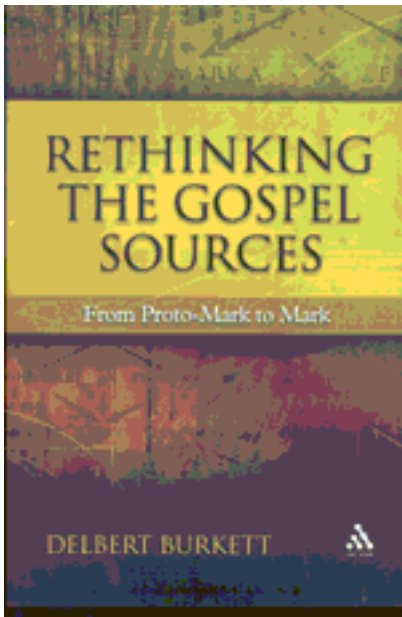


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**Burkett, Delbert**

***Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark***

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This book proposes a method for identifying literary sources through statistically significant correlations between like texts, in the case here, Synoptic Gospels. There is no difference for the method whether its examined objects are Gospels or other texts. Factors taken into account are similarities of content, differences of content, and position of content within each work. Position of content includes examination of similar and different positions of like material in different works. Correlations between the works are indicative: (1) agreements of inclusion (similar content) indicate a same source for either two or three of the works; (2) agreements of omission (absent major elements or absence of a significant number of minor elements) in two against a third indicate where the third was not a source for the two; (3) significant correspondence in the schedule of content between two, especially against a third, indicates a similar source for the two—it is not that the two relied each other, one a source for the other, but that the two relied upon some previous other source or group of sources. Gospel sources are taken to have been written (they could have been “copied”). Use of sources is considered to have been careful. Ancient Gospel writers worked with close scrutiny, careful collecting, and a focused desire to preserve as much as possible to the extent that preservation served their purpose.

The conclusion of the book, which in the preface is described as the first of three planned books about Gospel source analysis, is that a text Proto-Mark was used by an A and a B.

The authors A and B produced Markan texts that became, along with a few smaller others including a Markan C text, sources for what we know as canonical Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Therefore, canonical Mark can be read to exhibit a point of view about its sources A, B, and C. That would be a point of view to which there was no response by either Matthew or Luke because those two did not have canonical Mark before them. Instead, they had Proto Mark-A, Proto Mark-B, and C, which as it happened Mark also had. No canonical Gospel used another canonical Gospel as a source.

To this uncommon conclusion Burkett compares the work of forerunners (theories of Ur-Markus and Deutero-Mark and ideas of Koester, Boismard, Rolland). His conclusion does serve the purpose of situating Mark within a stream of preexisting traditions, so that hypotheses can then be offered about Mark's composition. Once Mark is viewed as a work put together (hypothetically) out of previous sources (Proto-Mark A and Proto-Mark B, C, a miracle/mission source, and a parable discourse), then its redactional features may (hypothetically) be explained—or, so Burkett allows. Two chapters outline Mark's features: chapter 6 about conflation in Mark and chapter 12 about the making of Mark in general. We also find observations about the (hypothetical) cultural or historical settings of Proto-Mark (158) and Proto Mark-A (181), as well as literary profiles of Proto Mark-B (188) and C (204).

The source analysis is buttressed with counts of the frequency and occurrence of Gospel redactional elements, especially in Mark and Matthew. The lists are robust and seem complete. One detection of sources is thereby developed by analysis of redactional features. If similar content in two texts is shared with a third, but each of the two has its own way of redacting the content, then the two probably used sources similar to but different from the third. For Burkett, such a probability is more likely than a probability that two authors copied a third but, as two independent authors, omitted the same features exhibited by the third, features to which the two authors show no objection elsewhere in their own texts.

The author seems very circumspect in his logical progressions. He appears to be quite careful, reticent to make leaps. The presentation of information in the book is clear, and numerous tables are used to show text correlations. The result is impressive and probably as fair as such a presentation could be. The conclusion about sources in general seems quite creative, not only from the viewpoint of the author's method (his reasonable reliance on likely-probable and unlikely-improbable criteria), but also simply from a human standpoint. That is, one must ask: How could the Gospels *not* be the product of a complex process of source, transmission, selection, bias, and preference? The book presents a method that may lead us to uncover findings to show how Gospel composition was complicated and that the complexity must be respected. I find this type of conclusion

a relief. Who wants the unpleasant task of finagling trajectories of Gospel source transmission while limited to only three large objects, some small objects, and a few hypotheses such as Q?

