

### *The Gospels: Some General points*

It is possible to get some idea of the relationship between the Gospels by carefully comparing the material that they share. Generally, it is easy to tell when one writer is using another as a source. Close textual *matches* constitute overwhelmingly strong evidence for textual *dependence*. It is even easier to see when two writers use a third as a source. It is also quite easy to tell when two writers are using a particular common source, *even if that common source does not survive*. These techniques are used in piecing together the rough history of our (surviving) Gospels.

Of special interest to us is what this can show us about the evolution of the material that they present.

The following is a rough sketch of those relationships. None of this is controversial.

- (1) The earliest gospel is Mark.
- (2) Matthew and Luke both use Mark as their main and probably only source for *biographical* claims about Jesus. I.e., for many of their passages about events in the life of Jesus, it is quite clear that they are simply transcribing, and slightly editing, Mark's text.
- (3) Matthew and Luke, for other parts of their texts, use another, lost source (which we will call 'Q'). Q evidently contained a large set of *sayings* of Jesus, but no biographical material. Many of these sayings appear in one very large chunk in Matthew traditionally titled 'the sermon on the mount' (Mt. 5-7) and a slightly smaller chunk of the same set of sayings in Luke as 'the sermon on the plain' (L. 6). Other material presumed to derive from Q (various sayings and parables) is also scattered through Matthew and Luke.
- (4) There are some signs that Mark also occasionally uses Q. But he uses it much less than Matthew and Luke.
- (5) This is probably because when Mark wrote his biography of Jesus he did not consider it necessary to include an exhaustive set of the sayings and parables of

- Jesus, because those *already existed* in written form, in Q. His Gospel was probably written as a *biographical accompaniment* to the sayings of Jesus that had already been circulating for decades (exactly as biographies of ancient philosophers, although they often contain plenty of the doctrines and sayings of their subjects, are only intended to accompany their works, not to replace them.) Two striking examples of this: Mark does not contain either the beatitudes or the ‘Lord’s prayer’ — perhaps Jesus’ two most famous sayings. Also, in all Mark gives us only 5 parables, while Matthew and Luke both give in excess of 15 each. Matthew and Luke seem to have thought that it would be more convenient to have the sayings collections and the biographical stories in the same single text.
- (6) Q is therefore almost certainly earlier than Mark. That is, we are fairly sure of this on these purely textual grounds; we also have several other good reasons for placing Q first. (On naturalist assumptions, we might well predict that sayings material predated miracle material, for example; and on our psychological assumptions we might well predict that sayings material predated the claims that Jesus makes in Mark about his own divinity. Claims of that kind always come in the *biographical* material, not in the *sayings* material; there appear to have been no such claims in Q.)
- (7) Luke contains a number of parables not found in Matthew; several of these are of very high quality (or so it seems) and probably belong in the corpus of authentic Jesus material. It appears, then, that Luke has some sources (or one?) that Matthew lacks, or that he used Q more than Matthew did, at least for parables. Alternatively, maybe he just made them up. But this seems unlikely.
- (8) John is known to be of a much later date and will not concern us. He may or may not have access to sources that are early and independent, but we have no way of assessing this, and given his late date, it is safer for our purposes to leave his Gospel to one side.

*Some other details:*

- (1) Matthew and Luke were both written originally in Greek as far as we can tell.
- (2) Mark shows signs of originally being written in Aramaic; or it may have been written in Greek by someone whose first language was Aramaic; or it may draw

- heavily from Aramaic sources that are being translated; or it may draw from sources themselves translated (literally) from Aramaic.
- (3) Q shows many signs of being written in Aramaic, or of being translated from Aramaic.
  - (4) Jesus almost certainly spoke Aramaic. (See Mark 5.41, 3.17, 7.34, 15.34). This fact is obviously the simplest explanation for the Aramaisms in the early sayings material. Aramaisms in Mark's biographical material, on the other hand, may just be a result of the fact that *Mark* was an Aramaic speaker.
  - (5) Most of these Aramaisms are fairly unimportant. We should note, though, that the expression 'son of [a] man' is an Aramaic idiom, which means simply 'man'; so 'son of man' in Aramaic means 'the man' or more often 'a man'. (It is not entirely clear what this originally meant; it was *also* an apocalyptic title for the messiah, and is clearly so used in at least some of the sayings.)

*Forming a Picture of the evolution of certain themes:*

- (1) Q contained *no miracle stories at all* (or perhaps just one). It did not contain the story of the resurrection. Most of its material is presented by Matthew and Luke as 'the sermon on the mount' and 'the sermon on the plain', and as smatterings of parables.
- (2) Q contains almost no *apocalyptic* sayings (just one or two), i.e., sayings about the end of the world, the future kingdom, the second coming, etc.
- (3) Mark contains far more miracle stories than Q, and far more apocalyptic sayings.
- (4) Matthew and Luke contain more miracle stories than Mark. (For example, Mark does not report the virgin birth, the magi, or most of the stories about people meeting Jesus after he died, or the ascension; he also omits numerous other lesser miracles.)

