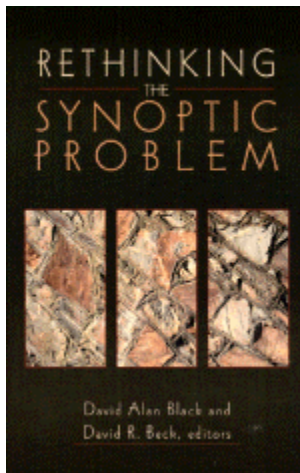


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Black, David Alan and David R. Beck, eds.

Rethinking the Synoptic Problem

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Rethinking the Synoptic Problem is the compilation of papers presented at a symposium by the same name held at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in April of 2000. In essence the symposium presented an opportunity to reconsider two major solutions to the synoptic problem: the two-source hypothesis and the two-gospel hypothesis. The papers represented in this volume are generally clear, to the point, and present a valuable summary of the major contours of the debate between these two solutions. Because the papers were intended to be presented orally to an audience of seminary students, pastors, and scholars, they tend to be clear and relatively free of scholarly jargon.

Following a brief introduction by the editors describing the symposium, chapter 1 presents a brief overview by Craig Blomberg of the state of studies on the synoptic problem. This is followed in chapter 2 by an essay by Darrell Bock reviewing the major arguments for the Q source in the two-source hypothesis. Scot McKnight then offers in chapter 3 arguments for Markan priority. After these essays from the two-source hypothesis, William Farmer in chapter 4 presents his argument for the Griesbach or two-gospel hypothesis. A concluding chapter by Grant Osborne is a response to the preceding essays, and draws the conclusion that the two-source hypothesis is the most credible approach to the synoptic problem.

A strength of this collection of essays is that it does not assume a great degree of knowledge by the reader on the subject, and yet treats it as important for gospel studies. For the audience of the symposium, which one can infer was largely populated by Southern Baptist seminarians and ministers, it seems that a subtext – an important and

valuable one – was the assertion that study of the synoptic problem is important and not just the province of “liberal” hyper-critical scholars. From this perspective, the appraisal of the subject with attention to some of the fundamental issues and a suitable allowance for the diversity of opinions expressed is very valuable.

Craig Blomberg’s essay giving an overview of the state of synoptic problem is a helpful introduction, even if it strays from that task by arguing for the two-source hypothesis. By tilting the introductory essay in favor of one solution, it tends to bias the entire volume and trivialize Farmer’s presentation of the two-gospel hypothesis. Still, most of the major issues are touched on and help frame the subsequent essays. Helpfully, Blomberg points to the value of Peter Head’s work on the role of christological arguments in the Markan Priority debate (*Christology and the Synoptic Problem*) as a major advance in one aspect of this debate. Unfortunately, only M. D. Goulder’s commentary on Luke, perhaps too quickly rejected as defying credibility, is cited with reference to the Farrer theory. This oversight of the Farrer theory throughout the volume was at least acknowledged by the editors in their foreword.

The essay on Q by Darrell Bock is perhaps the best in the collection despite its brevity. It is well balanced, shows awareness of current trends in Q research, and makes a credible argument for a Q source. Bock correctly notes that the cornerstone of the argument for Q rests on the proposition that Luke did not use Matthew as a source. Here unfortunately Bock does not separate the distinct issues of Q and Markan priority. One of the major arguments adduced for Luke’s non-use of Matthew is the overall argument from order (see his chart on pp. 50-51), by which Bock argues that the best explanation for the common order and occasional dislocation of material must rest on Mark being a common source. Of course one can see that the position being argued against is the Griesbach hypothesis in which Luke’s use of Matthew takes place without Mark present (hence Bock’s argument for Markan priority would invalidate the hypothesis). But of course there is a major theory which posits Luke’s use of Matthew and Mark (the Farrer hypothesis), in which this argument from order is simply of no probative value for establishing the likelihood of Q. Bock does helpfully offer some critiques of the limits and possible abuses of the Q theory. He ultimately argues for a Q source, but is very cautious about its documentary form and whether anything can be said about tendencies or its composition; he is clearly opposed to excessive speculation about communities behind the Q source.

Scot McKnight’s essay on Markan priority alludes to many of the essential arguments for Markan priority, and yet his focus often seems to be on other issues than demonstrating Markan priority. And this “other focus” actually detracts from the essay. In the first place, McKnight seems determined to sanctify the memory of the Oxford Seminar and especially B. H. Streeter. What is somewhat curious is that he does this despite having concerns about the distinctive features of Streeter’s theory (sources M, L, proto-Luke), and acknowledging that he did not adequately deal with the real problem of minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. But more importantly, McKnight never lays out the major arguments for Markan priority (of which there are many), but insists that the primary foundation for this approach is the linguistic

phenomena. Put simply, the linguistic phenomena is best explained by Luke and Matthew's use of Mark than vice-versa. This is fine as far as it goes, but he offers little substantive evidence and no extensive analysis to show how this works other than three relatively minor examples of where the Griesbach hypothesis is inferior to Markan priority. Indeed, most of the essay is simply an assertion that the two-gospel hypothesis is inferior. For readers who do not know some of the building blocks for the theory of Markan priority, this oversight was unfortunate.

William Farmer's essay is for the most part a modification and abridgment of chapter 6 of his groundbreaking book *The Synoptic Problem*. It is worthy of note that Prof. Farmer died before this book was published, and this symposium may have been one of the last opportunities he had to present his arguments for the Griesbach hypothesis. There is little new in this current essay, and it engages very little with the other essays on Q and the Priority of Mark. Nonetheless, this essay leads the reader through the major steps by which Farmer concluded that Mark was the final synoptic gospel written and that he used Matthew and Luke as his sources. Its step-by-step procedure and the use of charts to show possible relationships is a model of clarity. The overall failure to convince many is due more to poor logic in some of the steps than to the overall mode of argumentation.

There were some features which marred the usefulness of the discussions in the book. In the presentation of Farmer's essay, the editors have misrepresented the directional arrows on key charts of possible synoptic relationships (p. 108, 112) so that his argument is made somewhat confusing. A quick double check of these charts with his identical charts in *The Synoptic Problem* would have prevented this confusing error. On a more fundamental level, the repeated polemic against "post-modern" methodologies (apparently understood to be deconstructionism and narrative criticism) by both Scot McKnight and Grant Osborne was unfortunate, in part because it was more emotional than substantive. Their comments tended to lump very disparate methodologies together, to assume that such methodologies are inherently opposed to historical-critical methodologies, and uncritically assumed that historical-critical methodologies are the only pathway to "truth." These issues are substantially unrelated to the synoptic problem and were a distraction from the theme of the book.

Despite some shortcomings, this volume makes the debate over the synoptic problem accessible to the beginning student and the educated general reader. One can only hope that interest in this continually fascinating and important element in gospel studies will be revived on college and seminary campuses.