

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN MATTHEW AND LUKE AGAINST MARK

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The usual method of handling agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark is to view them as insignificant because of their small number.¹ Or else they are termed "minor" because they consist largely of stylistic variations and for the most part affect only a word or two.² Usually those who notice the agreements in any detail analyze them in a manner similar to Hawkins': (1) accidental agreements caused by changes from *kai* to *de* in Matthew and Luke; (2) accidental agreements caused by changes of the historical present to the imperfect or aorist in Matthew and Luke; (3) accidental agreements caused by words that are ordinary and colorless and nearly synonymous with Mark's words; (4) accidental agreements caused when Matthew and Luke add obvious amplifications or explanations; (5) accidental agreements caused by cases of abrupt style in Mark; and (6) twenty passages where the agreements could not have been accidental.³

Usual explanations for the twenty passages that could not have been accidental fall into one of the following categories: (1) All three writers depended on an *Ur-Markus*; (2) an early non-Markan document included over 58 sections of triple tradition as well as the ten sections of *Logia*; (3) either Matthew or Luke consulted the other's work; (4) the agreements are due to copyists' changes (cf. Streeter); or (5) Matthew and Luke worked from a recension of Mark that is not now extant.⁴ None of these is convincing enough to have won universal acceptance among proponents of Markan priority.

Three factors have led the writer to a renewed interest in this subject: (1) the unresolved question of how the universally acknowledged non-accidental agreements could have occurred; (2) the logical fallacy that the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark are not significant just because they are not as numerous as those of Matthew and Mark against Luke or as those of Mark and Luke against Matthew; and (3) the growing conviction that the complete story of these agreements has not been told.

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¹R. P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 142.

²N. B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), p. 61.

³J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), pp. 208-211.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 211 f.

I. THE AGREEMENTS

The agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark number about 230. Of the 58 sections where a triple tradition exists,⁵ only five are void of agreements. The material in common in these five sections is limited, varying from zero to three verses.

In the 53 sections where agreements are found, they are from one to 12 in number. In 36 of the 53, the agreements are spread throughout the section. In seven sections multiple agreements are confined to a small part. Ten sections have only one agreement apiece.

Put into percentage figures, Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark touch 91 percent of the triple-tradition accounts. Of those sections 68 percent are covered rather thoroughly by these agreements and another 19 percent have limited coverage because of only a single agreement.

Obviously these agreements are not as extensive as those between Matthew and Mark and between Mark and Luke, but they are substantial enough to require attention in any adequate solution to the synoptic problem.

Conjunctions. As stated above, one of the most frequently cited explanations for part of these agreements is Matthew's and Luke's desire for "a more smooth and usual Hellenistic style,"⁶ which prompted them to revise Mark's *kai*'s in the direction of *de* 31 times. This is approximately the number of accidental agreements that would be expected on the basis of the following computations.

In sections including a triple tradition, Mark has 156 uses of a connective-type *kai* which Matthew or Luke could have revised to *de*. They did it in the same places as each other 31 times, or about twenty percent of the total possible.

In observing Matthew and Luke separately, one discovers that Matthew uses *de* for *kai* in 57 out of the 156 possible places, or 37 percent of the times, while Luke does so 82 out of 156 cases for a figure of 53 percent. The predicted coincidental agreements between Matthew and Luke would be 37 percent of 53 percent, or about twenty percent of the 156 possible cases of such. This is the same figure reached through tabulation of the actual agreements.⁷

The case for accidental agreements looks good if we accept these probability statistics. Yet other factors seem to nullify somewhat the

⁵E. D. Burton and E. J. Goodspeed, *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), sec. nos. 17-19, 20, 24, 27-32, 51-54, 66-68, 70 f., 76-78, 86-90, 92, 99, 136 f., 139, 141, 144, 146, 148, 150, 152-156, 160-164, 170, 172-179, 181.

