SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM AND THE USE OF STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

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In attempts to provide a sounder basis for the solution of the Synoptic problem some scholars have sought to apply statistical methods to the Synoptic data. Here some observations will be made concerning certain of the attempts.

The study of C. E. CARLSTON and D. NORLIN ¹ was based on a sampling of the material which they classified as triple tradition and double tradition. Their purpose was to see how closely Lk. and Mt. correspond to one another when, according to the authors’ hypothesis, Mt. and Lk. used Mk. However, they made a mistake in handling the material of the gospels when they assume that for statistical purposes one can consider equivalent words synonyms ²). It is not that their judgment is necessarily wrong when they so identify different words; rather there is no statistical control for such a judgment. Thus they find, for example, as common to both gospels twenty-one words in Mt. viii 2-4 and twenty-five in Lk. vi 12b-14, whereas in actual fact thirty-seven words in each passage are the same ³); in Mt. vi 25-33; Lk. xii 22-31 they find 130/128 words common ⁴), but the actual number of complete agreements is 113 ⁵); they count thirty-three words as common to Mt. v 3.6.11-12; Lk. vi 20-21a.22-23 ⁶), whereas

²) Article cited 63f.
³) Their figures can be found in article cited 65; the numeration of absolute agreements is that found in B. DE SOLAGES, A Greek Synopsis of the Gospels: A New Way of Solving the Synoptic Problem (Leiden: 1959) 51-56; they were confirmed by a count of the words marked in red and blue in W. R. FARMER, Synopticon: The Verbal Agreement between the Greek Texts of Matthew, Mark and Luke Contextually Exhibited (Cambridge: 1968) 17.
⁴) CARLSTON, NORLIN, article cited 69; DE SOLAGES, Synopsis 704-707.
⁵) Thus DE SOLAGES, Synopsis 704-707; FARMER, Synopticon 187f., marks but 108 words.
⁶) CARLSTON, NORLIN, article cited 69.

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the actual number of complete agreements is not more than thirty 7). Thus from a statistical standpoint their comparisons are not valid.

A. M. Honoré 8), using the divisions of the Huck-Lietzmann synopsis as did Carlston and Norlin but without subtracting as much from the sections as they did 9), compared the three gospels in what he considers the triple tradition and in the double tradition which for him is threefold: Mt.-Mk., Mt.-Lk., Mk.-Lk.

B. de Solages also compared the three gospels to one another, but he excided from the triple material some of that included by Honoré 10). For purposes of statistical comparisons these different approaches do not significantly affect the conclusions which can be drawn. Both Honoré and de Solages consider as agreements only those words which have the same form in two or three gospels. Honoré outlines the agreements thus 11).

7) Thus de Solages, Synopsis 617-620 who finds three of the thirty-three agreements of Lk vi 20-26; Mt v 1-12 in Mt v 1-2, verses not under discussion, and apparently two more in Mt v 5, not under discussion. Farmer, Synopticon 8f., marks twenty-five words but 166 marks twenty-seven.

8) A. M. Honoré, A Statistical Study of the Synoptic Problem, Novum Testamentum 10 (1968) 95-147.

9) Carlston, Norlin, article cited 61 notes 3-6, 62 notes 7-8, list what they omitted from their sampling. Honoré, article cited 96, states his principles.

10) The principal differences in de Solage’s division of the material as compared to that of Honoré are these: He does not consider Mt iv 2-11a; Lk iv 2b-13 parallel to Mk i 12b-13; he considers Lk iv 33-37 and Mk i 23-28 as double tradition; Lk vii la and Mt. vii 28a as double tradition; Mt xii 16-21 as without parallel; Mt iv 24-25 as parallel to Mk iii 7b-9; Lk vi 17; Lk iv 41b parallel to Mk iii 11-12 but in the triple tradition; Mt x i as parallel to Mk iii 13b-15; Lk vi 13b; he includes Lk xii 18b in the material parallel to Mt xii 32; Mk iii 29-30; he considers Lk xiii 20-21; Mt x iii 33 without parallel in Mk and as double tradition; Mt ix 1 as parallel to Lk viii 40; Mk v 21; Mt ix 35 as parallel to Mk vi 6 but in the triple tradition; Mt x 5a as parallel to Mk vi 7; Lk ix 1-2 (plus ten words in Lk ix 7); Mk vi 8-11 as parallel to Lk ix 3-5; Mt 9-10, 5b.12-14; he includes Mt. xi 1a with Mt xiv 1-4 in the parallel to Mk vi 14-18; Lk ix 7-9; iii 19-20; he considers Mk v 16-21 parallel to Mt xvi 7-12 in double tradition; he considers Mk ix 9; Lk ix 37b; Mt xvii 9 as parallel; he considers Lk xvii 5-6 as parallel only to Mt xii 20b; he considers Mk ix 43-49 as parallel only to Mt xviii 8-9; he considers Mt v 13; Lk ix 34-35 parallel to Mk ix 50; he considers Mk x 35-41 as having a parallel only in Mt xx 20-24 in double tradition; he adds Mt xxiii 46; Lk xx 39-40 to the material parallel to Mk xii 28-34; he omits Mt xxiii 1-3, 5 to the material parallel to Mk xii 37b-39 and adds Lk xx 47 to it; he omits Mt xxiv 22; Mk xiii 20 from the material parallel to Lk xxiii 20-24.

11) Honoré, article cited 112, Table 10.