

Q Hypothesis

The Q Hypothesis, also referred to as the 'Two-Source Hypothesis', refers to a theorised second text from which the New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke are in part derived.¹

Behind this hypothesis is the plausible assumption that the Matthean evangelist did not know Luke and vice versa, so they must have had a common source. The contents are usually estimated at about 220 – 235 verses or parts of verses²

Biblical scholarship generally holds that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke derived their accounts from that of the Gospel according to Mark, whilst the Two-Source Hypothesis contends they also share a second source text in common. This posited lost text is referred to as the 'Q' document, or 'Q' source, a reference to the German word for source (*quelle*).

The Q Hypothesis originated in the nineteenth century, when biblical scholars first noted the similarities between the Synoptic Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain many instances of event ordering, word choice, and Jesus' sayings (*logia*) that imply their using a common source independently of each other. Whilst much of this shared content can be explained by hypothesising that the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke used that of Mark as a source, there is also much shared material that is not present in Mark. Although this Synoptic 'Problem' had been identified much earlier, such as in the work of Augustin, some biblical scholars such as Herbert Mars and Christian Hermann Weisse interpreted this disagreement as evidence for a second, unknown source beyond the Gospel of Mark.³

¹ M. Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (New York: A&C Black, 2001), p. 28.

² Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament: The Abridged Edition*, ed. by Marion L Soards (Croydon: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 39.

³ *ibid.*

The assumption of Marcan priority is based on a number of factors, including the shorter length of his Gospel and the simpler language used.⁴ The theorised existence of a Q 'document' as opposed to merely an oral tradition is implied by the high level of agreement between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as to the wording of events not contained within Mark. Although the hypothesised work is lost, it has been assumed that the work focuses largely on Jesus' teachings and sayings due to the content of Matthew and Luke's double tradition.⁵

The existence of the Q document is implied by the high degree of agreement in some areas of Matthew and Luke. One example is that of Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, which share 27 words in the same order in their original Greek. That Luke and Matthew may have drawn from other sources besides that of Mark is implied also when Luke states that he has 'compiled' a narrative from existing events (Luke 1:1-2). However, some have argued against this premise. For example, Mournet observes that the levels of verbatim agreement vary between 8 and 100 per cent, meaning that:

'a "Q" comprised of pericopes with such low levels of agreement no longer resembles the source which was originally posited to account for the high levels of agreement between the Matthean and Lukan double tradition'.⁶

The argument against the Q source's existence denies that the double tradition implies the existence of a second text. For one, it may be that the double tradition owes to the authors knowing each other personally, working in unison to correct errors or omissions in the Gospel

⁴ C.M. Tuckett, *The Current State of the Synoptic Problem* (Oxford: Oxford Conference on the Synoptic Problem, 2008), 154.

⁵ Goodacre, *loc. cit.*

⁶ T.C. Mournet, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q* (Berlin: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 19.

of Mark. There are, for example, several hundred cases of shared alterations to the Marcan Gospel that imply a common editorial agenda that might account for other commonalities.⁷ Additionally, some of the double tradition also contains narrative material and especially agreement between the ordering of events, contradicting the theory that a common 'sayings' gospel was used by Matthew and Luke.

There is also a case for Matthean priority. Although it is generally believed that Matthew's Gospel was written last and that it used material from the Synoptic Gospels as its sources, it may be the case that Matthew was written first, meaning that the double tradition was derived from two sources: Mark and Matthew.⁸ According to this rationale, the omission of this material from Mark would owe to Mark's editorial agenda of simplifying Matthew's Gospel.⁹

The document's non-survival does not alone imply its non-existence given that it may have been fully incorporated into Matthew and Luke, rendering its reproduction unnecessary. However, the fact that its mention is omitted from historiographies of the early church, such as that of Jerome, has been interpreted by some scholars as evidence against its existence.¹⁰ 'Famously in the mid-1960s, one biblical scholar spoke of abandoning the use of the term hypothesis to describe in all together'.¹¹

⁷ D.B. Peabody, A.J. McNichol & L. Cope, *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke* (New York: A&C Black, 2002).

⁸ Wm.R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 16.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ J.R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 228.

¹¹ M. Goodacre, p.21

Bibliography

- Brown, R. *An Introduction to the New Testament: The Abridged Edition*, ed. by Marion L Soards (Yale: Yale University Press, 2016)
- Edwards, J.R. *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
- Farmer, Wm. R. *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1981).
- Goodacre, M. *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (New York: A&C Black, 2001).
- Mournet, T.C. *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q* (Berlin: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).
- Peabody, D.B., A.J. McNichol & L. Cope. *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke* (New York: A&C Black, 2002).
- Tuckett, C.M. *The Current State of the Synoptic Problem* (Oxford: Oxford Conference on the Synoptic Problem, 2008).