⁶Hawkins, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁷Lumis, however, differs with this calculation. As cited by W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 111, he says that on the basis of chance Matthew and Luke could have been *kai* expected to agree only half as many times.

alleged preference of Matthew and Luke for *de*. For example, in two cases where Mark has *de* (2:6; 14:47), Matthew and Luke agree against it in their use of *kai*. In four other cases (Mk. 9:25; 13:5; 14:1, 70) Matthew has *kai* instead of Mark's *de*. In four additional cases (Mark 13:28; 14:11; 15:15, 37) Luke has *kai* for Mark's *de*. The obvious question: Just how deep-seated is this frequently cited preference?

Historical presents. Another area of accidental agreements relates to Mark's use of the historical present. Because of a supposed dislike for the historical present, Matthew and Luke agree with each other in changing 18 of Mark's historical presents to other forms which bring the two into exact agreement with each other against Mark. However, can it be said that Matthew has a distaste for the historical present when he finds occasion to use it a total of 93 times? Is it legitimate to find in Matthew as compared with Mark a trend away from the historical present when the former uses it in 13 places where Mark's corresponding verb is either aorist or imperfect? These considerations, combined with the fact that Matthew does retain the historical present 19 of 90 times (21 percent) in places corresponding to Mark's historical present, cause us to question whether Matthew had an aversion for the historical present.

Legei has often been cited as one word used in the historical present by Mark. This word alone produces 15 agreements between Matthew and Luke if they used Mark as a source. At first glance this affords apparent support for the theory of "accidental" agreements. Yet when it is noticed that Matthew handles Mark's uses of *legei* in six different ways and Luke in nine different ways, the possibility of "coincidence" becomes more remote. Twelve of the 15 agreements are *eipen*, but following normal frequency rates of Matthew's and Luke's changes to *eipen* elsewhere in triple-tradition sections, only six such agreements would have been predicted. Two of the 15 agreements are *legōn*, yet following normal rates of change no more than one could have come by accident. One of the 15 agreements is *ephē*, which is completely contrary to expectation, since Matthew makes such a change only three times out of 48 and Luke only once out of 53. The probability of accidental agreements of this nature is very remote.

Another difficulty in seeing a trend such as an unusual Matthean inclination away from the historical present comes in noticing Mark's version of Matthean historical presents. In eight of 17 cases where Matthew has the historical present, Mark uses an imperfect or aorist. This is about the same ratio as Matthew's alleged revision of Mark.

Agreements in proximity. More attention than has been given should be directed toward the location of agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. For example, of the 31 cases of agreement where Matthew and Luke have *de* instead of Mark's *kai*, at least 17 come in conjunction with another agreement of a different type. Twelve of these

17 have at least one other agreement in the same sentence. Two others have agreements in both the sentence before and the sentence after, while three others have agreements in either the sentence before or the sentence after. These combination agreements obviously reduce radically the statistical probability of anything accidental.

The phenomenon of combination agreements is even more remarkable where Mark's historical presents are involved. All 18 Matthew-Luke agreements are joined by other agreements against Mark, so that no single coinciding form is alone. In 13 of the 18 places where Matthew and Luke concur against Mark's historical present, another agreement lies in the same sentence. In four of the 18 cases, agreements come in both the sentence before and the sentence after. In the other case an agreement is found in the sentence just before. This pattern of coinciding forms could hardly have come about by accident.

Various other "accidental" agreements appear less accidental when other coincidences are brought into focus. For instance, Hawkins lists seven agreements of Matthew and Luke caused by cases of asyndeton in Mark (Mark 5:39; 10:14; 12:9, 23, 37; 13:6, 7).⁸ Yet in six of these seven, other agreements are immediately adjacent—in two cases in the same sentence, in two in sentences both before and after, and in two in sentences before only. When we take into account that Matthew has 16 cases of asyndeton where Mark has *kai*, it becomes very questionable whether this was a Matthean tendency at all.

Hawkins also gives a category of agreements composed of words so ordinary and colorless and so nearly synonymous with Mark's that Matthew's and Luke's agreement may be merely accidental.⁹ His two illustrations of this category are *eschaton* in Mark 12:22 and *legei* in Mark 12:37. In the former case Matthew and Luke both substitute *hysteron* and in the latter *kalei*. Yet how can it be termed "merely accidental" when in the former case another agreement comes in the following sentence and in the latter case two other agreements are found in the same sentence?

