Goodacre, Mark S.

The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem


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The Case against Q offers a defense of the theory of Synoptic relationships first proposed by James H. Ropes and Morton Enslin in the United States and promoted by Austin Farrer and Michael Goulder in the United Kingdom, which hypothesized Markan priority, Matthew’s use of Mark, and Luke’s direct use of both. It is a “case against Q” not in the sense that Goodacre argues that a sayings source is inherently unlikely; instead he argues that given Luke’s direct knowledge of Matthew, the supposition of a sayings source is unnecessary. Where Ropes’ proposal was little more than an aside, Farrer’s case logically flimsy, and Goulder’s exposition so full, subtle, and complex that it is accessible only to a few specialists, Goodacre’s argument is clearly structured, careful in its logic, and buttressed with a few carefully selected illustrations. He is aware of, and responds to, the main criticisms of the hypothesis and writes in an engaging and lively style. Whether he is right or wrong in his argument, his book is the best presentation to date of the “Mark without Q” hypothesis (hereafter, MwQH) and deserves to be read and discussed by all who take Synoptic studies seriously.

In Chapter One (“First Impressions”) Goodacre bemoans the fact that Q is sometimes incautiously presented as if it were an assured result of research rather than the corollary of the hypothesis of Markan priority and the independence of Matthew and Luke. The point is well taken; but it also deserves to be said that detractors of the Two Document Hypothesis (2DH), who delight in pointing to its hypothetical character, blithely treating all sorts of other matters as if they were not also the produce of hypotheses. Simply put, Q is not the only hypothesis of New Testament scholarship and it is far being its least well-founded one. Goodacre claims that “it is rare in the recent literature to find a careful account of the origin of the Q hypothesis, at the very least
locating the postulation of Q as an element in the discussion of the Synoptic Problem” (p. 4), but curiously cites as examples of such neglect volumes whose focus is not the Synoptic Gospels or Q. The real test of Goodacre’s assertion is literature on Q itself. And in such literature the hypothetical nature of Q and its genealogy are regularly acknowledged: A. D. Jacobson (1992), D.R. Catchpole (1993), R. Piper (1995), C.M. Tuckett (1996), Documenta Q (1996-); and this reviewer’s Excavating Q (2000), all of which Goodacre cites in other contexts. While it is true, then, that some who appropriate the results of Q research speak of Q as if its existence were certain, those who write directly on the topic fairly consistently acknowledge the hypothetical nature of the enterprise.

It is quite true, however, that the MwQH has been undeservedly ignored in Germany and generally neglected in North America. In German literature the only alternate to the 2DH to be imagined—if indeed one is imagined at all—is the neo-Griesbach (Two Gospel) hypothesis. But Germany is not Europe: F. Neirynck in Belgium has discussed Goulder’s views extensively, and despite various mischaracterizations of the MwQH in North America, the MwQH has been promoted by E.P. Sanders and Margaret Davies in the American edition of their Studying the Synoptic Gospels (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), and discussed critically by C.M. Tuckett in the American edition of his Q and the History of Early Christianity, by Robert Derrenbacker (2001), Zeba Crook (2000), and this reviewer (1992, 2000, 2001).

Past promoters of the MwQH tended to focus on the Matthew-Luke relationship and ignored the defense of Markan priority. With the reemergence of the Griesbach hypothesis, Goodacre realizes that a defence of Markan priority is the first order of the day. His case (chap. 2) sketches the key issues: the argument from order; indications that Mark is closer to the events than Matthew or Luke; the difficulty in accounting for Mark’s omissions on a theory of Markan posteriority, when content of Matthew and Luke seems otherwise so congenial with Mark’s theology; the contrasting problem of accounting for Mark’s additions on the theory of Markan posteriority; the “oral” style of Mark; and Goodacre’s own thesis of “editorial fatigue” (“Fatigue in the Synoptics,” NTS 44/1 [1998] 45-58)—points where Matthew and Luke seem not to have carried through on editing Mark and have inadvertently left telltale traces of their source.

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters are the heart of Goodacre’s case, for it is here that he mounts his defense of the possibility of Luke’s direct knowledge of Matthew. In Chapter 3 he considers three arguments that have been invoked repeatedly against the MwQH and several arguments that have been mounted in favor of Q (noting rightly that the latter become important only if the former are cogent). Thus he first considers the objections (a) that Luke is ignorant of Matthew’s modifications of Mark; (b) that Luke seems unaware of Matthew’s ‘M’ additions to Mark; and (c) that in the double tradition, sometimes Matthew’s formulation, and sometimes Luke’s seems the more primitive.

