THE USE OF TEXTUAL THEORIES TO EXPLAIN AGREEMENTS OF MATTHEW AND LUKE AGAINST MARK

BY

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It is becoming increasingly popular to reject the hypothesis of Q and to accept a direct literary connection between Matthew and Luke, usually the use of Matthew by Luke. One main argument in favour of a direct connection is provided by the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark in passages common to all three gospels, which, it is alleged, have not been adequately accounted for by those who believe that Matthew and Luke were written independently. Apart from the possible overlapping of Mark and Q the two explanations usually given (as for example by Streeter) are independent revision and textual corruption. To many critics of this view textual corruption looks suspiciously like an easy way out: surely we cannot alter the text of the gospels to fit in with a literary theory? Are there valid textual criteria that support the proposed revisions of the text?

We may distinguish two main ways in which textual study has been used to explain some of the agreements.

1. USE OF A DIFFERENT TEXT OF MARK

If Matthew and Luke wrote independently it is unlikely that they used the same copy of Mark or that either of them had access to the autograph. It is therefore almost certain that scribal mistakes or improvements had already crept into the copies they used. If the evidence were to suggest that many deliberate changes were made we could speak of a revision of Mark, or a separate recension. This would imply a literary theory in which Matthew and Luke were dependent not on our Mark but on the revision. The theory that they were dependent on an Ur-Markus was long ago rightly rejected by Sanday because so many of the agreements are stylistic improvements and therefore are likely to be secondary.


2. Corruption Exists in Our Present Texts

If we accept a straightforward literary situation in which Matthew and Luke independently copied from a text of Mark which was substantially the same as the autograph then (i) the accepted text of Mark may be secondary, or (ii) the accepted text of Matthew or Luke (or both) may be secondary, assimilation between Matthew and Luke being one obvious possible cause.

1. Use of a Different Text of Mark

(a) Abbott and Sanday

In the Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1897 E. A. Abbott dismissed the agreements as "trifling", but in The Corrections of Mark (1901) on closer examination of the evidence he concluded that there were many agreements that could not be easily explained by independent revision by Matthew and Luke, but were rather to be accounted for by previous correction of Mark by an Editor or Editors. He therefore suggested that there existed an edition or editions of Mark later than our version but previous to Matthew and Luke.

W. Sanday enlarged upon this theory in Oxford Studies 21-4, suggesting that the two copies of Mark used by Matthew and Luke belonged to a different line of descent from that other important copy from which most of our extant witnesses are descended. In this line of descent changes had been introduced with considerable freedom and he is happy to call it a different recension. He quotes Abbott at length on the incidence of eight kinds of stylistic agreement and comments that "the number and recurrence of these phenomena is evidently due to design and not to accident" (Oxford Studies 22).

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4 W. R. Farmer (The Synoptic Problem, A Critical Analysis, New York: Macmillan, and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1964, 95) states that in Abbott's view the agreements "must have been made by a single editor", but Abbott does not commit himself to this: see Corrections 55 n3.
5 Cf. also J. C. Hawkins in the same volume, 103.