or speeches and of his prophetic actions (see especially his actions and words in the Temple area in chap. 7), warnings of impending doom for Jerusalem, and a type of passion narrative (chaps. 26, 37-38). Although the proportion of Jeremiah's oracular speeches is much higher than that of Jesus' words in the canonical Gospels, the Book of Jeremiah illustrates the joining in one work of many elements that are joined in the Gospels. By the 1st century AD we find a Jewish work, the *Lives of the Prophets*,⁶ which recounts a few or many details about

²Teachings are said to be found or not found in "the Gospel" by Didache 15:3-4; 11 Clement 8:5; Martyrdom of Polycarp 4: 1. H. Koester, NTS 35 (1989), 361-8 1, would trace the usage to Marcion who was protesting against oral traditions to which churches attributed apostolic authority.

³An appended title calls the Gospel of Thomas a gospel; it and the Gospel of Mary speak of preaching the good news.

⁴Here as elsewhere, except in italicized titles of works, capital "G" will be kept for the canonical gospels. In the apocrypha of the first few centuries we have preserved no full narrative gospels. Some might wish to argue that Secret Mark, since it was a conflated form of Mark, was a full narrative gospel; however, we possess only two small passages and therefore are not certain to what extent the whole work was truly distinct from Mark. Of the Gospel of Peter (GPet) we have preserved only a partial passion/resurrection narrative. Origen knew of a Petrine gospel that contained an infancy narrative (BDM 2.1337)--if that was the same work, GPet was probably a full narrative gospel.

⁵In general I shall reserve to Chapter II below a discussion of other hypotheses peculiar to the study of John.

⁶Lives (OTP 2.385-99) has a complicated history, including seemingly some Christian additions. See Appendix 11 below.

the various prophets: e.g. birth, signs, dramatic deeds, death, and burial place. Probably written in Greek, this work may reflect the influence of the ancient biographies we now describe. (Readers are cautioned not to think of modern biographies.)

ORIGIN IN IMITATION OF SECULAR BIOGRAPHIES. Among the abundant Greco-Roman literature of the centuries immediately before and after Christ were various types of biography, e.g., Plutarch's *Lives of famous Greeks and Romans*, Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, and Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Ancient Philosophers*.⁷ Those proposed as counterparts to the Gospels have divergent tonalities.

First, scholars sometimes speak of "aretalogy" as a special genre of biography where a divine man (*theios aner*) with preternatural gifts works miracles. Despite the appeal to Philostratus, it is not clear that such a definable genre existed; and many of the parallels are post-Marcan. Second, Shuler, *Genre*, points to the "laudatory biography" where the primary concern was to show the greatness of the figure. In the case of the philosophers especially, there is emphasis on their teachings and an idealization of the noblest in their life, designed to encourage appreciation and imitation. However, diversities among the proposed laudatory biographies have to be overlooked to isolate such a subgenre, and so its definability is uncertain. Third, Talbert, *What*, considers the portrayal of "immortals" and of "eternals." Humans (sometimes sired by gods) could become immortals at death, whereas eternals were divine beings who descended to earth, lived as humans, and then ascended to heaven again. He contends that Matt, Mark, and Luke present Jesus as an immortal, whereas John portrays him as an eternal--a comparison that needs serious qualification.⁸

In fact, considerable differences exist between Greco-Roman biographies and the Gospels, specifically in the latter's anonymity, their clear theological emphasis and missionary goal,⁹ their anticipated ecclesiology, their composition from community tradition, and their being read in community worship. Especially Mark differs from a biography pattern that would highlight the unusual birth and early life of the hero, plus his triumph--or if he was unjustly treated, his fearless and noble acceptance. However, these dissimilarities between the Gospels and Greco-Roman biography are observable from the scholarly point of view and take into account what the evangelists probably intended. It is likely that many 1st-century hearers/readers familiar with Greco-Roman biographies would not have been so precise and would have thought of the Gospels almost as lives of Christ, particularly Matt and Luke which begin with an infancy narrative.

CREATIVITY AND THE GOSPELS. If Mark was the earliest Gospel, was the Gospel a unique Marcan creation? Despite the suggestions in the two preceding paragraphs, there is a uniqueness to the Gospels. Even though the idea of writing a description of Jesus' career might have been catalyzed by the existence of lives of the prophets, famous philosophers, and world figures, what is narrated about Jesus is scarcely governed by a simple desire to provide information (although there is an element of that in Luke [1:3-4], the closest of the four Gospels to a Greco-Roman biography) or to encourage emulation. As we saw above in discussing the word *euaggelion*, there is a sense in which what is reported is to receive a response of faith and to bring salvation. To a considerable degree John's statement of purpose in 20:31 fits all the Gospels, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." The appearance of the word *euaggelion* in Paul covering a content that would have a similar purpose (Rom 1: 1-4; 1 Cor 15:1-8; cf. I Cor 11:23-26) means that Mark was certainly not the first to put together Jesus material for a salvific purpose, even though his was the earliest preserved full narrative.

⁷One could include also the Memorabilia of Socrates by Xenophon and the biographical elements about Socrates in Plato's Dialogues; see the study of Votaw, Gospels 30-62. (In part the biography parallels were offered as a reaction to the thesis that the Gospels were a type of popular literature distinct from the more classical literature.) Votaw, Talbert, Burridge, and Stanton (for Matt) have been leading exponents of the biography approach to the Gospels.

⁸The Synoptic Gospels do not present Jesus simply as a mortal who gains immortality as a reward; rather the resurrection primarily confirms the truth of what he already was before death. John does not present an eternal descending to earth and living as a human, but rather a divine Word that became flesh and remained flesh. Anne, "Problem:" offers an extended critique of Talbert.

⁹One could argue that the Gospels are christology in narrative form, and Tolbert, Sowing, points to the ancient novel. Stanton, "Matthew," however, objects that, while there are some similar literary conventions, novels were meant to supply entertainment and titillation--scarcely the goal of the Gospels.

