A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

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INTRODUCTION

The Synoptic problem can be a difficult issue to understand. There are many different proposed solutions to the problem, some which have been widely accepted and some which have very little support at all. Nonetheless, scholars on every side of the argument continue to research, write about, and argue for their preferred solution. Though treatment of this issue could potentially fill up volumes, we will attempt to provide a concise overview of the problem and a selected few of the more popular solutions that have been offered in an effort to better understand the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels and what impact they might have on church ministry.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Before we begin sifting through the different views and issues that surround the Synoptic problem, it is appropriate to first define the Synoptic problem. Mark Goodacre, in a lecture at Duke University in 2010, rightly points out that in dealing with the Synoptic problem we all too often begin by proposing one of the solutions without really having defined the problem. For instance, proponents of Markan priority open by explaining their side of the argument as the problem when, in fact, it is one of the proposed solutions to the problem. Therefore, we must understand that the Synoptic Problem is “the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship”.¹ Understanding this definition gives us a firm foundation with which to begin.

We first must grapple with whether or not the Synoptics are, indeed, reliant on one another in some manner. Independence would assume that they each wrote their Gospels separately with no reliance on the others for any of their content. Though in the extreme minority, there are scholars who do hold to the idea that the Synoptics are independent. A better solution, as we will see, is to conclude that they are interdependent in several ways. Daniel Wallace concludes that there are 4 reasons for their interdependence.

1. **Agreement in Wording.** In reading through the Synoptic Gospels, it is noticeable that the wording which is used is quite similar, if not almost exact, on many occasions. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, is almost completely unique unto itself.

2. **Agreement in Order.** The order in which the Synoptics present the stories of the life of Jesus are consistently parallel. There are occasional disagreements; however, the areas in which there are agreements are far greater.

3. **Agreement in Parenthetical Material** – There are several examples of all three Gospels using the same statement as an aside. One of the most popular examples is “let the reader understand” contained in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14.

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2 For further study see F. David Farnell's chapter in *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*.


4 F. David Farnell in *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* argues both that this criterion is insufficient and that this specific example has been incorrectly interpreted by Robert Stein and other scholars that hold to this criterion.
4. *Luke’s Preface* – Luke clearly states in the introductory remarks of his Gospel that there were eyewitnesses to the works of Jesus that had attempted to put together an account of Jesus’ life before him. Luke’s wording causes us to assume that he has access to these eyewitness accounts.

Though arguments can be made for the independence of the Gospels, I cannot, having seen the similarities between the three, bring myself to find these arguments convincing. Therefore, we will move forward assuming interdependence.

**UNDERSTANDING THE MATERIAL**

Any introduction to the Synoptic problem requires an explanation of the terms that define the materials with which the problem deals. There are 6 different terms that are referred to when dealing with the literary content of the Synoptic problem.


2. *Double Tradition*. Double tradition refers to the content that is contained in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark.

3. *M Material*. M Material refers to the content that is unique only to Matthew. This content could be information that Matthew simply remembers, by the power of the
Holy Spirit, and has recorded. It could also be a result of oral tradition, or they could denote another written source or sources from which Matthew copied. 

4. L Material. L Material is the same as M Material except that it is unique to Luke.

5. Special Mark. Special Mark is material that is unique to Mark. There is very little special Mark. Less than 10% of Mark’s material is not found in Matthew or Luke.

6. Q. Q is the hypothetical document often posited as an explanation for the significant verbal similarities between Matthew and Luke when they deviate from Mark. The assumption is that if they were not copying from one another, there must have been another document from which both Matthew and Luke copied. There remains no concrete historical evidence for the existence of Q.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

The term “synoptic” comes from the Greek adjective synoptikos which can be translated “to see together.” This term was first applied to Matthew, Mark, and Luke by Johann Griesbach in the late eighteenth century. In looking at the texts of these three gospels, one cannot help but notice the significant similarities. We first see similarities at the pericope level. A pericope is a set of verses that come together to form a set of thoughts. Most modern Bibles contain headings to define when pericopes begin and end. For instance, Matthew 1 is divided into 2 pericopes: the first being the Genealogy of Jesus (vs. 1-17) and the second, the Birth of Jesus (vs. 18-25). These

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5 B.H. Streeter, one of the most influential scholars of Markan priority, makes the case for M and L Material stemming from other written documents in his book The Four Gospels.
headings group together the verses by thought or story. It is at the pericope level that we begin to see the significant similarities between the Synoptics: approximately 90 percent of the book of Mark is found also in Matthew and 50 percent is also found in Luke. For example, all three gospels contain the stories of John the Baptist, Jesus being Baptized, the Choosing of the Twelve, the Parable of the Sower, the Transfiguration, and many more. On the other hand, John’s Gospel is 90 percent unique from the other 3 gospels.