As a general approach, Goodacre invokes Farrer’s notion that certain elements of Matthew were “Luke pleasing” and others “Luke displeasing.” Thus Matt 16:16b-19 is not in Luke because it was not “Luke pleasing,” which is in turn explained by the claim
that “Luke is not as positive about Peter overall as Matthew” (p. 51). This is an argument of dubious merit. First, “Luke pleasing” words are simply words that Luke has along with either Matthew or Mark (or both). “Luke displeasing” words are words where Matthew and Luke disagree and which, on the 2DH, are where either Matthew or Luke (or both) has altered Q. Farrer’s standard explanation of why Luke had taken certain material from Matthew and omitted other material is that he “wanted to.” But this only takes certain textual facts and converts them into aesthetic preferences attributed to Luke with the help of the hypothesis that it presupposes. That is, it merely renames the problem; it does not offer an explanation. Goodacre realizes that an explanation requires that the notion of “Luke displeasingness” be buttressed by pointing to other features of Luke’s redaction. Hence, he avers, the image of Peter as a church-supporting “rock” in Matt 16:17-19 would have been “Luke displeasing.” This, however, runs aground on Luke’s treatment of the prediction of Peter’s denial in 22:31-34, where Luke depicts Peter, if not as a churching founding figure, then at least as the pastor of the post-Easter church. Indeed 22:31-34 functions rather like an equivalent to Matt 16:17-19. Luke, moreover, redactionally highlights the role of Peter at 8:45; 9:32; 12:41; and 22:8 and features his call with special prominence (5:4, 5, 8, 10). The first half of Acts, moreover, features Peter’s activities prominently and, Peter, the first apostle in Acts to speak (Acts 2:14-36), is responsible for three thousand converts. Goodacre can only weakly plead that Peter “progressively recedes” in Acts; but this, in my view, fails to acknowledge the major role that Luke has assigned to Peter’s in the matter of church-founding and in the inauguration of the Gentile mission.

The notion of “Luke displeasing” elements cannot save the day in the case of Matt 12:5-7, since Luke has something very similar at Luke 14:4-6. Nor will it work for Matt 13:14-17, for in that case it is clear from Luke 3:4b-6 (=Isa 40:3 + 4-6) that Luke elsewhere extends quotations from the Tanak and that Luke “likes” Isaiah (cf. also Luke 4:18-19 = Isa 61:1-2; 58:6). Nor does Farrer’s expedient work with Matthew’s modifications to the portrait of Pilate, since it is manifest from Luke’s own treatment of the passion narrative that he is keen to shift the blame to the high priests; Matthew’s hand-washing and Pilate’s wife’s dream would have served Luke’s purposes admirably, especially because the dream declares Jesus to be δίκαιος, which is just what Luke’s centurion declares Jesus to be (23:47).

Goodacre points out that the traditional objection to Luke’s dependence on Matthew—that Luke shows no knowledge of Matthew’s additions to Mark—already presupposes the 2DH. It ignores the Mark-Q overlaps, Q material itself, and the minor agreements, all of which on the MwQH are materials that Matthew added to Mark and that Luke took from Matthew. Using Matt 3:11-12 || Mark 1:7-8 || Luke 3:16-17 as an example, he shows that Luke does agree with some of Matthew’s additions to Mark.

Goodacre then takes on the objection that Luke lacks ‘M’ material. Of course this is true: by definition ‘M’ material is what is present only in Matthew. The key issue is to define grounds for Luke’s omission of this material. He pleads that Luke’s tendency of not having Jesus come into direct contact with Gentiles would have been sufficient
grounds for him to have omitted Matthew’s story of the magi. But this hardly suffices to account for Luke’s neglect of all of Matthew 1-2. So Goodacre argues that Matthew’s elements of birth in Bethlehem, the name of Jesus’ father, and the notion of the virginal conception inspired Luke to write his own birth account. None of this special pleading helps with the bulk of Matthaean material that Luke has omitted, including such items as the account of Herod’s deeds and those of his son Archelaus, which one would think would have been congenial to Luke, given the dim view he takes of the Herodian family. For ‘M’ materials outside the birth and resurrection stories, Goodacre relies on the explanation that Luke omits them because they are ‘Matthaean’: “there is scarcely a pericope there that one could imagine Luke finding congenial with his interest” (p. 59). Again Farrer’s expedient “Luke-pleasingness” is invoked. But one wonders just what is uncongenial about Matt 20:1-16 when Luke is clearly in support of euergetism, and what is uncongenial about Matt 25:31-46 when Luke thinks that the basis of judgment has to do with acts of kindness to the less-privileged (Luke 16:19-31).