How much ingenuity was required to construct a full gospel narrative about Jesus? The answer depends in part on the historicity of the narrative: Largely fiction, or largely fact? (I shall describe historical-Jesus research briefly in Appendix 1, which develops many observations made in this paragraph.) On the one hand, a variety of scholars would judge much of what Mark narrates as fiction. For some the passion narrative is fictional, largely created from reflections on the OT. For some Jesus was a wisdom teacher, and the narratives of miracles and resurrection were propagandistic creations in order to make Jesus competitive with other wonder-working figures. For some Jesus was a magician who healed by various means, and the wisdom teaching was a creation in order to make him respectable. Were any of this true, much creativity would have been required to move from what Jesus was in fact to the plausible but very different picture painted in the Gospels. (In Appendix 1, however, we shall see how tenuous is the evidence on which many of these claims are made.) On the other hand, an even larger number of scholars would judge much of what Mark narrates as factual. Suppose that Jesus was baptized by JBap and did proclaim the coming of God's kingdom both by sayings/parables that challenged people's entrenched attitudes and by healing the sick and expelling what he regarded as demons; suppose that he aroused the antipathy of Jewish leaders by exercising too sovereign a freedom toward the Law, by claiming to speak for God in a way they regarded as arrogant, and by challenging Temple administration through actions and warnings--then Jesus himself would have supplied the kinds of material that ultimately went into the Gospels, no matter how much that material developed over the decades that separated him from the evangelists.¹⁰

PORTRAITS OF JESUS. Nevertheless, even in the latter understanding the production of Gospels required selection from the Jesus material. Accordingly it is helpful to keep distinct three portraits: the actual Jesus, the historical Jesus, and the Gospel Jesus. A portrait of *the actual Jesus* would involve everything of interest about him:¹¹ exact dates of birth and death; revealing details about his parents and family; how he got along with them and how he grew up; how and where he worked for a living before he began preaching; what he looked like; what his preferences were in food and drink; whether he got sick from time to time; whether he was humorous, friendly, and liked by villagers of Nazareth, etc. We have nothing like that detail in the Gospels, and the very lack of it is why many scholars resist describing the Gospels as biographies or lives of Christ. Awareness of that deficiency is important for readers who might otherwise approach the Gospels in the same way they would approach the life of a famous modern figure, without any sense of tendentious Gospel selectivity.

A portrait of *the historical Jesus* is a scholarly construct based on reading beneath the Gospel surface and stripping off all interpretations, enlargements, and developments that could possibly have taken place in the thirty to seventy years that separated his public ministry and death from the written Gospels. The validity of the construct depends on the criteria employed by the investigating scholars. The detailed recognition that the Gospel picture reflects developments beyond Jesus' lifetime was first and most ardently promoted in the last two centuries by skeptics who wished to challenge traditional Christian theology; and so the initial quest for the historical Jesus had a debunking tone, as if the Christ of faith had little to do with the Jesus of history. Still today leaders of "the Jesus Seminar" (Appendix 1) have publicly stated a goal of liberating Jesus from the church's proclamation of him. In fact, however, as illustrated by Meier, *Marginal*, investigation of the historical Jesus, while it can never be purely objective, needs not be slanted by such prejudices. Indeed, given our modern curiosity this investigation is inevitable and justifiable and even helpful--a point that some who criticize the excesses of the Jesus Seminar (e.g., L. I. Johnson) do not seem to appreciate sufficiently. Yet cautions are needed in such investigation. The portrait of the historical Jesus is a construct based on limited evidence and designed to produce a minimalist view that can be scientifically agreed on. It can give us at most a tiny fraction of the detail and coloring of the actual Jesus, and it will constantly change as scholarly method is refined or revised. Since the investigation strips off the christological appreciation of Jesus by his followers, the two-dimensional picture that emerges will be

¹⁰ There is a rough outline of Jesus' activity in the sermons of Acts, e.g., 2:22-24, and especially 10:37-41: It began in Galilee after JBap's baptism when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power he went about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil in the country of the Jews and Jerusalem; they hanged him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day, and he was seen by God's chosen witnesses who ate and drank with him. C. H. Dodd (ExpTim 43 [1931-32], 396-400) suggested that this was the common preaching outline fleshed out by the Gospels. Far more likely this is an outline distilled from Luke's own Gospel which he inserted into the sermons, and which he got from Mark. Although the preaching contained Jesus material, the ordering from Galilee to Jerusalem probably reflects Mark's simplification. In the majority view John is not dependent on Mark; and while John begins with JBap's baptism and contains words and deeds of Jesus, there is no smooth movement from Galilee to Jerusalem but frequent goings back and forth.

¹¹ All biographies have to be selective; but here I refer to what gives vitality and color to lives of past figures so that they become understandable and their personality emerges.

singularly lacking in theological and spiritual depth and almost surely will be partially distorted because it will reflect what the investigators wish to highlight. The notion that Christian faith should depend on reconstructions of the historical Jesus is a dangerous misunderstanding.

The Gospel Jesus refers to the portrait painted by an evangelist. It stems from his highly selective arrangement of Jesus material in order to Promote and strengthen a faith that would bring people closer to God. The evangelist included only information that served that purpose, and the needs of the envisioned audience affected both contents and presentation. That is why the Gospels written by different evangelists for different audiences in different decades had to differ.

It may be noted that in giving names to the three pictures of Jesus I have refrained from speaking of "the real Jesus," a designation that has connotations both of truth and value. The life of the real Jesus attracted and convinced disciples who proclaimed him throughout the known world. How do the portraits of the actual Jesus, the historical Jesus, and the Gospel Jesus match up to "real" in that sense? Major aspects of the actual Jesus are unreported and thus unknowable; functionally, then, this picture of Jesus can only be partly real to subsequent generations. Because of what it excludes, especially of a religious and theological nature, the depiction of the historical Jesus (or better the "reconstructed Jesus") is the farthest from giving us the real Jesus. As we shall see in Appendix I, it is hard to see how the historical Jesus reconstructed by many scholars would attract the ardent commitment to the point of death that we know Jesus evoked from those who had known him. If one accepts that the portraits in the Gospels retain significant amounts of material from the actual Jesus and their missionary goal was not alien to his, then those portraits are as close to the real Jesus as we are likely to get. As stated in the Foreword, this *Introduction* is meant to acquaint readers with what in fact exists in the NT. Primarily, therefore, it will be concerned with the Jesus of the Gospels. Working with views held by most middle-of-the-road scholars rather than with the highly speculative, the next subsection will expound in simplified form a theory of three stages that contributed to the Gospel presentations of Jesus.¹² In terms of helping those who are not specialists to understand the Gospels, this is the most important part of the Chapter.

The Three Stages of Gospel Formation

(1) THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OR ACTIVITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH (the first third of the 1st century AD). He did things of note, orally proclaimed his message, and interacted with others (e.g., JBap and Jewish religious figures). Jesus chose companions who traveled with him and saw and heard what he said and did. Their memories of his words and deeds supplied the raw "Jesus material." These memories were already selective since they concentrated on what pertained to Jesus' proclamation of God, not the many trivia of ordinary existence (or elements of the "actual Jesus"). On a practical level it is important for modern readers to keep reminding themselves that these were memories of what was said and done by a Jew who lived in Galilee and Jerusalem in the Cos. Jesus' manner of speaking, the problems he faced, his vocabulary and outlook were those of that specific time and place. Many failures to understand Jesus and misapplications of his thoughts stem from the fact that Gospel readers remove him from space and time and imagine that he was dealing with issues he never encountered.¹³ There can even be a sophisticated form of misrepresenting Jesus by imposing on him categories that really do not fit, e.g., peasant¹⁴ or freedom-fighter.