*In other words, there is good evidence that claims about the miracles of Jesus increased over time in this period, and that the eschatology and some evidence that the apocalypticism of Christianity also increased. These tendencies, combined with our principles of interpretation suggest the following tentative hypothesis:*

- (1) Jesus did not perform any miracles and during his life; he did not claim to have performed any; nobody else claimed that he performed any.
- (2) Jesus did not have any extravagant apocalyptic beliefs. (He at least did not claim that *he* would come back and bring the end of the world. Possibly he was not an apocalypticist at all.)
- (3) After his death, from a fairly early date, people began to tell *some* stories about his miraculous powers. The first such miracle may have been the resurrection itself; but we can be by no means sure of this.
- (4) After his death, some aspects of his sayings and teachings were given — for the first time — an apocalyptic interpretation; existing apocalyptic ideas, including existing written material, was *attached* to the Jesus corpus. This process may have been encouraged by the apparently very early belief that Jesus was (had been) the messiah; by the belief in his resurrection; by the conviction that he *was going to come back* (and that when he did, it would be the end of the world). Above all, however, if this is the right explanation then we shall probably have to suppose that an entire existing apocalyptic sect (e.g., the followers of John the Baptist) at some very early stage, decided to co-opt Jesus as the ‘son of man’ that they had been waiting for — wrongly, but understandably.
- (5) It is, of course, another perfectly good possibility that the apocalyptic material is best explained by the theory that Jesus really *was* an apocalyptic prophet (as argued by Ehrman). But we shall try hard to show that this is not as good an explanation as the one sketched in 1-4.
- (6) By the time Q was compiled — 50 AD? — there were still virtually no miracle stories being told about Jesus, and only a relatively small number of apocalyptic sayings in the corpus.
- (7) By the time Mark was composed — 70 AD? — there were many miracle stories, and a large number of apocalyptic beliefs within established Christianity. Mark was evidently himself an apocalypticist, and may be partly showing us the *apocalypticization* of Jesus at work.
- (8) By the time Matthew and Luke were composed — 85 AD? — there were many more miracle stories; and Pauline Christianity had become obsessively apocalyptic. Other branches of Christianity (e.g., the Gnostics) fully rejected apocalypticism — perhaps, in some cases, because they retained some memory

of its earlier imposition on the person of Jesus, and not just because they wished to reinvent Jesus according to *new* preferences.

*This is only a very rough sketch. It is also only a hypothesis. You have no reason to accept any of this, yet. What we will try to show, however, is that this hypothesis ends up making better sense of the sayings material, and other aspects of the Jesus tradition, than other naturalist hypotheses. The main rival naturalist hypothesis is Ehrman's, that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, and that the apocalyptic material in the texts is all early and authentic.*

\*\*\*\*

### ***Some basic Stoic principles at the time of Epictetus.***

1. God oversees everything. He is benevolent, and provides us with good things. He is our father. Therefore we should assume that there are good things that are unfailingly available to us, and that things that are not unfailingly available to us are not really good.

This belief in divine providence is probably the most important Stoic principle. They derive most of their other views from it directly. See *Discourses* 1.3 (p. 11) and 1.6 (p.16).

2. Moral goodness, and moral goods in general — integrity, righteousness, honesty, courage, sense of duty, love of others, etc — are the only things that are really good (and they are completely in our power and therefore unfailingly available to us). External goods (power, status, family, physical beauty, material wealth) are not in our power, and therefore not really good.
3. To pursue moral goods, or goods of the soul, effectively, you must pursue them single-mindedly. Don't try to attain the moral goods *and* the material goods. The two will often conflict, and you will probably end up attaining neither. (E. 1)
4. Once you grasp these principles, you will be free, happy, content, at peace, etc., because nothing external will be able to take away the things that you value; no misfortune can detract in any way from the good things you have. No person will be able to do you any harm (because they cannot harm your moral goods, only your external goods).

These views make up the great bulk of the *Enchiridion*; most of the short chapters are about dealing with difficulties and misfortunes by recalling Stoic principles. The *Enchiridion* seems to have been designed with this in mind: it's a self-help handbook.

5. God is our master, father, etc. We aim to live according to his will. This means two things: (1) we live *ethically*, valuing the moral goods that he has made especially available to us, and giving up other things (or at least, being willing to give them up when and if they are taken from us, and not pursuing them beyond what is minimally necessary) and (2) we accept that all events are brought about by God's benevolent will; thus there is a divine order and plan to everything; even apparent misfortunes must have some purpose. Frequently it is clear that the purpose of material and external misfortunes is to enable and test our moral virtues. This God takes away material goods precisely as a way of increasing our stock of moral goods.

For this, again, see Discourses 1.6, *On Providence*. Also E.7, 10, 11, 15, 17.

---

### **Governance parables**

All page numbers refer to our 'Synopsis' text of the Gospels, except T numbers, which refer to saying numbers in the Gospel of Thomas.

