

Review of Mark Goodacre's *The Synoptic Problem*
By John L. Rothra

Goodacre, Mark. *The Synoptic Problem: A Way Through the Maze*. London: T & T Clark, 2001.

Summary

Goodacre attempts to prove the validity of the Farrer Theory (Mark is first; Matthew used Mark; Luke used both; no Q source exists) by using logic and scripture to support this theory. He begins by first describing the synoptic problem; second, justifying the need to study it; and third, defending this theory. He offers support for both Markan Priority and the nonexistence of the Q-source. Finally, he summarizes his reasoning for the validity of the Farrer Theory.

Review – Strengths and Weaknesses

Goodacre's work, as a whole, contains some very strong points that allow the reader to enjoy, learn, and follow the flow of the book, but also contains some major weaknesses that detract from his effort. On the positive side, throughout the text, he uses section summaries within each chapter to give the readers a condensed version of what was previously discussed more thoroughly. Along with these, he also provides summaries at the end of each chapter to highlight the main points. These help the reader retain the content more effectively.

On the negative side, Goodacre commits some potentially major errors that take away from the credibility of his own arguments. First, he uses his own personal translation of the Greek text (p. 9). Second, he appears to approach the Bible as either dynamically or rationally inspired—evidenced by his concepts that Mark put words in God's and others' mouths (pp. 96-99), that the Bible contains errors (p. 100), and that Luke disapproves of and corrects the theology or content of other gospel writers (pp. 127, 142). On a minor note, Goodacre does contain multiple grammatical and spelling errors (pp. 24, 32, 73, 127).

Each chapter, individually, contained various strengths and weaknesses, some of which will be outlined here. Chapter two, while abounding with overall well-made arguments, contains a major logical weakness where Goodacre hints that any remote similarity in the synoptic texts means the content is from the same event (p. 41). Little to no room is left for the idea of Jesus saying similar things multiple times (repetition). Chapter three, though, provides one of the two strongest parts of the book: honesty. Goodacre states his biases and presuppositions up front rather than hiding or disregarding them (p. 57). Despite this, chapter three also finds him seeming to give a level of validity to the Gospel of Thomas not warranted to that ancient text (pp. 60-64). This bias, if it is such, brings into question Goodacre's view on the Bible itself.

The second of the two strongest parts of the text is found in chapter four. Here, he provides the reader a lesson on how to perform redaction criticism (pp. 90-91). This tool is invaluable to the readers, as it is the basis for the rest of Goodacre's arguments. Chapter five provides another weakness in that Goodacre's descriptions of the positive arguments for Q are vague and confusing (pp. 115-117). This is followed in chapter six by weak, and hence inconclusive, evidence for Luke's use of Matthew (pp. 144-147). One could easily see the evidence showing the possibility that Matthew used Luke. The only strong argument for Luke using Matthew is the use of one particular word (ὑστερον) found seven times in Matthew and only once in Luke (p. 147). Goodacre closes with a very strong ending in chapter seven, where he summarizes his work throughout the book and gives a positive outlook for the future.

Conclusion

Overall, *The Synoptic Problem* is a quality book worth every New Testament scholar's reading. Goodacre makes a strong logical and scriptural case for the Farrer Theory (Mark is

first; Matthew used Mark; Luke used Matthew and Mark; no Q exists). While there are weaknesses, the strengths provide for an intriguing and enticing study of the synoptic problem.