The similarities do not end at the pericopes. Not only is there major pericope agreement among the three Gospels, but we also see extremely close verbal agreement between the Synoptics in many places. That is to say, stories have not simply been retold, they have been retold with exactly the same verbiage. An excellent example of this literary relationship in John the Baptist’s chastisement of the Pharisee’s is seen below.

TABLE 1: Example of interdependence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 3:7-10, ESV</th>
<th>Luke 3:7-9, ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”</td>
<td>“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scot McKnight, ”A Generation Who Knew Not Streeter,” in Rethinking the Synoptic Problem, ed. David Alan Black and David R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).
This, among many other examples, leave us to assume that there was copying going on among the 3 historians, and the forthcoming solutions to the Synoptic problem all differ based primarily on who is copying from whom.

MATTHEAN PRIORITY

To best understand the solutions and arguments surrounding the Synoptic problem best, I think it is appropriate to begin with the hypotheses that assume Matthean priority because through the majority of history it has been the accepted view. Matthean priority means to assume that the Gospel of Matthew was written first and that Mark and Luke copied Matthew in some manner. The early church fathers were almost unanimous in their belief that Matthew wrote first. Among those who held this belief were Irenaeus, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. Moreover, Clement of Alexandria noted that the Gospel containing the genealogies was the first to be written. Additionally, these men held to the idea that the Gospels were written in the order that we currently see them in the canon: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

Because of this testimony there were virtually no disputations of this view until the 18th century when Johan Griesbach argued that though Matthew wrote first, Mark wrote his Gospel last. This idea was initially called the Griesbach Hypothesis but its most influential modern proponent, William Farmer, has named it the Two-Gospel Hypothesis. It is called the

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7 For an excellent treatment of this issue with color coded guides, see http://markgoodacre.org/maze/synopses.htm

Two-Gospel Hypothesis because it assumes that only Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels independently and that Mark then copied from their two Gospels in an effort to write a more concise version of the other two. Farmer comes to this conclusion through a very thorough process that shows how the similarities in wording and order are due to Matthew writing first, Luke using Matthew as a source, and Mark conflating both Matthew and Luke in his Gospel.

We must first affirm two very important things about this hypothesis. First and foremost it requires no other unknown sources. One of the other prominent views surrounding the Synoptic problem, which we will deal with shortly, contains within it an assumption that there was another source called Q from which Matthew and Luke both copied. This is a significant area of contention among many New Testament scholars. Proponents of the Two-Gospel hypothesis and the Farrer Theory hold to the idea that basing a scholarly solution on a document that only hypothetically exists is not necessary. Mark Goodacre, the most prominent proponent of the Farrer theory, has published multiple articles as well as a book-length study dealing with the nonexistence of Q.\(^9\) Farmer’s argument is that we first need to make every effort to solve the problem with the texts and information that we have before giving way to a theoretical document.\(^10\)

Additionally, though the early church did assume the canonical order, it cannot be overlooked that it is virtually unanimous that Matthew came first. G.R. Osborne argues that even though both views agree on Matthew writing first, their differences in the order of Luke and

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Mark give this point little weight in the argument.¹¹ Though I see his point, I find it invalid. The Two-Gospel Hypothesis cannot function without Matthew coming first, so regardless of the order of the other two, historical attestation to the priority of Matthew is a legitimate part of the discussion.

**MARKAN PRIORITY**

There are 2 primary views of Markan Priority. The Two-Document hypothesis is the most commonly held theory among scholars today. This idea proposes Mark as the source for the triple tradition content and Q as the source for the double tradition content. The second theory, popular in Great Britain, is called the Farrer theory after its originator, A. M. Farrer. This view agrees that the triple tradition is best explained by Mark writing first, but asserts that the double tradition material is best explained by the idea that Luke used Matthew in addition to Mark and that Q is nonessential. We must first establish the foundation for these 2 hypotheses by posing the arguments for Markan priority, which in turn, are arguments against Matthean priority.

