

# THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VII.

SEPTEMBER, 1927.

No. 9.

## Brief Sketch of the Synoptic Problem and the Relation of the First Three Evangelists to St. John.

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Luke, the Evangelist, characterizes his gospel as a "treatise of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." Acts 1, 1. Accordingly, we may term the four gospels treatises of all that Jesus did and taught. These historical records embrace almost one half of the New Testament. The longest gospel was written by St. Luke, who, in point of bulk, has contributed more than one-fourth of the New Testament writings, the greatest portion by any New Testament penman.

A characteristic feature of the gospels is that they quote Christ's words amply. The expressions ἀπεκριθή or ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἔλεγεν πρὸς αὐτούς, ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς, ἔφη αὐτοῖς, ἐτέλεσεν τοὺς λόγους, etc., occur frequently. The greater half of the Gospel according to St. Matthew comprises Jesus' spoken word; in fact, His oral teaching constitutes nearly one half of the four gospels.

The agreement of Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's gospels with each other is truly remarkable, and the similarity becomes pronounced when a comparison is made with the Gospel according to St. John. At the same time, upon a closer examination, a surprising difference between the first three evangelists will be noticed. This harmony and this divergency is termed the Synoptic Problem.

Time and again, the deviating elements have been advanced as an argument against the inspiration of the Bible. It will suffice to adduce one dictum, that by Dr. Marcus Dods, who says: "The second fact which appears to be incompatible with the idea of verbal inspiration is the fact that those who record the sayings of our Lord greatly differ in their reports." (*The Bible: Its Origin and Nature*, p. 115.) On the other hand, Semler, Lessing, and others argued against the authenticity of the gospels in view of their uniformity. (*L. u. W.* 42, 4, 122.)

To explain the problem, a number of theories have been submitted. Thus it has been claimed that Matthew was the oldest source and that Mark drew his information both from Matthew and Luke (Grotius). According to others, Luke was the oldest, and Matthew made use of Luke and Mark (Buesching). Again, some have followed the suggestion that Mark was the original evangelist, and that Matthew and Luke derived their data largely from him (Weisse). At the present time the so-called Two-document Theory (*Zweiquellentheorie*) has been adopted by many critics, the theory that in the main the Synoptic Gospels are founded on two writings, one of which contained anecdotes and the other discourses; as the author of the former Mark was named, who is said to have supplied the basis for Matthew and Luke or, at least, to have reproduced the source most faithfully. Now, since Matthew and Luke record matter, especially discourses, not found in Mark, these two writers, it is alleged, utilized another source, designated as *Q* or the so-called *Logia*. Renan writes: "The life of Jesus in the Synoptists rests upon two original documents: 1) the discourses of Jesus collected by Matthew; 2) the collection of anecdotes and personal reminiscences which Mark wrote from the recollections of Peter." (*Life of Jesus*; Burt Co., New York, p. 37.) But not one of these theories has been universally accepted. As Zahn says: "About results of the study of the gospels heretofore which have found general approval or can lay stable claim thereto one cannot speak." In point of fact, the difference of opinions among these critics leads to the suspicion that none of them is right. For notwithstanding the harmony of the evangelists in the choice of their sentences, phraseology, and subject-matter, there is nevertheless a marked diversity, and the theories advanced in no wise explain the problem. Heinrici remarks: "The attempts to arrive at assured results are kept alive by alternating criticisms, operating like a screw without a point." The numerous differences in word and phrase and often in the component parts are indeed inconceivable were we disposed to assume that the Synoptists had copied from each other. Judging from the past, it is only a matter of time, and another theory will be in vogue.

Reference has been made to the similarity and dissimilarity in the synoptic writings. What is their relation to St. John? In what respect is a concurrence noted? How do the Synoptists compare with each other? Let us specify. The four evangelists have this in common: What they wrote are treatises of what Jesus did and taught; they quote the Lord's sayings at length; in the early chapters all refer to John the Baptist as "the voice of one crying

in the wilderness"; the feeding of the five thousand is recorded by all; they describe the Lord's entrance into the city of Jerusalem amid the hosannas of the people, His suffering, death, and resurrection, and, finally, various appearances after the resurrection. Jesus is the "Son of Man."

