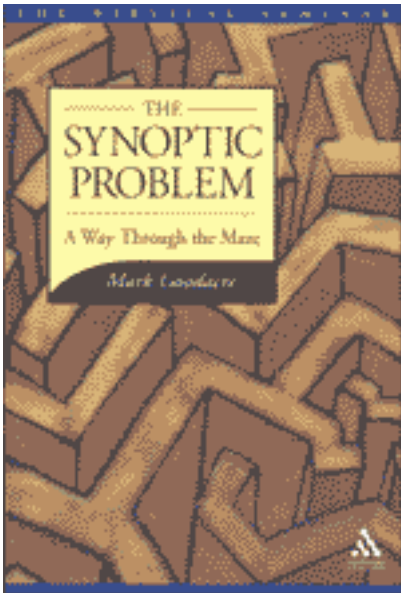


RBL 05/2004



Goodacre, Mark

The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze

Biblical Seminar 80

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. Pp. 178.
Paper. \$24.95. ISBN 1841272388.

Mark A. Matson
Milligan College
Johnson City, TN 37601

As the title indicates, this book is a textbook dealing with the Synoptic Problem. It uses the conceit of leading a person through a maze (hence the subtitle), which is actually a very useful conceit. The text works by moving the student through introductory issues, including study methods, then leading through a series of intermediate conclusions along the way to a solution. In addition to its rather straightforward prose and simple format, this book is noteworthy in that it is oriented toward a nonstandard “solution” to the Synoptic Problem: the Farrer theory. Goodacre is already becoming well known as a proponent of this alternate approach, the “Markan Priority without Q” theory, so the orientation of the book should come as no surprise. While Goodacre’s solution is apparent from the beginning, his discussions about other approaches are clear and fair.

The first chapter of the book gives a very concise overview of the nature of the Synoptic Problem, the principal approaches to explaining the relationships, and reasons why the study of the Synoptic Problem is still a worthwhile endeavor. This introduction is fair and helpful, especially to a beginning student. It has the special advantage of making the whole subject matter relevant, which is no small task.

In chapter 2 Goodacre turns to describing the “tools of the trade” in Synoptic studies, particularly discussing the use of the synopsis and the value of coloring the synopsis to

really learn the areas of commonality and difference. It would have been helpful to actually see the use of colors rather than have them described, but Goodacre does give the URL of his web site (www.ntgateway.com/maze), where he displays the colored versions of many of the Synoptic parallels, so the careful student can see the way his coloring scheme actually works. In this chapter Goodacre introduces key terms such as Double Tradition, Triple Tradition, Special Luke, and Special Matthew materials. He also introduces the term Not Quite Triple Tradition material to describe where either Matthew or Luke (but not both) agree with Mark.

Chapter 3 then begins the analysis with a case being presented for Markan priority. Based on the analysis of Mark as a middle term from the previous chapter, Goodacre examines the relative strength of Mark being either the first Gospel written or the last. Special note should be made here of an argument that Goodacre has really defined as his own: editorial fatigue. This argument is that Matthew and Luke both show signs of having followed Mark by lapsing late in a pericope to Markan terms or language, a sign that Mark was used as a source even when editorially modified. Chapter 4 then builds on the Markan priority hypothesis by delineating the benefits the hypothesis has offered modern Gospel scholarship.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to arguments for and against the hypothetical Q document. Goodacre begins with detailing the case for Q, and he covers the major arguments for Q accurately and succinctly. As noted before, however, Goodacre is a Q skeptic (see his book *The Case against Q* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002]; reviewed at <http://bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=1932&CodePage=2436,1932>), and thus the rhetorical force is found in chapter 6, which mounts a series of counterarguments against the Q hypothesis. The central thrust of the argument, either for or against Q, seems to rest on the question of whether it is reasonable for Luke to have used Matthew as a source; the strongest polemic in the argument for Q is used against Luke's possible use of Matthew. In Goodacre's argument against Q, the issue of editorial fatigue is interestingly raised, as well as the inevitable discussions of the minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark, some of which Goodacre categorizes under the rubric "Passages in which Mark is not the Middle Term."

This book is particularly valuable for several reasons. It is well written, and as a result it is clear and reads well, which is especially important for undergraduate and beginning students. Its structure is particularly helpful for first-time students of the Synoptic Problem: the case is built step by step, with helpful summaries at the end of each section and expanded summaries at the end of each chapter. But it is also valuable because it is

the only textbook on the subject that valorizes the Farrer hypothesis. The primary textbooks in use (especially Stein's *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001]) focus almost exclusively on the Two Document hypothesis, reject the Two Gospel hypothesis (Griesbach), and tend to ignore the Farrer hypothesis. E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies's *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989] does treat that hypothesis as well (perhaps more dispassionately), but it is not as accessible for undergraduate students. Goodacre's book does a good job of introducing the major arguments for the Two Document hypothesis, even though arguing against it, but tends to minimize the importance of the Two Gospel hypothesis. The clarity, brevity, and consideration of the Farrer theory alongside the Two Document thesis make it attractive for use in introductory classes on the Synoptic Problem.