(2) THE (APOSTOLIC) PREACHING ABOUT JESUS (the second third of the 1st century AD). Those who had seen and heard Jesus had their following of him confirmed through postresurrectional

¹²Critical Protestant scholarship developed the three-stage approach by discussing the effect of the variations in the *Sitz im Leben* (life-context) of a passage, i.e., the context it had in the life of Jesus, the context it had in the life of the church as it was proclaimed, and the context it has in the Gospel in which it has been incorporated. In a church document that has binding authority for Roman Catholics ("Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels," April 21, 1964; NJBC 72.35) the Roman Pontifical Biblical Commission proposed the three-stage development as a way of explaining that, although they contain historical material, the Gospels are not literal history.

¹³Whether liberal or conservative, Christians make that mistake. They may ask whether Jesus would serve as a soldier in a modern war (e.g., in Vietnam) or how many sacraments he planned. The exact answers to such questions is that a Galilean Jew would not have known of the existence of Vietnam or of mechanized war, and that there was not even a word for "sacrament" at this period. What Jesus did and said has implications for these later problems; but in Christian faith the Holy Spirit clarifies that implication by a process of translating from Jesus' time to our time. When church confessional documents speak about the actions of "Jesus Christ," they are not simply talking about the Jesus of the public ministry but about the Jesus portrayed in apostolic preaching and subsequent tradition.

¹⁴Criticized by Meier, *Marginal* 1.278-82: Jesus lived in an agrarian society but had a trade as a woodworker (Mark 6:3). By way of modern parallel, Meier maintains that Jesus would have been closer "to a blue-collar worker in lower-middle-class America" than to a peasant. See p. 67 above.

appearances (I Cor 15:5-7); and they came to full faith in the risen Jesus as the one through whom God had manifested ultimate salvific love to Israel and eventually to the whole world--a faith they vocalized through confessional titles (Messiah/Christ, Lord, Savior, Son of God, etc.). That postresurrectional faith illumined the memories of what they had seen and heard during the preresurrectional period; and so they proclaimed his words and deeds with enriched significance. (Modern readers, accustomed to a media goal of uninvolved, factual reporting, need to recognize the very different atmosphere of early Christian preaching.) We speak of these preachers as "apostolic" because they understood themselves as sent forth (*apostellein*) by the risen Jesus, and their preaching is often described as kerygmatic proclamation (*kerygma*) intended to bring others to faith. Eventually the circle of missionary preachers was enlarged beyond the original companions of Jesus, and the faith experiences of newcomers like Paul enriched what was received and proclaimed.

Another factor operative in this stage of development was the necessary adaptation of the preaching to a new audience. If Jesus was a Galilean Jew of the first third of the 1st century who spoke Aramaic, by midcentury his gospel was being preached in the diaspora to urban Jews and Gentiles in Greek, a language that he did not normally speak (if he spoke it at all). This change of language involved translation in the broadest sense of that term, i.e., a rephrasing in vocabulary and patterns that would make the message intelligible and alive for new audiences. Sometimes the rephrasing (which has left visible traces in the written Gospels) affected incidentals, e.g., a type of tile roof familiar to a Greek audience in Luke 5:19, as contrasted with the Palestinian-style roof through which a hole was opened in Mark 2:4. But other rephrasing had theological repercussions, e.g., the choice of *soma*, "body" for the eucharistic component in the Synoptics and I Cor 11:24 (as distinct from the more literal translation *sarx*, "flesh" in John 6:51 and Ignatius, *Romans* 7:3). That choice may have facilitated the figurative use of body in the theology of the body of Christ of which Christians are members (I Cor 12:12-27). Thus developments in the Jesus tradition were promoting the growth of Christian theology.

Most often "preaching" serves as the umbrella term for this second stage of Gospel development, although other formative elements contributed to the Gospel end-products. For instance, liturgy or worship became part of Christian life as seen in Gospel baptismal and eucharistic formulas. The shaping of material by catechesis can be detected in Matt. Community controversies supplied coloration, e.g., struggles with Jewish synagogue leaders (in Matt and John) and internally with some who cry "Lord, Lord" in Matt 7:21 (against spiritual enthusiasts?).

(3) THE WRITTEN GOSPELS (the last third of the 1st century, approximately). Although in the middle of the previous period as the Jesus material was being preached some early written collections (now lost) would have appeared, and although preaching based on oral preservation and development of the Jesus material continued well into the 2d century,¹⁵ the era 65-100 was probably when all four canonical Gospels were written. As for the evangelists or Gospel writers/authors, according to traditions stemming from the 2d century and reflected in titles prefaced to the Gospels ca. 200 or even earlier, two Gospels were attributed to apostles (Matthew and John) and two to apostolic men (i.e., companions of the apostles: Mark [of Peter] and Luke [of Paul]). Yet most modern scholars do not think that the evangelists were eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus. This surely represents a change of view;¹⁶ but the denial of the tradition may not be so sharp as it first seems, for the early traditions about authorship may not always have referred to the evangelist who composed the final Gospel. Ancient attribution may have been concerned with the one responsible for the tradition preserved and enshrined in a particular Gospel (i.e., to the authority behind the Gospel), or to the one who wrote one of the main sources of the Gospel. See p. 209 below for the problem of what Papias meant when he stated, "Matthew arranged in order the sayings [logia] in the Hebrew [= Aramaic?] language, and each one interpreted/translated them as he was able" (EH 3.39.16).

The recognition that the evangelists were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry is important for understanding the differences among the Gospels. In the older approach, wherein the evangelists themselves were thought to have seen what they reported, it was very difficult to explain differences among their Gospels. How could eyewitness John (chap. 2) report the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of the ministry and eyewitness Matthew (chap. 21) report the

¹⁵Ca. AD 115 Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, was seeking out those who had been with the older apostolic generation or their immediate followers, looking for oral tradition independent of the written Gospels that he also knew (EH 3.39.3-4).

¹⁶At least about Matt and John. Luke 1:2-3 states clearly that the writer was not one of the eyewitnesses although he drew on them.

cleansing of the Temple at the end of the ministry? In order to reconcile them, interpreters would contend that the Temple-cleansing happened twice and that each evangelist chose to report only one of the two instances.¹⁷ However, if neither evangelist was an eyewitness and each had received an account of the Temple-cleansing from an intermediate source, neither one (or only one) may have known when it occurred during the public ministry. Rather than depending on a personal memory of events, each evangelist has arranged the material he received in order to portray Jesus in a way that would meet the spiritual needs of the community to which he was addressing the Gospel. Thus *the Gospels have been arranged in logical order, not necessarily in chronological order*. The evangelists emerge as authors, shaping, developing, pruning the transmitted Jesus material, and as theologians, orienting that material to a particular goal.