**Explanations for the Triple Tradition**

*Marks Brevity and Purpose*

Mark is the shortest of the three Synoptics. According to Daniel Wallace’s calculations Mark contains 407 fewer verses than Matthew and 488 less than Luke. Furthermore, Mark

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¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, "Response," in *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 147.
contains 7,268 fewer words that Matthew and 8,351 less than Luke.\textsuperscript{12} Mark’s brevity can be explained in 2 ways. The first way, which supports Markan priority, is that Mark wrote first and that Matthew and Luke copied Mark and then added their own material. The other option is that Mark wrote last which leaves us with the need to know why Mark would cut so much of the material from Matthew and Luke.

Two-Gospel hypothesis supporters would argue that Mark’s Gospel is shorter because he was attempting to, for one of many possible reasons, write a more concise Gospel. This argument breaks down when we begin to look at the material that Mark has both left out and the material that he chose to add. If Mark was trying to squeeze Matthew and Luke into a more condensed version, he did not do this well. The most obvious example is the Sermon on the Mount. This Sermon, found most popularly in Matthew but also covered in Luke, is regarded as one of the most important passages that we find in Scripture. It contains Jesus teaching, uninterrupted, on myriad aspects of how to live out the Christian life. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has written an extensive volume on the importance of this sermon and says, “The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount.”\textsuperscript{13} He adds, “nothing shows me the absolute need of the new birth, and of the Holy Spirit and His work within, so much as the Sermon on the Mount.”\textsuperscript{14} As we look at the potential of Mark writing last, is it logical that he decided to leave this out? Mark additionally leaves out the Lord’s Prayer and Jesus’ birth narrative. We then have


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 13.
to determine, based on these significant omissions, whether or not it seems more logical that Mark left out these important stories on purpose or that he wrote first and Matthew and Luke added these portions at a later time. My suggestion would be that the latter is the better assumption.

Additionally, on the assumption of Matthean priority, Mark added some contents, not found in Matthew or Luke, that seem rather odd. A prime example is found in Mark 14:51 where there are 2 sentences about a young man running away naked during Jesus’ arrest. Another example is the story in Mark 8 where Jesus spits in a blind man’s eyes. If Mark were attempting to write a digest of Matthew and Luke, it seems irrational that he would cut the story of Jesus’ birth and keep the story of the naked running man. It doesn’t seem reasonable that Mark would cut the entire Sermon on the Mount in place of Jesus spitting in a blind man’s eyes especially when Mark contains an additional story of Jesus restoring a blind man’s sight in chapter 10. The much more plausible reason for these noteworthy differences is that Mark did not have Matthew or Luke in front of him from which to copy these stories. Therefore, not only is Mark the shortest of the Gospel accounts, but since it can be assumed that he is not writing a condensed version of previous Gospels, there is no legitimate reason for Mark to be writing at all unless he is writing first.

Marks Harder Readings

There are numerous passages within Mark, which are also contained within Matthew and Luke, where the seemingly primitive language that Mark uses is harsh and can be easily
misunderstood. Matthew and Luke both seem to smooth over Mark’s less elegant language.

Below are two of the most popular examples.

**Table 2: First example of Mark’s harder reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” (Mark 10:17-18, ESV)</th>
<th>And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.” (Matthew 19:16-17, ESV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The important section in this reading is the final sentence. Mark’s statement, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone,” leaves room for misunderstanding. Jesus seems to be deflecting the compliment that He is good and attributing goodness to God alone. But if Jesus is God, why would he deflect this compliment? Mark’s rendering of the conversation can easily be misinterpreted as Jesus claiming that he is not God. Matthew, on the other hand, smooths out the wording so that reader more easily understands that Jesus is being tactical in his conversation rather than denying his deity.

**Table 3: Second example of Mark’s harder reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. (Mark 6:4-6 ESV)</th>
<th>And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. (Matthew 13:57-58ESV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
In Mark’s version of this story it seems as if Jesus was unable to perform any miracles. This allows the reader to draw conclusions about Jesus’ fallibility and deity. Matthew again smooths the reading so that it is understood that Jesus was able to do the miracles but chose not to do miracles because of the unbelief of the people; not because he was unable to. These are only two examples of several that can be found throughout the triple tradition. We again need to determine if it is more likely that Mark wrote first and Matthew and Luke smoothed out his harder readings, as I have proposed, or that Mark wrote last and chose not to copy Matthew and Luke in many instances and, instead, purposefully used wording that is ambiguous. I would propose that the option of Mark writing first is the most coherent conclusion.