To the third objection—−−that sometimes Luke seems to preserve versions of sayings or stories more primitive than Matthew—Goodacre demurs from Goulder’s solution, which views the Lukan versions of all the double tradition as Lukan redaction. Instead he argues, for example, that in the case of Luke 11:2-4 Luke may have had access to an alternate oral tradition. Such and explanation might work for liturgical traditions, it is not clear at all that it will work for nonliturgical materials.

A major objection to the MwQH has to do with its necessary supposition that Luke has re-ordered the Matthaean double tradition. R.H. Fuller once characterized Luke’s procedure as “unscrambling the egg with a vengeance,” the title Goodacre chooses for his Chapter 4. His answer to Fuller depends, first, on the assumption that Luke knew and used Mark long before coming to know Matthew and hence his use of the latter was determined by his basic decision to use Mark as a backbone. Then he observes that Luke shortened Mark’s parable discourse (Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18) and Mark 9:33-50 (Luke 9:46-48, 49-50), an observation that leads to the generalization that Luke habitually preferred short speech units of twelve to twenty verses and the conclusion that Luke would have shortened Matthew’s longer speech units. Finally, he argues that Luke’s preferences, coupled with the “rag bag” nature of Matt 6:19−−7:27 inclined Luke to shorten the sermon, preserving only the “Luke-pleasing” elements and redistributing some of them to other parts of the gospel.

Goodacre’s case depends logically on his insistence on the fundamental disunity of the second part of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount and the generalization that Luke prefers short speech units. That Matt 6:19−−7:27 is a “rag bag,” however, is asserted but never defended. Such is hardly the view of most Matthaean commentators. Of course one might argue that Matthaean commentators imagine structures where they are not, or that Luke did not perceive them where they were. But then Goodacre’s contention that Luke shortened the Sermon by creating smaller clusters of sayings elsewhere in Luke is no more convincing than the view of the 2DH, that Matthew collected related sayings into the Sermon on the Mount. His second premise, that Luke dislikes long speeches, is even
more problematic. Luke not only has a 52 verse speech in Acts 7, but Luke typically associates large bodies of speech material with a single discursive occasion, strung together with brief indications of Jesus’ addressees: after leaving a Pharisee’s house, Jesus speaks to a crowd (12:1-21), then the disciples (12:22-53), then again to the crowds (12:54-59), adding a comment on hearing about Pilate’s killing of Galileans (12:1-9)—69 verses in all; or on another occasion while eating at another Pharisee’s house, Jesus delivers a long set of teachings loosely strung together, but belonging to the same discursive event (14:7—17:10)—112 verses. Patently, Luke can and does tolerate long discourses and simply intersperses these units with “and he said to the disciples” and “and he said to the crowds.”

Chapter 5 further defends the possibility that Luke relocated bits of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount by arguing that Luke 11:1-13 is not inferior to Matthew’s deployment either in its location (following the reference to the fatherhood of God in 10:21-22) or its arrangement. Likewise Luke 12:13-34 uses Matthaean material at least as coherently as Matthew does in his Sermon. Goodacre sees the “advantage” of studies of Lukan redaction predicated on the MwQH in that they would inevitably have to attend much more keenly to Luke’s literary creativity and artistry, since Luke’s editorial activity entails not simply the alternating use of Mark, Q and L, but the large-scale reworking and rearrangement of Matthew. The value in Goodacre’s argument is to point out the logic in Luke’s arrangement of Matthaean (or “Q”) materials—a point that is not, of course, new to Lukan exegetes. It also underscores the degree to which aesthetic judgment is part of arguments about the Synoptic Problem. Directional arguments are often based on claims that the arrangement or grammar or theology of \( y \) is superior to that of \( x \), and hence it is preferable to conclude that \( x \Rightarrow y \) than the reverse. But as those conversant with the history of argumentation know, it is all to frequent to find aesthetic arguments invoked in support of mutually exclusive theses. In this case, Goodacre stresses Matthew’s unartistic arrangement and Luke’s superior artistry; but Matthaean commentators, working on the assumption that it is Matthew who has engaged in large scale reworking of Mark and Q, find superior artistry in Matthew. Goodacre has succeeded in showing that good reasons for Luke’s (re)arrangement of Matthew might be given and to that extent, the argument that Luke’s procedure on the MwQH is “inconceivable” is faulty. Thus we are left with an argument of competing aesthetic judgments and are driven back to the plausibility of Goodacre’s argument about Luke’s alleged tendency to shorten and abbreviate.