Corollaries of this approach to Gospel formation would include the following:

- The Gospels are not literal records of the ministry of Jesus. Decades of developing and adapting the Jesus tradition had intervened. How much development? That has to be determined by painstaking scholarship which most often produces judgments ranging from possibility to probability, but rarely certainty.
- A thesis that does not present the Gospels as literal history is sometimes interpreted to mean that they are not true accounts of Jesus. Truth, however, must be evaluated in terms of the intended purpose. The Gospels might be judged untrue if the goal was strict reporting or exact biography; but if the goal was to bring readers/hearers to a faith in Jesus that opens them to God's rule or kingdom, then adaptations that make the Gospels less than literal (adding the dimension of faith, adjusting to new audiences) were made precisely to facilitate that goal and thus to make the Gospels true.
- To some such an approach to Gospel truth is unsatisfactory since, if there have been developments and adaptations, how do we know that the Gospels offer a message faithful to that of Jesus? Scholars cannot be certain guides since they disagree widely on the amount of alteration, ranging from major to minor. This is a theological issue, and so a theological answer is appropriate. Those who believe in inspiration will maintain that the Holy Spirit guided the process, guaranteeing that the end-product Gospels reflect the truth that God sent Jesus to proclaim.
- Much time has been spent in the history of exegesis harmonizing Gospel differences, not only in minor matters but also on a large scale, e.g., trying to make one, sequential narrative out of the very different Matthean and Lucan infancy narratives, or out of Luke's account of appearances of the risen Jesus in Jerusalem and Matt's account of an appearance on a mountain in Galilee. Besides asking whether this is possible, we need to ask whether such harmonization is not a distortion. In an outlook of faith, divine providence furnished different Gospels, not a harmonized version; and it is to the individual Gospels, each with its own viewpoint, that we should look. Harmonization, instead of enriching, can impoverish.
- In the last half of the 20th century respect for the individuality of each Gospel had an effect on church liturgy or ritual. Many churches have followed the lead of the Roman Catholic liturgical reformation in introducing a three-year lectionary where in the first year the Sunday Gospel readings are taken from Matt, in the second year from Mark, and in the third year from Luke. In the Roman church this replaced a one-year lectionary where without any discernible theological pattern the reading was taken one Sunday from Matt, another Sunday from Luke, etc. A major factor in making the change was the recognition that Gospel pericopes should be read sequentially within the same Gospel if one is to do justice to the theological orientation given to those passages by the individual evangelist. For instance, a parable that appears in all three Synoptic Gospels can have different meanings depending on the context in which each evangelist has placed it.

¹⁷ Many other examples of improbable reconciliations could be offered. Since Matt has a Sermon on the Mount and Luke has a similar Sermon on the Plain (Matt 5: 1; Luke 6:17), there must have been a plain on the side of the mountain. Since Matt has the Lord's Prayer taught in that sermon and Luke has it later on the road to Jerusalem (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4), the disciples must have forgotten it, causing Jesus to repeat it. Mark 10:46 places the healing of the blind man after Jesus left Jericho, while Luke 18:35; 19:1 places it before Jesus entered Jericho. Perhaps Jesus was leaving the site of OT Jericho and entering the site of NT Jericho!

The Synoptic Problem

A further stage in Gospel development is required to explain the interrelationship of the first three Gospels, called "Synoptic" because they can be reviewed side by side (syn-optically). These Gospels have so much in common that in the third stage described above there must have been some dependence of one or two on the other or on a common written source. Although much scholarly attention and even passion has been devoted to this problem, most readers of the NT find the issue complex, irrelevant to their interests, and boring--a fact that causes me to be succinct in my treatment. Ample bibliography will be given; but beginners are warned that the subject tends to generate complexity, and they may want to settle for the most common conclusions that I have italicized below (pp. 114, 115, 122).

Statistics and terminology: Mark has 661 verses (vv.); Matt has 1,068, and Luke has 1,149. Eighty percent of Mark's vv. are reproduced in Matt and 65 percent in Luke.¹⁸ The Marcan material found in both the other two is called the "Triple Tradition" The approximate 220-235 vv. (in whole or in part) of nonMarcan material that Matt and Luke have in common is called the "Double Tradition." In both instances so much of the order in which that common material is presented, and so much of the wording in which it is phrased are the same that dependence at the written rather than simply at the oral level has to be posited.¹⁹ Let me simply list some proposals offered to explain these statistics, including for each the main argument(s) pro and con. Finally I shall draw out corollaries from the most commonly accepted solution.

SOLUTIONS THAT POSIT ONE OR MORE PROTOGOSPELS. There have been many proposals (some having no major following today) that would explain the interrelationships of the Synoptic Gospels by positing a gospel that existed before they were written. In the 18th century G. E. Lessing suggested that all three Synoptic Gospels drew on a no-longer-extant Aramaic Gospel, a theory developed by J. Eichhorn, who thought of this source as a full life of Christ. A variant of this thesis has been revived by those who would make apocryphal gospels the source of the canonical Gospels. (The *Gospel of Thomas* will be discussed in relation to the Q hypothesis mentioned below.) *Secret Mark*, a conflated form of Mark known to Clement of Alexandria and thought by many to have been composed in the early 2d century, is claimed by M. Smith to represent more closely than do the canonical Gospels the oldest detectable Christian gospel source, and H. Koester would contend that *Secret Mark* itself was actually written before canonical Mark. The fact that all we know of this gospel is two small fragments and that they can be understood as drawn from the canonical Gospels has discouraged wide acceptance of such claims.²⁰ In addition to *Secret Mark* J. D. Crossan posits the priority of a shorter form of the *Gospel of Peter* from which all four canonical Gospels drew their passion accounts. Again the majority view is that *GPet* is dependent on the canonical Gospels.²¹

In a more traditional search for a protogospel, some would invoke Papias ("Matthew arranged in order the sayings in the Hebrew [= Aramaic?] language": p. 209 below) and contend that he was speaking not about the Matt we know but about an earlier collection (at times designated M) on which Mark drew and also canonical Matt (whether directly or through Mark). Supposedly this hypothetical collection contained what cannot easily be explained by deriving Mark from canonical Matt or vice versa.²² Other scholars judge necessary a more complex multidocument theory, e.g., the source was not simply Aramaic M but a Greek translation of M, plus an Aramaic collection of sayings translated into Greek. Oral sources alongside the written are also posited. In a three-volume French Synopsis produced in the 1970s, MA. Boismard and A. Lamouille detect four source documents drawn on by the Synoptic evangelists, not directly but on a preGospel

¹⁸Numbers drawn from Neiryck, NJ13C 40:5. Very few Marcan pericopes have no parallel in either Matt or Luke.

¹⁹Tuckett ABD 6.263-64, cites two examples of order and wording as demanding more than oral dependence. Matt (14:3-12) and Mark (6:17-29) both stop the narrative of Jesus' ministry after his return to Nazareth to report the death of JBap; all three Gospels have the same interrupted sentence when Jesus speaks to the paralytic (Matt 9:6; Mark 2: 10-11; Luke 5:24). The order of Mark may agree with that of Matt, or that of Luke, or with that of both--however, Matt and Luke never agree against Mark in order. (For seven proposed instances to the contrary, see Fitzmyer, Luke 1:68-69: Five are instances of dependence on Q rather than on Mark; two are very dubious.) In itself, that pattern of agreement would not prove that Mark was written first and the other two drew on it, but only that Mark somehow stands between Matt and Luke.