Another set of coincidences Hawkins calls obvious amplifications or explanations.¹⁰ He notes five of these which, he says, are natural for any writer to introduce. The "coincidental" explanation appears quite improbable, however, when other agreements in the immediate context with these five are noted. In two cases the added correspondences are in the same sentence, in two the sentence immediately following, and in one the sentence immediately before.

Edwin A. Abbott, after an exhaustive study of all agreements (approximately 230 of them), came to realize that they were not trivial (as he had thought) and that they demanded some explanation.¹¹ Streeter, on the other hand, was inattentive to the combined

⁸Hawkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 137 f.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁰*Idem.*

¹¹Farmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 f.

agreements. He avoided the subject by "atomizing" them, thereby separating them.¹² In pointing to a five-word agreement in Matthew 9:7 = Luke 5:25, Farmer comments:

In this manner Streeter explained away as merely deceptive an agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark extending through five consecutive words in the Greek text. Streeter's point about the "fallacy of merely counting words or considering extracts without a study of the context," is well taken. But a full study of the context in which this five word agreement occurs exposes the questionable character of Streeter's basic methodological procedure of dividing up the minor agreements into several different categories and then treating only examples of one category at a time.

For if one turns to the story of the Paralytic's healing in Mark 2:1-12, and its parallels in Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26, where the five word agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark is to be found, he will find that this agreement does not occur in isolation from other agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark, but rather that it is but part of an extensive web of interrelated minor agreements, each of which when considered by itself might appear dismissable as insignificant, but when considered together constitute such a concatenation of agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark as to seem unlikely to be merely accidental, but rather to point to some kind of literary relationship between Matthew and Luke.¹³

Agreements impossible to attribute to accident. That this many coincidences of such a nature could have happened defies natural explanation. It presents an intolerably high "accident rate." Furthermore, the array of inexplicable agreements could be expanded rather easily. Yet we shall have to content ourselves by closing out our survey by including a notice of twenty agreements which no one claims as accidental.¹⁴ These are acknowledged by all sides as indicating the influence of a common source and not based on independent revisions of Mark's gospel. They are isolated agreements of such a nature that they could not have happened by mere coincidence.

No consensus has been reached as to how they came about. To explain the agreements, Sanday proposes that Matthew and Luke used a text of Mark that had been revised slightly along stylistic lines.¹⁵ Streeter proposes that many of the agreements were due not to the original authors but to later scribes who tended to assimilate parallel passages.¹⁶ Kümmel finds Sanday's explanation implausible and attributes the

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 118 f.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 131 f.

¹⁴Hawkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 210 f.

¹⁵B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels, A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 305.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 306 ff.

non-accidental agreements to the influence of oral tradition.¹⁷ Streeter's approach is faulted by Farmer and Dahl in that it makes the thing to be proven, that is, the priority of Mark, "the basis of an objective criterion, by which, in some cases, the text critic could decide which of the alternate readings was the best."¹⁸

The source of the agreements. If it is unjustified to call most of these 230 agreements accidental, and if the *Ur-Markus* and interdependence theories have proven their insufficiency on other grounds, what further alternative remains? Of the five possibilities proposed by Hawkins there remains only that of an early non-Markan document to which Matthew and Luke could refer, not only in ten sections where Hawkins allowed this document to overlap Mark but also in the rest of the sections where a triple tradition is found.¹⁹ This non-Markan source would be none other than the phantom-like Q.²⁰ Had Hawkins pursued this option further, he perhaps would have suggested that possibly all three synoptists used Q since it now comes to include not only the double-tradition portions in Matthew and Luke but also the triple, including all three books. If it was that extensive, no impressive reason can be found to deny that Mark too used it as a source.

This presents intriguing possibilities and commends itself for further investigation in two areas: the nature of Q, and the significance of agreements as to source.