Chapter 6, “The Synoptic Jesus and the Celluloid Christ,” offers a novel approach to the problem, arguing that cinematic depictions of the Sermon on the Mount evidence the same sort of modifications that Luke has, \textit{ex hypothesi}, effected on Matthew: the Sermon is shortened, restructured, and delayed relocated to a point after the disciples have been called, chosen, and named; parts are redistributed; and elements in the Sermon are dramatized through changing camera-angle, foil questions and the like (comparable, Goodacre thinks, to Luke’s “and he told them a parable” in 6:39a). While cinematic representations of the Sermon on the Mount provide a good location to examine twentieth century views of Jesus, it is more than doubtful that they afford us any control over how
first century editors, unconstrained by the cinematic medium or the need for “sound bytes,” might have worked. A far more useful control is afforded by what first century editors actually did with their sources, something that F. G. Downing has analyzed, with the conclusion that had Luke used Matthew he might well have come up with a different arrangement of things, but surely not the arrangement that Luke in fact now has.

Goodacre is at his best in Chapter 7, “How Blessed are the Poor?” where he argues against the consensus that Luke indeed would have had reason to changes Matthew’s “blessed are the poor in spirit” to “blessed are the poor” (6:20b). His argument has both redaction critical and narrative critical aspects. Luke has a clear redactional interest in the Isaiah 61 (4:18) and the poor (4:18; 14:13; 14:21), in eschatological reversal (1:52-53; 12:16-21; 16:19-31) and hence, faced with Matthew’s phrase might well be expected to reduce it to “blessed are the poor.” The second aspect of his case helpfully tries to look at the synoptic problem from the perspective of the entire gospel. Thus he argues cogently that given that Luke’s account of the call of the disciples (5:1-11, 28) has them leaving all to follow Jesus, and that the Sermon is addressed to the disciples, it only makes sense to characterize them as “poor.” Of course, Goodacre realizes that the same “narrative” argument can be used for the 2DH: Luke arranged Q such that its address to the “poor disciples” would follow his call stories, and (of course) inserted the mission speech after this.

Chapter 8, “Major and Minor Agreements,” discusses one of the most serious problems for the 2DH, where Goodacre focuses on concessions made by some defenders of the 2DH to the effect that the 2DH may allow Luke to have “subsidiary” access to Matthew without thereby endangering the hypothesis itself. Goodacre is right to argue that this concession is problematic since the 2DH depends logically on the independence of Matthew and Luke. But most defenders of the 2DH do not in fact concede Luke’s subsidiary knowledge of Matthew, and so Goodacre’s point, while surely correct, is of limited force.

Goodacre’s final chapter, “Narrative Sequence in a Sayings Gospel?” is the most innovative and challenging. For the sake of argument he grants the existence of Q and the observation, made by this reviewer and others, that the first part of Q has a proto-narrative and that themes having to do with Jesus as the Coming One and geographical progressions hold Q 3-7 together. This “narrativizing” of Q sets “Q” off from the Gospel of Thomas. Recalling an aphorism of Farrer’s, that towards its end Q “peters out into miscellaneous oracles,” Goodacre offers an ingenious way of making sense of this. The appearance of structure in “Q” 3—7 is the result of Luke’s editorial decision to draw on Matt 3—11 for his two non-Markan blocks (Luke 3:7—4:16; 6:20—7:35). Thus Luke inadvertently took over elements of Matthew’s non-Markan framework, such as the references to Nazara (Matt 4:13 || Luke 4:16) just before the Sermon and to Capernaum just after it (Matt 8:5 || Luke 7:1b). While Matthew had rearranged Mark in Matt 3—11 but followed Mark in Matt 12—25, Luke did just the opposite, following Matthew in Luke 3—7 and abandoning Mark completely at 9:51. Thus “the presence of a narrative sequence for some Q material at the beginning of the Gospel, and the absence of a
narrative sequence in the Q material throughout the rest of the Gospel, is simply a source-critical inevitability” (p. 181).

There is no space in a review to engage all of the important arguments that Goodacre makes. Even though in the end Goodacre’s arguments are in the main reversible, he has gone a considerable distance in sketching how one might make sense of certain features of Luke’s double tradition, given the assumption of the viability of the MwQH. And this is the value of Goodacre’s volume. I do not think that he has provided necessary and sufficient grounds for concluding to Luke’s knowledge of Matthew. On the other hand, it is a hypothesis well worth considering and well worth developing. Goodacre’s sketch of how it might be developed provides a welcome and refreshing contribution to the discussion of the Synoptic Problem and Lukan editorial procedures.