²⁰M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1973); also HTR 75 (1982), 449-61; H. Koester in *Colloquy on New Testament Studies*, ed. B. Corley (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1983),35-57; A. W. Meyer, *Semeia* 49 (1990),129-53. Critique: R. E. Brown, *CBQ* 36 (1974), 466-85; F. Neiryck, *Evangelica II* (BETL 99; Leuven Univ., 1991), 716-24.

²¹J. D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); *The Cross That Spoke* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); *Semeia* 49 (1990),155-68. Critique: R. E. Brown, *NTS* 33 (1987), 321-43; *BDM* 2.1317-49; F. Neiryck, *Evangelica* 11, 2.732-49; D. F. Wright, *Themelios* 12 (2; Jan. 1987), 56--60; A. Kirk *NTS* 40 (1994), 572-95.

²²Other protogospel theories include protoMark (C. Lachmann; H. J. Holtzmann), which Matt and Luke used rather than canonical Mark, and protoLuke (B. H. Streeter), consisting of Q and special Lucan material and composed by Luke before he added material influenced by Mark.

level: Document A of Palestinian and Jewish Christian origin Ca. AD 50; Document B, a reinterpretation of A for Gentile Christians written *before AD 58*; Document C, an independent Palestinian tradition in Aramaic, very archaic and perhaps the memoirs of Peter-used also in John; Document Q containing material common to Matt and Luke. This type of theory virtually posits a new source to solve every difficulty. It cannot be proved wrong or right, but most will find it too complex to help in the ordinary study of the Gospels. In fact, the scholarly majority in its effort to explain Synoptic differences and similarities, rather than positing no-longer-extant protogospels and very early apocrypha, draws on a relationship among the extant Gospels, i.e., mutual-dependence solutions to which we now turn.

SOLUTIONS IN WHICH MATT WAS THE FIRST GOSPEL, AND LUKE USED MATT. This hypothesis, dating back to Augustine in the 4th century, is the oldest explanation; it was generally accepted by Roman Catholics up to the mid-20th century, and still has respectable advocates (B. C. Butler; J. W. Deardorf; J. Wenham). In this Augustinian approach the canonical order is also the order of dependence: Matt was written first, Mark severely abbreviated Matt, and then came Luke and John, with each drawing on its predecessors. In 1789 J. J. Griesbach proposed a theory of dependence in which the order was Matt, Luke, and Mark.²³ The underpinning of the Matthean priority proposal is that from antiquity Matt has been considered the first Gospel. Explaining Mark is the greatest difficulty in any hypothesis that gives priority to Matt. In the Augustinian hypothesis what was Marws logic in omitting so much of Matt's account? The Griesbach hypothesis attempts to meet that difficulty by placing Mark last and evaluating it mostly as a digest that reports material where Matt and Luke agree. Yet Mark omits the whole Double Tradition where they do agree!

The main support for the thesis that Luke used Matt lies in passages in the Triple Tradition where Luke and Matt agree, over against Mark, i.e., the "Minor Agreements." For instance, in the Jewish mockery of Jesus both Matt and Luke have Jesus being asked an identically worded question absent from Mark: "Who is it that struck you?"--a quotation that makes better sense of the challenge to prophesy (Matt 26:68; Luke 22:64; Mark 14:65). If Luke and Matt wrote independently of each other, could such an agreement have come about by pure coincidence? Is it not more plausible that Luke copied the question from Matt?²⁴ Yet there are major arguments against Lucan dependence on Matt (see Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1.73-75). Where Luke and Matt have almost contradictory accounts, why did Luke not make some effort to reconcile the difficulty? For example, Luke's infancy narrative is not only massively different from Matt's, but also in details is virtually irreconcilable with it, e.g., about Joseph and Mary's home (in Bethlehem in Matt 2:11 [house]; in Nazareth in Luke 2:4-7, with no home in Bethlehem) and about their travels after the birth of Jesus (to Egypt in Matt 2:14; to Jerusalem and Nazareth in Luke 2:22,39). Or again, Luke's account of the death of Judas in Acts 1:18-19 is scarcely reconcilable with Matt 27:3-10. As for order, if Luke used Matt, why does Luke's placing of the Q material differ so greatly from Matt's (except for the words of JBap and the temptation story: see Table 2 below)? That argument becomes stronger if Luke used Mark as well (Augustinian thesis), for Luke follows Mark's order closely. Another problem would be Luke's failure to report the Matthean additions to Mark, e.g., Matt 3:14-15; 12:5-7; 16:17-19; 21:14-16; 26:52-54.

SOLUTIONS BASED ON MARCAN PRIORITY. Mark was written first and both Matt and Luke drew on it. There is a form of this approach that goes on to hold that Luke drew on Matt as well, but it faces the difficulties recounted in the last paragraph. *The most common thesis, therefore, posits that Matt and Luke depended on Mark and wrote independently of each other* What they have in common and did not derive from Mark (the Double Tradition) is explained by positing Q (a source reconstructed entirely from Matt and Luke to be discussed in the next subsection). Thus this is known as the TwoSource Theory.²⁵

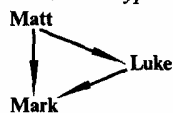
We may compare it to the Griesbach hypothesis thus:

²³ He was not clear as to whether Luke depended on Matt, but the modified Griesbach hypothesis advocated today does suppose such dependence. Prominent supporters are, W. R. Farmer, B. Orchard, and D. L. Dungan.

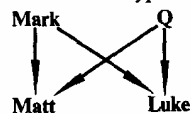
²⁴ W. D. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 109-14*, answer carefully objections raised against Q on this basis by Stoldt (History); also see n. 26 below. Ironically, the Minor Agreements offer difficulties for the rest of the Griesbach hypothesis, e.g., in the example just cited from the mockery, if Mark used Matt and Luke, why did Mark omit the question that both Gospels have and that improves the sense?

²⁵ Actually both Matt and Luke are posited to have drawn on special material for many passages that appear in only one of the two Gospels, and thus on a type of third source; but here we are discussing solutions offered for what the Synoptics have in common.

The Griesbach Hypothesis



The Two-Source Hypothesis



The basic argument for Marcan priority is that it solves more problems than any other theory. It offers the best explanation for why Matt and Luke so often agree with Mark in order and wording, and allows reasonable surmises for why Matt and Luke differ from Mark when they do so independently. For instance, neither evangelist liked Mark's redundancies, awkward Greek expressions, uncomplimentary presentation of the disciples and Mary, and embarrassing statements about Jesus. When using Mark, both expanded the Marcan accounts in the light of postresurrectional faith. The basic argument against Marcan priority rests on the Minor Agreements cited above in reference to the Griesbach hypothesis. Good explanations can be offered for many of them,²⁶ but some remain very difficult.