II. IMPLICATIONS OF THE AGREEMENTS

The nature of Q. Was Q written or oral? Kümmel says three factors prove it was written: (1) The agreements in wording in the texts common to Matthew and Luke are in part very extensive; (2) Matthew and Luke inserted the discourse materials which are additions to Mark into the Markan framework in a completely different manner, but the sequence within individual discourses is remarkably similar; and (3) the doublets and double traditions in Matthew and Luke and the extensive common sequence of the parts not found in Mark prove that Matthew's and Luke's second source was written.²¹

Others have concluded that Q is a common oral tradition. Though not supportive of that theory, Kümmel cites four proofs: (1) A supposed written source can be imagined only arbitrarily and cannot be reconstructed with certainty; (2) the verbal agreements in the

¹⁷W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 49 f.

¹⁸Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Cf. N. A. Dahl, "Die Passionsgeschichte bei Matthäus," in *NTS* 2 (1955), p. 21.

¹⁹Hawkins, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 208.

²¹Kümmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.

Jesus-sayings are less than in the text which has been taken over from Mark; (3) a saying source without a passion narrative is inconceivable; and (4) the catchword connections point to oral tradition.²²

Martin adds to these four more: (1) It is difficult to find any inner coherent structure to the material proposed as belonging to Q; (2) no certainty as to the order of its sections is discernible; (3) no precise contemporary parallels to the type of document Q is supposed to be have been found; and (4) if such a valuable document as Q did exist, how was it allowed to disappear?²³

Probably it is more logical not to insist that Q was a homogeneous corpus with definable limits. Palmer propounds the theory that it was non-homogeneous, but he does not insist on an all-oral source. He allows the possibility that "the evangelists may have used a whole library of books."²⁴ He does not state it dogmatically, but notes that a failure to prove literary unity for Q opens the door to this possibility as well as to the possibility of oral sources.²⁵ It is probably a saner course to view Q as a convenient cipher for material common to Matthew and Luke.²⁶ Bornkamm joins Martin in this conclusion: "All this shows that Q is still relatively close to the oral tradition, and remained exposed to its influence."²⁷ Fuller also embraces this viewpoint: "If we do use the symbol Q, it is shorthand for a common layer of tradition, partly written and perhaps partly oral."²⁸ Albright and Mann are even more decisive on this point: "No doubt Q is a useful kind of symbol, provided we remember that it is only a symbol, and not the name of an exactly determined, homogeneous body of tradition."²⁹ "It is impossible to reconstruct 'Q' as a document. There may well have been a number of 'little gospels,' using OT texts and allusions, as indeed there are certainly references and allusions to such texts in oral teaching in the time of the apostles."³⁰ "Behind the 'Q' material there appears to lie gospel material which may belong to many different traditions.... Assuming the homogeneity of 'Q,' the changes [made by Matthew and Luke] are anomalous and only cease to be odd when we rid our minds of the

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 50 f.

²³Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 145 f.

²⁴H. Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 174.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 172-174.

²⁶Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 f.

²⁷G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 217.

²⁸R. H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1966), p. 72.

²⁹W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), p. xlii.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. xliii.

suggestion that 'Q' is a single source."³¹ "As a single, ordered source, oral or written, 'Q' will not stand."³²

A good case can be built, then, for seeing Q as a layer of tradition composed of a miscellaneous assortment of data, both written and oral, and containing much by way of duplication and varying accounts of the same events and discourses.

The significance of agreements as to source. We are now ready to ask the question, "What do agreements prove?" We have a situation in which the synoptic gospels can be grouped two against one in all possible combinations: Matthew and Mark against Luke, Mark and Luke against Matthew, and Matthew and Luke against Mark—if the conclusion reached earlier in this paper is valid. That all worked from a single homogeneous written source with definable limits is sufficient to explain the agreements, but not so with the differences in content and order and the various combinations of omissions.