**Agreement in Order**

One of the most interesting points of the synopsis is that Matthew and Luke never agree against Mark in order. This means that when we look at the order of the pericopes, either Matthew or Luke is always following Mark in order, even if the other strays off the path. This table serves as a very primitive example of this idea

**Table 4: Example of agreement from order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Luke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When Matthew deviates by putting C in front of B, Luke maintains the same order as Mark. In the same way, when Luke deviates from Mark’s order by putting F in front of D, Matthew maintains congruency with Mark. Matthew and Luke never differ on order against Mark, which causes us to assume that Mark is the guide for order. If Matthew and Luke agreed against Mark in order, we might have reason to believe that one of them was the common denominator; however, this is not the case.

Conclusion

There are several additional arguments for Markan priority that we have not dealt with here. Among them are Mark’s poor writing style (the idea that Mark’s writing and Greek are not nearly as clean as that of Matthew and Luke, and therefore he must not have copied from Matthew and Luke), Mark’s more primitive theology (which calls attention to the fact that Mark most commonly calls Jesus “Teacher” or “Rabbi” as opposed to Matthew and Luke who more often call Him “Lord”), and, a more recent argument made by Mark Goodacre, Editorial Fatigue (the idea that when Matthew and Luke are copying Mark, they will often change the scene or content of a story and then forget about the changes they have made and slip back into copying Mark’s version, thus causing some of the content not to make sense). ¹⁵

Though it remains that the early church writers claim that Matthew wrote first, the evidence that we have seen seems to tell us otherwise. The idea that Mark copied Matthew and

Luke seems extremely far-fetched, based on the data, and we must conclude that Markan priority is the best solution for the triple tradition material.

**Explanations for the Double Tradition**

As mentioned above, this is the point where the 2 proponents of Markan priority part ways. Two-Source theorists maintain that Q is the source for the double tradition while scholars adhering to the Farrer theory maintain that it is not necessary to hypothesize a document to account for the double tradition when it can be explained that Luke used both Mark and Matthew in the writing of his Gospel. To further understand the arguments, let us look to some of the arguments for each of these viewpoints.

**Two-Source Theory**

This hypothesis is based on the idea that Matthew and Luke had 2 sources, namely, Mark and Q. The existence of Q is based on the idea that in the double tradition there are not just agreements in content, but crucial verbal and order agreements between Matthew and Luke. The best example has already been used at the beginning of this paper as one of the arguments for interdependence of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 3:7-10 and Luke 3:7-9, John’s chastisements of the Pharisee’s. The 3 verses in Matthew and 2 verses in Luke are nearly identical in their wording. Another excellent example is found here. Text common to Matthew and Luke is green, text unique to Matthew is blue and text unique to Luke is red.
Table 5. Example of verbal agreement in the Double Tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 7:3-5</th>
<th>Luke 6:41-43</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.</td>
<td>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Matthew 7:3-5, ESV)  
(Luke 6:41-43, ESV)

These examples are important because they are a clear example that they contain identical material that is not included in Mark, however, the problem with this argument and any other subsequent argument that show similarities between Matthew and Luke, is that they do not assist us in sorting out whether Q is necessary; it can always be said that the agreement is due to Luke copying Matthew. The main issue that needs to be resolved, and that is at the epicenter of the disagreement between the Two-Source Theory and the Farrer Theory, is if it is probable and possible that Luke knew and used Matthew. Just as the earlier arguments for Markan priority are arguments against Matthean priority, the arguments against Luke’s use of Matthew are arguments for the existence of Q.

1. **Luke’s Order.** Scholars conclude that it is highly unlikely that Luke copied from Matthew because he notably jumbles the order that Matthew has created. One of the most prominent examples of this phenomena is the Sermon on the Mount. Luke
not only cuts out much of Matthew’s version of this sermon, but he also disperses it throughout several sections of his book instead of keeping it all connected as one long discourse, as Matthew does.

2. **Luke’s lack of Matthean Additions.** When we come across pericopes that are in the triple tradition, there are several cases where Matthew expounds on what Mark has said, but Luke remains brief alongside Mark. The argument is that if Luke had Matthew to copy, he would have at least used some of the content that Matthew added.

3. **Amount of M Material.** This viewpoint argues that if had Luke known Matthew, there would be less material unique to Matthew’s Gospel than there is; Luke would have copied from Matthews additions to Mark as he did from Mark initially.