A realistic conclusion is that *no solution to the Synoptic Problem solves all difficulties*. Modern authors whose own books require research and who attempt after several decades the almost impossible task of reconstructing precisely how they had put their sources together in writing those books will be sympathetic to our inability to reconstruct precisely the way the evangelists proceeded 1,900 years ago. The process was probably more complex than the most complex modern reconstruction. If one cannot resolve all the enigmas, it is realistic to accept and work with a relatively simple solution to the Synoptic Problem that is largely satisfactory. That is the spirit in which the theory of Marcan priority (as part of the Two-Source Theory) is recommended to Gospel readers. Even though it remains a hypothesis, one should be aware that important consequences flow from accepting it.

These are some *points to be kept in mind when working with Marcan priority*:

- Even when Mark was written, the remembrance of oral tradition about Jesus did not cease. Too often we imagine the composition of the Gospels as totally a written endeavor. Yet Papias is a witness to continued interest in oral tradition in the 2d century (n. 15 above). Scholars differ on how much of the oral tradition was memorized (on a rabbinic model) as distinct from repeated word-of-mouth transmission.²⁷ Many think that some problems not resolved by the Two-Source Theory can be met by bringing into the picture the influence of orally transmitted remembrances. For instance, the identical question, "Who is it that struck you?", shared by Matt and Luke over against Mark (see above), might be explained as independent use of a traditional question in the blindman's-buff treatment of Jesus (BDM 1.579).
- If both Matt and Luke used Mark, their theology can at times be studied by the changes they made in Mark's report-redaction criticism. This has been the linchpin of some ecumenical studies tracing the development of ideas in 1st-century Christianity by moving from Mark through Matt to Luke.²⁸
- If one decides that Matt or Luke has added material to what was taken from Mark, that addition, sometimes coming from the special material peculiar to either of those evangelists, need not be dated later than the Marcan material. A sensitive instance would be Matt 16:17-19 added between material borrowed from Mark **8:29** and **8:30**. The added material, which has a very strong Semitic cast, may well be early.

²⁶See Neiryck, *Minor Agreements and "The Minor Agreements and Q"* in Piper, *Gospel*, 49-72. Also T. A. Friedrichsen in L'Évangile de Luc, ed. F. Neiryck (rev. ed.; BETL 32; Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 335-92; R. H. Stein, *CBQ* 54 (1992), 482-502. Omissions are less difficult since coincidentally both evangelists may have found Mark needlessly troublesome, e.g., both Matt 26:45 and Luke 22:46 omit the virtually untranslatable *apechei* ("it is enough/paid") of Mark 14:41. As for augmentations, in a few of the Minor Agreements a minority of textual witnesses to Mark agree with what Matt and Luke have added (e.g., adding "and perverse" in Mark 9:19, to agree with Matt 17:17, Luke 9:41); but that may result from copyists' harmonizations.

²⁷For some a written Gospel was an attempt, conscious or unconscious (and perhaps somewhat antagonistic) to control the vagaries of oral tradition—a theory that does not do justice to the role of apostolic authority in fashioning the Jesus tradition (I Cor 15: 11). See W. H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), who is debated by B. Gerhardsson, *The Gospel Tradition* (Coneiectanea Neotestamentica 15; Lund: Gleerup, 1986). Cf. also *Jesus and the Oral Tradition*, ed. H. Wansbrough (Sheffield: Academic, 1991); B. W. Henaut, *Oral Tradition and the Gospels* JSNTSup 82; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

²⁸Thus PNT and MNT. The views of Peter and Mary grow more favorable (in a trajectory pattern) as one passes through the Gospels in the order Mark-Matt-Luke. Although some Roman Catholics have praised the Griesbach hypothesis as a more traditional approach, they are left with an unfavorable trajectory since the latest of the Synoptics (Mark) would then be the least appreciative of Peter and Mary (see p. 165 below).

The Existence of "Q"²⁹

"Q" is a hypothetical source posited by most scholars to explain what was called above the Double Tradition, i.e., agreements (often verbal) between Matt and Luke on material not found in Mark.³⁰ Behind the hypothesis is the plausible assumption that the Matthean evangelist did not know Luke and vice versa, and so they must have had a common source. Many cautions are necessary before Q is reconstructed. The contents are usually estimated at about 220-235 verses or parts of verses.³¹ Independently, however, both Matt and Luke omit passages found in Mark; therefore it is plausible that independently they have omitted material that existed in Q. Sometimes only Matt or only Luke will preserve material in Mark; it is also possible that material found only in one of the two Gospels might have existed in Q.³² We are not certain of the sequence of material in Q because Matt and Luke do not present it in the same order; nevertheless most reconstructions follow the Lucan order, since it seems that Matt worked Q material into his large sermons (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount in chaps. 5-7, and the Mission Discourse in chap. 10). The accompanying Table shows generally agreed on contents of Q in the Lucan order; and henceforth, unless otherwise specified, in this Chapter *references to Q material will be through the Lucan versification*. Q is normally reconstructed as a Greek written document because the only guide is two Greek Gospels and because a purely oral body of tradition would not explain the large parts of the Double Tradition that are in the same order. Since Matt and Luke often do not agree in the wording of what they have derived from Q (any more than they agree in what they have derived from Mark), one has to study the tendencies of each Gospel to determine which version more likely represents a change wrought by the individual evangelist. Also it is unlikely that there was only one copy of Q in existence to which Matt and Luke had independent access, and it is possible that *some* of the differences of wording between Matt and Luke are derived from slightly variant copies of Q.³³

Reconstructed Q consists of sayings and some parables with an absolute minimum of narrative setting;³⁴ and thus there is a strong sapiential tone. The discovery of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, representing a Greek original

²⁹The designation "Q" from the German Quelle, "source:" is thought to have begun with J. Weiss in 1890. See F. Neiryneck, ETL 54 (1978), 119-25.

³⁰Or at least not found in Mark in the form found in Matt and Luke. For instance Mark 1: 12-13 mentions the tempting of Jesus by Satan but not in the extended form found in Matt 4: 1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Mark 3:22 reports the Beelzebul (Beelzebub) controversy but not attached to casting out a demon from a mute as in Matt 12:22-24 and Luke 11:14-15. Havener, Q 153-60, prints out the text of Marcan passages parallel to Q; and Fleddermann, Mark, offers a thorough discussion. A few scholars maintain that Mark knew Q; see I. Dunderberg, NTS 41 (1995), 501-11.

³¹Kloppenborg's very useful Q Parallels gives a Greek text and English translation of Q. An English text is printed out in Havener, Q 123-46; and in Miller, Complete Gospels 253-300. Lists are offered in Neiryneck, NJBC 40.14; Davies and Allison, Matthew 1. 117-18; and at the beginning of Edwards' Concordance (with Aland synopsis numbers). Virtually a commentary is offered by Catchpole, Quest. There is a vigorous scholarly debate about some verses and words; J. M. Robinson, "International," reports on the discussion of each verse.