If no satisfactory combination of direct or literary dependence is forthcoming, perhaps the agreements have some other explanation. Kümmel, speaking in another connection, sees an interesting possibility when he alludes to "the erroneous presupposition that parallels between the materials of tradition can be explained only by literary dependence."³³ He then says, "We shall have to visualize the relationship of the gospel writings to one another and to the oral tradition as essentially freer."³⁴ Kümmel has in mind at this point a denial of literary dependence between Mark and Q, but no good reason can be advanced for not applying the same principle to the three synoptic gospels. He bases his denial of literary dependence on a strong linguistic difference between Mark and Q in instances of double tradition. Yet strong linguistic difference can also be cited as a factor in comparisons of Matthew, Mark and Luke. If through the history-of-redaction and history-of-theology views one can attribute these differences to differing strands of oral tradition,³⁵ perhaps the agreements can be traced to areas where these strands coincide with one another.

Albright and Mann view the matter thus: "Though the role of oral tradition can be exaggerated, it seems generally true that the memory of words and stories is better in the ancient East than in the modern West.... Some of the differences in the gospel narrative are best understood as small—and normally unimportant—details which differed in the memories of those who passed on the stories.... There are, however, some details of agreement or difference which can best be understood

³¹*Ibid.*, p. xlix.

³²*Ibid.*, p. liii.

³³Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁴*Idem.*

³⁵Kümmel, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

on the basis of oral tradition."³⁶ "It is not in the least necessary, we think, to suppose that there was a single block of material on which Matthew and Luke drew. The vitality of oral tradition, the varying emphases cherished by various groups in the early church, the care that was taken ... to ascertain from reliable sources precisely what did happen in the public and private ministry of Jesus, the urgent need felt to preserve Christ's teachings in writing in the face of the difficult times—all these will have led to more than one tentative collection of oral material."³⁷

A modern illustration may facilitate our understanding at this point. The institution where the writer is employed has a history dating back to the early part of this century. Few if any eyewitnesses of the school's founding remain. There is no single written authoritative history of the school as yet. Yet several are alive whose connection with the school is of long standing: Louis T. Talbot, chancellor; Ray Meyers, chairman of the board for many years and now honorary board member; Samuel H. Sutherland, president emeritus; Charles L. Feinberg, dean emeritus of Talbot Seminary; James O. Henry, professor emeritus of history at Biola College. Each of these tells the history of Biola from a differing perspective, yet their accounts coincide even to the point of verbal agreement at times. They base their accounts on a wide variety of oral reports and written sources such as correspondence, minutes of board and faculty meetings, and catalogue historical sketches. The source of an account in each case is a study in complexity. Still, however, areas of agreement emerge.

A much more intense interest surrounded the person of Jesus Christ, and circumstances made early Christians a much more closely-knit group. Agreements between the synoptists were therefore more extensive than in the above illustration. If one will concede the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a factor, the reason for agreements in drawing on a widely assorted layer of tradition becomes even more obvious.

One other element of such a layer of tradition deserves mention. This is the personal memory of a writer. In at least one gospel this undoubtedly played a major role in composition. If another writer agrees with an eyewitness' personal recollection, the probable explanation is found in accuracy of reporting rather than in literary dependence.

III. CONCLUSION

Our endeavor has been to demonstrate that the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark are widespread, substantial and largely non-accidental, and that admitting them to be so does not lead into a blind alley of source criticism. No attempt has been made to present an adequate and total solution to the synoptic problem. Rather, it has been our objective to suggest a plausible combination of

³⁶Albright and Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxviii f.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. xlvii.

possibilities that could prevail if the main thesis of this study is accepted. The thesis is that enough evidence exists to conclude that Matthew and Luke worked from a common source other than Mark in sections containing a triple tradition from all three synoptics.

If this be true and if Mark too worked from that source, if that source was Q, if Q is an assorted array of tradition rather than a homogeneous written source, and if agreements are explainable on the basis of all three drawing from a layer of tradition composed of personal recollections, oral traditions, and numbers of brief written sources—and all of these are reasonable “ifs”—then it is time for gospel criticism to begin looking elsewhere for a solution to the synoptic problem. For too long New Testament scholars have been bound to the assumption of direct literary dependence among the writers. Perhaps this has been a blindfold rather than a help in supplying answers. At least the option should be entertained that the three synoptists worked in relative independence of one another in producing their gospels.