The relation of the Synoptists to each other can be summarized as follows: They concur as to the historical trend. They set forth the events before Christ's public ministry: John the Baptist's preaching, Jesus' baptism, and the temptation (Matt. 3—4, 11; Mark 1, 1—13; Luke 3—4, 13); thereupon they take up the activity of Christ in Galilee (Matt. 4, 12—18, 35; Mark 1, 14—9, 50; Luke 4, 14—9, 50); then follows the journey to the Paschal Feast and the last happenings at Jerusalem (Matt. 19, 1—28, 20; Mark 10, 1—16, 20; Luke 9, 51—24, 53). Essentially we have the same story in consecutive order. Aside of the historical account, numerous coincidences present themselves in the sayings of our Lord, in which, in the main, a like choice of words obtains (Matt. 13, 3; Mark 4, 3; Luke 8, 5; Matt. 16, 24; Mark 8, 34; Luke 9, 23). Thus we have hundreds of prepositional phrases in the parallels and otherwise, employed in like manner by each writer. Certain set forms are used by all, sometimes with slight variations: *Ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν* (Matt. 7, 2; Mark 4, 24; Luke 6, 38); *ὁ ἔχων ὅσα ἀκουέτω* (Matt. 11, 15; 13, 9, 43; Mark 4, 9, 23; Luke 8, 8); *ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι* (Matt. 19, 30; 20, 16; Mark 10, 31; Luke 13, 30); *ὃς γὰρ ἔχει δοθήσεται αὐτῷ, καὶ ὃς οὐκ ἔχει καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ* (Mark 4, 25; Matt. 13, 12; Luke 8, 18; 19, 26).

The course of events often coincides, at times it varies. manifold deviations become apparent upon a closer scrutiny of parallels. Not only does each evangelist add independent features, but the choice of words differs in part. (An interesting analogy with different incidental circumstances by one and the same writer is found Acts 9, 4—8; 22, 6—11; 26, 13—18.) To take an example, let us think of Christ rebuking the storm, Matt. 8, Mark 4, Luke 8. Matthew speaks of a *σεισμός μέγας ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ*; Mark writes: *γίνεται λαίλαψ μεγάλη ἀνέμου*; Luke says: *κατέβη λαίλαψ ἀνέμου εἰς τὴν λίμνην*; Matthew: *τότε ἐγεγνησθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τοῖς ἀνέμοις καὶ τῇ θαλάσῃ, καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη μεγάλη*; Mark: *καὶ διεγεγνησθεὶς, ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ, καὶ εἶπεν τῇ θαλάσῃ, σιώπα, περὶ μωσοῦ. Καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη μεγάλη*; Luke: *ὁ δὲ διεγεγνησθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ καὶ τῷ κλύδωνι τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἐπαύσαντο, καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη*. The illustration is

typical for other parallels. Certain events and discourses are related by only two writers: The account of the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt. 14; Mark 6), the story of the Syrophenician woman (Matt. 15; Mark 7), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7; Luke 6), the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8; Luke 7); the widow's mites (Mark 12; Luke 21). Others are recorded by only one evangelist: the account of Joseph and Mary before the Savior's birth (Matt. 1); the wise men from the East, the flight to Egypt, and the massacre of the infants (Matt. 2); the parable of the tares among the wheat, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the net (Matt. 13); the tribute-money (Matt. 17); the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20); and others. Recorded only by Mark: the seed growing secretly (chap. 4); the young man with only a linen cloth (chap. 14); by Luke: the account of Zacharias, Elisabeth, and Mary (chap. 1); the nativity at Bethlehem, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, Jesus in the Temple in the midst of the doctors (chap. 2); Jesus' raising of the widow's son (chap. 7); story of the Good Samaritan, the one thing needful (chap. 10); the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (chap. 15); Zacchaeus, the publican (chap. 19); and others. Some events are recorded more fully by one evangelist than by another (Matt. 4, 1—11; Mark 1, 12, 13). The words: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see," etc., are employed in different connections by Matthew (chap. 13, 16, 17) and Luke (chap. 10, 23, 24); also the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6; Luke 11). Not all prepositional phrases are used alike by the Synoptists: Matt. 9, 2 and Mark 7, 30 *ἐπί* appears with different cases; Matt. 22, 37 has *ἐν* and Mark 12, 30 *ἐκ*. Luke 10, 27 has both prepositions. Furthermore, the combination *βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν* is found only in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Mark employs the word *εὐθύς* — *εὐθέως* profusely (cf. the first chapter); this peculiarity stands out conspicuously in the translation "straightway," "immediately," "forthwith," "anon." He also furnishes a number of Aramaic expressions with the proper translation (3, 17; 5, 41; 7, 11, 34; 10, 46; 14, 36; 15, 22, 34); also Latin words are frequent (2, 4, 9, 11; 5, 9, 15; 6, 27, 37, 55; 7, 4; 12, 14, 42; 15, 15, 16, 39, 44, 45). Luke, the physician (Col. 4, 14), supplies the exact terminology in accounts mentioning ailments, the proper care for patients, and the parts of the human body (4, 38; 5, 12; 6, 6; 7, 2; 8, 42; 10, 30—37; 16, 20—22; 18, 13; 22, 50; 23, 29, 48).