That being said, it must be noted that no new Gospel source artifacts are discovered by the author, nor any newly found ancient testimony explaining how Gospel composition took place. Instead, Gospel sources have been deduced by a method that seems, probably, reasonably likely to produce (1) reliable results that (2) possibly might prove valid if ever there could be a way adequately to test them. But it is unlikely that there ever could be such testing, so it is difficult to know what to do in general with results from operations of Gospel source analysis. Performing the operations well is mandatory, and Burkett is very good at them. Yet it remains difficult to know what one has when one has a conclusion in this area of study. It appears not to be a historical conclusion, although through its rhetoric it is posturing as such. Source criticism seems to want to sound like it is setting straight the historical record. Outside of corresponding independent testimony, it can do no such thing. Its findings probably lead to literary conclusions, and because of that its merits do not exceed its interest, which is to make literary themes come alive through exegesis.

Burkett indeed does offer insight into literary themes, based on performance of operations of what appears to be a crafty game of source criticism. He follows the idea that, if sources can be discretely identified, then their background and context might be cogently guessed. He offers such guesses. Given its identification through the source analysis, Proto-Mark has a Judaic Christian character (158). It has a particular view of law, places no emphasis on the death of Jesus as a saving event, has an adoptionist Christology, and emerged from a setting where reflection on the early Christian caliphate in Jerusalem was underway. The Proto Mark-A material shows connection to the Jerusalem Hellenists, some origin in Galilee, and an interpretation of the eschatology of Jesus wherein the end was said to have been expected in his lifetime. Proto-Mark A views the death of Jesus as a vicarious death, like that of a prophet (183). Proto-Mark B material, as identified in the source analysis, consists primarily of miracle accounts. C materials have yet a different schedule of content, which exhibits different interests: John the Baptist, ministry in Galilee, the choosing of twelve, the debate about Beelzebub, the going up to Jerusalem, the fig tree story, some different eschatological emphases, the anointing at Bethany, a passion narrative, and a resurrection (204–21). Standing on the findings of his method, Burkett suggests that identified sources may be taken to be representative; they are significant of different commitments, theologies, social locations, and interests.

Based strongly on the view of conflation of sources in Mark (often clued by repetition of statements or repetition of story-framework items such as introductions or conclusions) and warranted by the source analysis, in chapter 12 Burkett offers a variety hypotheses about the meaning of canonical Mark's organization of various materials. He explains that his insights are not a proof of his source-analytical method but are instead the kind of exegetical result that his method possibly might induce. Some of Proto-Mark survived through canonical Mark's redaction, as for example in Mark 1:25–26, 28 compared to 1:23–24. Mark knew three versions of the summary of healing in 1:32–34, from Mark-A and Mark-B and C. "Mark knew all three [versions] and melded them into a single more comprehensive version, adding one of his own typical motifs to the mix" (229). The bread story in Mark 8:14–21 was originally without the statement about the "leaven of the Pharisees." That statement, absent in Proto-Mark, was added by Mark-A. Misunderstanding by the disciples about from where their nourishment might come is different from misunderstanding by the disciples and subsequent a warning to them about their state of mind vis-à-vis Pharisees. Canonical Mark had three passion narratives, from Proto Mark-A, Proto Mark-B, and C, and each had different content (and therefore meanings) as stand-alone narratives. The longer ending of canonical Mark, which contains vocabulary and themes that are present in Matthew and Luke, was composed by the same hand that composed canonical Mark, but the vocabulary and themes derive from Proto-Mark A and Proto-Mark B. The "shorter ending" of versions of canonical Mark derived from Proto-Mark, although canonical Mark altered that through terminology changes.

The book has an index of modern authors and a Scripture citation index. It is well paced and accessible to readers at a variety of levels of competence. This would appear to be Gospel source criticism in its best form, and perhaps also at its most up-to-date. Readers will need to decide just where this approach fits into their own methods. Burkett explains his decisions with clarity, so that those interested in source-analytical approaches will find this an essential text.