4. **Alternating Primitivity.** If Matthew came first and Luke copied, one would assume that Matthew would always contain the harder reading. This is not the case. Luke and Matthew alternate this characteristic in their writing which gives us more clarity on the fact that Luke did not use Matthew.

These points offer legitimate evidence that Luke did not use Matthew and that the Q source may be the best explanation of the double tradition, however, there are additional arguments against Q and for Luke’s use of Matthew that need to be addressed.

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16 An excellent example is Jesus’ conversation with Peter found in Mat 16:19, Mar 8:29-30, and Luke 9:20-21. Matthew adds a lengthy middle section where Jesus blesses Peter and tells him that he is the rock on which the church will be built. Luke completely leaves all of this out.
**Farrer Theory**

On the other end of this argument stands Mark Goodacre, who, since the death of Michael Goulder in 2010, has become the lead scholar in favor of the Farrer theory. In his book *The Synoptic Problem: A Way Through the Maze*, he sets out his ‘Case Against Q.’ The first 4 points in his argument attempt to debunk the aforementioned assertions in favor of Q by asserting that they are either fallacies or value judgments that Luke has simply chosen to make. The primary argument for Luke’s use of Matthew is what he calls the “minor agreements.” Scholars say that anywhere from 770 to 3,785 minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark exist. Essentially the idea is that if Luke did rely on Matthew as well as Mark, we should be able to see evidence of that in the triple tradition material. Goodacre explains that “if Luke sometimes agrees with Matthew against Mark in important ways, then Matthew and Luke were not written independently of one another. And if they were not written independently of one another, Q is no longer required to explain the Double Tradition material—for this, Luke can be dependent primarily on Matthew.” He also gives the following example from Jesus’ punishment before Caiaphas.

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Table 6. Example of minor agreements

| Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, “Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” (Matthew 26:67-68 ESV) | And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards received him with blows. (Mark 14:65 ESV) | Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” (Luke 22:63-64 ESV) |

We can see in this example that the phrase “Who is it that struck you?” is included only in Matthew and Luke. Luke obviously didn’t take that phrase from Mark. Additionally, it is important to note that modern scholars do not believe that there is a Passion narrative in Q, so Luke could not have copied this from Q. This is just one of many examples that reveals either extreme coincidence or copying.

**FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

The Synoptic problem is, as Mark Goodacre so rightly calls it, a maze. We have not even begun to scratch the surface in this short overview. The theories are many and the research continual. However, in the midst of the cloud of research and amidst the many options for argument, as Christians, we must not lose sight of the goal of Biblical study. I echo D. Bock in praying that “whatever resolution we contend for…, may the church never lose sight of the fact

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that its’ mission is to focus on and proclaim the Jesus whom the combination of our sources reveal.”

I think that the evidence for Markan priority is overwhelming; however, dealing with the source of the Double Tradition is, in my opinion, not as cut and dry. It is on this point that I have had the most trouble coming to a conclusion. There are legitimate arguments for both sides. Without further study into the existence of Q, I think it would be dishonest for me to say that I can come to a conclusion on which hypothesis is most accurate. I struggle to base my conclusion on a theoretical document that has absolutely no external attestation. On the other hand, the majority of scholars, who have way more experience in this field than I do, agree that the existence of Q is the best possible solution to the problem of the Double Tradition. For the time being, honesty forces me not make a definitive decision as to whether or not Q exists or is even necessary.

Finally, I have been bothered by the question of why this conversation really matters in a pastoral sense. After all, I am not a scholar. I am a pastor and my chief desire in educating myself is to prepare my mind to best teach the Word of God so that I might shepherd well the people that God has entrusted to me. Though it has been said that the effort of working through the synoptic problem is a worthy venture, I continue to lack clarity on how the information within these pages will assist me in pastoring my church. Nonetheless, any study into the Bible and it’s


22 Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles mention that the "potential benefits of source criticism are well worth the effort invested in this difficult enterprise." (Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, 174).
message is a worthwhile venture so long as we have the right focus. The danger in engaging with the Synoptic problem is that one can easily get caught up in the maze and never get out. As with all theological arguments, we can use them to edify and challenge one another as we do ministry and attempt to live out the Great Commission, or we can treat them as a battlefield where little is gained for the Kingdom in trade for a boost to our pride. My prayer is that we never trade the former for the latter.
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