The contents of the Gospel according to St. John differ materially from those of the other gospels. Had we only the writings

by the Synoptists, it would appear that the Lord's public ministry terminated after a period of about one year. But in the Gospel of St. John, at least three Passovers are mentioned (2, 13; 6, 4; 12, 1, the reference in 5, 1 being disputed). According to the Synoptists, Christ's activity, in the main, takes place in Galilee. True, John mentions historical events in this province (1, 43; 2, 1—12; 4, 3. 43—54; 6; 7, 1; 21, 1), but the major happenings recorded by him occurred in Judea (2, 13—4, 2; 5; 7, 10—53; 8—10; 11; 12; 13—20). The only Galilean incidents which he narrates in common with them are those found chap. 6, 1—15 and vv. 16—21, the latter with Matthew and Mark. The Samaritan account, chap. 4, is distinctive. In the history of the Passion and resurrection, a relative concurrence being evident, the divergency likewise is perceivable. Cf. chaps. 12—13 and Matt. 26, Mark 14, Luke 22; John 14—17, chaps. 20—21, and Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24. Whereas the Lord's sayings, in general, correspond in the synoptic writings, no parallel is found in them to the longer discourses in John. The language and style in this gospel are unique and elsewhere only found in the epistles of St. John and perhaps in one other passage, namely, Matt. 11, 27. Very few verbal parallelisms with the Synoptists are noted; cf. John 6, 5—13; Matt. 14, 15—21; Mark. 6, 34—44; Luke 9, 11—17, where numerous points of contact between the Synoptists are to be observed and a limited number between John and the other evangelists. Cf. also John 4, 44, Matt. 13, 57, Mark 6, 4. The subjective form in the sayings of Jesus is truly impressive: "I am the Bread of life," "I am the Light of the world," "I am the Door of the sheep," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Resurrection," "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "I am the true Vine." Nowhere does John employ the parable form as used by the other writers. The following dialogs are distinctive: Jesus and Nathanael (chap. 1); Jesus and Nicodemus (chap. 3); Jesus and the Samaritan woman (chap. 4); Jesus and Martha (chap. 11); Jesus and Peter (chap. 13); Jesus and Pilate (chap. 18); Jesus and Mary Magdalene (chap. 20); Jesus and Simon Peter (chap. 21). Significantly St. John writes: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book." Chap. 20, 30.

Most certainly the four gospels are the inspired Word of God. They are in the highest sense a fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus: "Ye also shall bear witness," John 15, 27; and: "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth," John 16, 13. It is not amiss, however, to hold an opinion which presents a fair

solution to the Synoptic Problem, but this view must not run counter to the inspiration of the Scriptures. Very likely — thus many eminent Bible students contend — soon after the Lord's ascension, an "unwritten gospel" of what Jesus did and taught (Acts 2, 22—24) was repeated time and again, and this formed the basis of what was written by the Synoptists. As to the divergencies: Each evangelist had certain readers in mind, and each writer maintained his individuality, employing his own method of research. This individuality and research of the four evangelists and the fixed oral account the Holy Spirit employed when His Word was penned as "a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." Luke 1, 1.

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