³²Neiryneck, NJBC 40.13, mentions proposed passages: Matt 10:5b-6; 10:23; Luke 6:24-26; 9:61-62; 12:32,35-38,49-50(54-56); 15:8-10; 17:28-29. Havener, Q 147-51, prints out disputed texts possibly pertaining to Q.

³³A different approach is to assume that the original of Q was in Aramaic (F. Bussby, ExpTim 65 [1954-55], 272-75-in that case Q might be identified with the supposed collection of the logia of the Lord arranged by Matthew in Hebrew/Aramaic). Matt and Luke would then have drawn on different Greek translations of that Aramaic. Relatively few differences, however, can be plausibly explained through that hypothesis.

³⁴There are three narratives of note: the tempting of Jesus-, the centurion's sick servant; disciples of JBap come to Jesus.

TABLE 2. MATERIAL USUALLY ALLOTTED TO Q

| Matthew | Luke | Contents |
|----------------------|----------------|---|
| 3:7b-12 | 3:7-9,16-17 | JBap: warnings, promise of one to come |
| 4:2b-11a | 4:2-13 | dim temptations (testings) of Jesus by the devil (different order) |
| 5:3,6,4,11-12 | 6:20b-23 | beatitudes (different order, wording) |
| 5:44,39b-40,42 | 6:27-30 | love of enemies; turn other cheek; give coat; give to beggars |
| 7:12 | 6:31 | what you wish others to do to you, do to them |
| 5:46-47,45,48 | 6:32-33,35b-36 | love more than those who love you; be merciful as the Father is |
| 7:1-2 | 6:37a,38c | judge not and be not judged; measure given is measure received |
| 15:14,10:24-25a | 6:39-40 | can blind lead the blind; disciple not above teacher |
| 7:3-5 | 6:41-42 | speck in brother's eye, log in ones own |
| 7:16-20(12:33-35) | 6:43-45 | no good tree bears bad fruit; no figs from thorns |
| 7:21,24-27 | 6:46-49 | calling me Lord and not doing; hearing my words and doing them |
| 8:5a-10,13 | 7:1-2.6b-10 | centurion at Capernaum begs help for sick servant marvelous faith |
| 11:2-11 | 7:18-28 | disciples of JBap; message to him; praise of JBap as more than a prophet |
| 11:16-19 | 7:31-35 | this generation pleased by neither Map nor Son of Man |
| 8:19-22 | 9:57--60 | Son of Man has nowhere to lay head; to follow him let dead bury dead |
| 9:37-38; 10:7-16 | 10:2-12 | harvest plentiful, laborers few, mission instructions |
| 11:21-23; 10:40 | 10:13-16 | woe to Chorazin, Bethsaida; whoever hears you, hears me |
| 11:25-27; 13:1647 | 10:21-24 | thanking the Father for revealing to infants; all things given to the Son who alone knows the Father; blessed eyes that see what you see |
| 6:9-13 | 11:2-4 | the Lord's prayer (variant forms-Mau's longer) |
| 7:7-11 | 11:9-13 | ask and it will be given; if you give good gifts, how much more the Father |
| 12:22-30 | 11:14-15,17-23 | demons cast out by Beelzebul; strong man guards his palace; not with me, against me |
| 12:43-45 | 11:24-26 | unclean spirit gone out of someone returns and brings seven others, making worse |
| 12:38-42 | 11:29-32 | generation seeks sign; sign of Jonah; judgment by people of Nineveh, queen of south |
| 5:15; 6:22-23 | 11:33-35 | not putting lamp under bushel; eye lamp of body, if unsound darkness |
| 23:25 -26,23,6-7a,27 | 11:39-44 | Pharisees cleanse outside of cup; woe for tithing inconsequentials, seeking first place |
| 23:4,29-31 | 11:46-48 | woe to lawyers for binding heavy burdens, budding tombs of the prophets |
| 23:34-36,13 | 11:49-52 | I speak/God's wisdom speaks: Will send prophets who will be persecuted; woe to lawyers |

TABLE 2. Continued

| Matthew | Luke | Contents |
|---------------------------|----------------|--|
| 10:26-33; 12:32 | 12:2-10 | all covered to be revealed; fear not killers of body; acknowledging me before God |
| 10:19-20 | 12:11-12 | before synagogues, Holy Spirit will help |
| 6:25-33 | 12:22-31 | don't be anxious about the body; consider lilies of field; Father knows what you need |
| 6:19-21 | 12:33-34 | no treasures on earth but in heaven |
| 24:43-44,45--51 | 12:39-40,42-46 | householder and thief; faithful servant preparing for master's coming |
| 10:34-36 | 12:51-53 | not come to bring peace but sword; divisions of family |
| 16:2-3 | 12:54-56 | ability to interpret weather signs should enable to interpret present times |
| 5:25-26 | 12:58-59 | settling before going before the magistrate |
| 13:31-33 | 13:18-21 | kingdom of heaven/God: like growth of mustard seed; like leaven woman puts in meal |
| 7:13-14,22-23; 8:11-12 | 13:23-29 | narrow gate through which few will enter, householder refusing those who knock; people coming from all directions to enter kingdom of heaven/God |
| 23:37-39 | 13:34--35 | Jerusalem, killing the prophets, must bless him who comes in the Lord's name |
| 22:2-10 | 14:16-24 | kingdom of heaven/God: a great banquet, invitees make excuses, others invited |
| 10:37-38 | 14:26-27 | anyone coming must prefer me over family and must bear a cross |
| 5:13 | 14:34-35 | uselessness of salt that has lost its savor |
| 18:12-14 | 15:4-7 | man who leaves 99 sheep to go after lost one |
| 6:24 | 16:13 | cannot serve two masters |
| 11: 12-13; 5:18,32 | 16:16-18 | law and prophets till JBap; not a dot of Law will pass; divorcing wife and marrying another is adultery |
| 19:7,15,21-22 | 17:1,3b-4 | woe to tempters; forgive brother after rebuking; Peter: how often to forgive |
| 17:20 | 17:6 | if you had faith like grain of mustard seed, could move mountains |
| 24:26--28 | 17:23-24,37 | signs of the coming of the Son of Man |
| 24:37-39 | 17:26-27,30 | as in the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man |
| 10:39 | 17:33 | whoever finds one's life will lose it; whoever loses will find it |
| 24:40-41 | 17:34--35 | on that night of two, one taken and the other left |
| 25:14-30 | 1 :12-27 | parable of the pounds/talents |
| 19:28 | 22:38,30 | followers will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel |

probably of the 2d century, shows that there were Christian compositions consisting of collections of sayings. (The exact relationship between Q and *Thomas* is highly disputed, since

some would date *Thomas* early while others contend that *Thomas* was produced a century after Q and with considerable dependence on the canonical Gospels.³⁵) Presumably, as with other Gospel material, these sayings were preserved because they were thought to be of relevance to existing Christians. Looking down the Contents column of the Table helps to highlight the emphases of Q. There is a strongly eschatological thrust in the warnings, woes, and some of the parables. One gets the impression that judgment is imminent; yet Luke 12:39-40 shows that the hour of the master's coming is not known; 17:23-24 warns that there will be deceptive signs; and 19:12-27 suggests that there is a time period for the recipients to make profit with the pounds/talents. Accordingly Jesus' followers are expected to live a highly moral life observing even the Law (16:17) without superficial hypocrisy (11:39-44). There is expectation of persecution and encouragement for those who bear it for the sake of the Son of Man (6:22-23).

Many would attribute to Q a low christology since in it Jesus emerges simply as a Sophist or Cynic wisdom teacher. Yet the Q Jesus is to come and baptize with the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by JBap (3:16-17; 7:18-23). He is greater than Solomon and greater than Jonah the prophet (11:31-32). He is portrayed as the Son of Man who will come in judgment (Luke 17:23-27,30,37) and as the Son of Man who is rejected and suffers in his lifetime (7:31-35; 9:57-60). He is the Son to whom all has been given; he is known only by the Father, and only he knows the Father (10:22). It is insufficient simply to call Jesus Lord; one must hear his words and do them if one is to survive (6:46-49). Jerusalem must bless him (13:34-35), and one must prefer him over family (14:26-27). He can proclaim with assurance that in the kingdom those who follow him will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Such a Jesus is far more than a wisdom teacher.

That issue leads us to a highly debatable aspect of recent Q studies: the attempt to reconstruct a Q community, its history, its theology, where it was written (usually Palestine or Syria), and its leadership (perhaps prophets). Indeed, Q has been analyzed to contain anywhere from two to four redactional layers with a theological outlook assigned to each. True, it is virtually certain that, like the rest of the Gospel material, the Q material has undergone changes (redaction) during the period before its reception into Matt and Luke, and that sometimes by comparing the version of a saying in those two Gospels we can trace a pattern of changes. However, the assumption that we can attribute *with considerable accuracy* different emphases to different stages of growth³⁶ presupposes an unlikely systematization in Christian life. Much publicity has been attached to this form of reconstruction, and so for the sake of balance readers should be informed that the claims made for it are widely disputed or doubted, and not only by conservative commentators.³⁷

Let me briefly report some of the claims. (*Then in parentheses I shall report observations indicating the precarious aspect of the reasoning.*) Some now refer to "the Q Gospel," often with the assumption that it has every right to be considered as important as the canonical Gospels.

³⁵ Contrast S. J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1993) and C. M. Tuckett, *ETL* 67 (1991), 346-60.

³⁶ Jacobson, First, and Kloppenborg, Formation, are strong advocates. For example, one approach posits a first stage of Q that was sapiential (and was close to the historical Jesus, who was not an apocalypticist), a second stage where Q was apocalypticized, and a third stage where there was a movement toward narrative and Jesus became an advocate of strict Torah observance (which made Q amenable to Matthew).

³⁷ See H. W. Attridge, "Reflections on Research into Q," *Semeia* 55 (1992), 222-34.

The classification is thought to be justified by the observation that a collection of sayings bears the name "The *Gospel* of Thomas." (Yet that title is a secondary appendage, perhaps by 2d-century gnostics trying to give *Thomas* status. F. Neirynck³⁸ prefers to retain the designation "the [Synoptics] Saying *Source Q*" as a reminder that Q remains a hypothetical text to which we have no direct access.) Often a basic presupposition is that Q was produced in a single community whose view it represented. (An individual, having heard sayings and parables attributed to Jesus, could have made a collection. Is there really a coherent theology that marks these juxtaposed sayings that frequently are grouped around different unifying motifs? A look at the sequence in the Contents column of Table 2 gives a rather haphazard impression.) The next presupposition is that Q represents the whole (or enough of the) outlook of those who collected it that it may be used to diagnose their stance as Christians. (The very fact that independently it was preserved by Matt and Luke only in combination with Marcan material may slant the likelihood in the other direction, i.e., that it was never more than an additional collection of teaching for those who accepted the Jesus story.) The argument from silence becomes a major factor in such a presupposition. For example, because there is no reference in the Q material to crucifixion or resurrection, it is claimed that the Q Christians ignored, rejected, or gave little importance to such belief. (In the combination they made, Matt and Luke found no contradiction between Q and Mark with its strong emphasis on the passion or between Q and their own emphasis on the resurrection. One cannot assume that independently two evangelists took over a source they wished to correct; rather a justifiable assumption is that Matt and Luke agreed with Q or they would not have used it. Moreover, there are some Q parallels in Mark—could the theology of Mark and Q have been so contradictory? What proof is there that any early-1st-century Christians believed in a Jesus who was not uniquely distinguished by the fact that he had been crucified and raised?³⁹ A rejection of crucifixion/resurrection is characteristic of a gnosticism not clearly datable before the 2d century.)

In the hypothesis that Matt and Luke used both Q and Mark, it is not unreasonable to assume that Q was as old as Mark and in existence in the 60s. Some, however, make the unprovable claim that Q is older than Mark and is indeed the oldest Christian presentation of Jesus. There is evidence against too early a dating, since certain sayings in Q suggest that an interval has passed since the time of Jesus. One has the impression from Luke 11:49-52 that Christian prophets and apostles have been persecuted. Luke 11:39--44,46-48 shows considerable hostility toward the Pharisees and lawyers; intense conflicts with Pharisees probably developed later in the history of Palestinian Christians rather than earlier.

Extravagant hypotheses based on this hypothetical document have left their mark on modern "Historical Jesus" research (see Appendix 1). The portrait of Jesus the wisdom teacher or Cynic philosopher with no apocalyptic message and no messianic proclamation emerges from speculations about stage one of Q theology—a portrait that some would substitute for the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of church faith.⁴⁰ A bit abrupt but worthy of reflection is the proposal

³⁸ "Q: From Source to Gospel," ETL 71 (1995), 421-30. Although the Q saying in Luke 7:22 speaks of the poor having the gospel preached to them (*euaggelizein*), that is borrowed from Isa 61: 1.

³⁹ Q sayings relate Jesus' rejection and death to the similar fate of the prophets (13:34; 11:49; 6:23); yet there is no evidence that this connection meant that the resurrection of Jesus lacked unique value for the Christians who read/heard Q.

⁴⁰ One need not agree with Farmer's defense of the Griesbach hypothesis to realize that he is right (Gospel) in arguing that the solution proposed for the Synoptic Problem has pastoral relevance.

of J. P. Meier, *Marginal* 2.178, that every morning exegetes should repeat, "Q is a hypothetical document whose exact extension, wording, originating community, strata, and stages of composition cannot be known." Linnemann, "Is There," is even more acerbic. That having been said, in the judgment of most, *the existence of Q (without many of the added hypotheses) remains the best way of explaining the agreements between Matt and Luke in material they did not borrow from Mark.*

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