1. rich man, camel & God's governance [218]
2. serving God and serving Money [58] +T 47
3. God's governance belongs to the poor, who are thereby blessed [50] +T 54
4. God's gov. is like a mustard seed (very unobtrusive [modest? discreet?] then grows into something useful.) [119] +T 20
5. God's gov. is like yeast in dough (very unobtrusive; grows into something useful) [119] +T 96
6. God's gov. is like a seed that grows unobtrusively and produces grain. [118] +T21 (fragment)
7. God's gov. [?] is accepted, received, develops to different degrees [?] the seed grows well or badly; sometimes it doesn't take root; sometimes it is choked out by competing concerns; sometimes it grows as in 6. [113] +T 9

8. God's gov. can be lost [?]; it can slip away like the grain through a small hole in a jar, without you even noticing. [T 97]
9. God's gov. is like a pearl that a merchant finds. He searches for it; finds it; gives up everything for the pearl. [120] +T 76
10. God's gov. is like a treasure in a field. A man finds it; gives up everything for the treasure. [120] also T 76, partial
11. God's gov. is like a rock [?]; if your house is built on it, it weathers every storm. [64]
12. God's gov. is like a big fish among small fish; you find the big fish, and gladly toss away all the small fish. [T 8]
13. God's gov. [?] is like a banquet that you mustn't be too busy to go to; if you're too distracted by worldly things, then you're rejecting God's invitation. [192] +T64
14. God's gov. is a way of preparing for great trials: it's like man who trains his strength at home before he has to go and slay a tyrant [T 98] see also [194]
15. God's gov. is way of being ready for anything: if you know the thief is coming you make sure he can't get in and tie you down; no thief can ransack your house if you are under God's governance. [see 58] T 21 + 35 see also [194] +T103

*Apocalyptic Governance parables:*

1. God's governance is like a net full of fish; the fishermen separate the good from the bad; likewise the good are separated from the bad, at the end of the age, and the bad are thrown into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. [120]
2. God's governance is like a field with good seed and weeds; the farmer waits until the end, then burns the weeds; likewise the angels will come at the end of the age and burn the bad people. [118] + T 57
3. God's kingdom is like a banquet; some of the people who are invited kill the messengers who deliver the invitation. They are slaughtered by the host, who is also a king and sends out his armies to kill them. Then good and bad people come to the (original?) banquet, and the bad guests are thrown by the host into hell.

There are only three overtly apocalyptic 'kingdom' parables. There are (arguably) around 12 or 13 'kingdom' parables that do not appear, at least not on the surface, to be apocalyptic.

Also, it seems fairly likely that one of these (the weeds parable) is in fact derived from 6, above, and that the other (the net parable) is derived from 11, above, and that the third (deadly banquet) is derived from 13, above). If that is correct, then there were (arguably) *no* overtly apocalyptic 'kingdom' parables in the original set..

Thomas Fish (8):

And he said, "The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!"

Thomas Banquet (64):

64. Jesus said, "A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests.

The slave went to the first and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said, 'Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner.'

The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master has invited you.' That one said to the slave, 'I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time.'

The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the slave, 'My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner.'

The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the slave, 'I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me.'

The slave returned and said to his master, 'Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused.' The master said to his slave, 'Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to

have dinner.'

Buyers and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father."

Texts Pertaining [?] to Jesus' attitude to *intellectual and moral autonomy; using one's own mind; making one's own judgments, etc.*

1. The Sabbath controversy: [101]
2. Other Sabbath controversies: 188, 45
3. Disagreeing with Moses: 215
4. On retaliation, oaths, murder, adultery: 54-55
5. Hypocrites, gnat and camel: 176, 252, T 6 T 14
6. Defiling, inner and outer: 141-143, T 89, T 14, 166
7. The light (1): 51
8. The light (2): 176, T 24?
9. Don't follow blindly: 60
10. "This is the law and prophets": 62
11. Treasures new and old: 121

• τ • μ • ν τ ο • λ ύ χ ν ο υ φ • ς , μέ χ ρ ι σ β ε σ θ • , φα ί ν ε ι κα • τ • ν α • γ • ν ο • κ • πο β ά λ λ ε ι , • δ • • ν σο •  
• λ ή θ ε ι α κα • δ ι κ α ι ο σ ύ ν η κα • σ ω φ ρ ο σ ύ ν η π ρ ο α π ο σ β ή σ ε τ α ι ; 12.15.1

Even the light of a lamp shines and does not lose its light until the lamp is extinguished. Shall the truth, and righteousness and decency within you be extinguished before you are? [Marcus Aurelius]

Texts pertaining to *divine providence*, and its practical significance:

- (1) On anxiety [59]
- (2) God surely gives us good things [61]
- (3) Compare: be like children [158], [216], also T 22 ['like babies nursing']
- (4) Master and the whining servant [201]; compare 'two masters' [197]
- (5) Accept your place [191]; [compare Epictetus *Ench.* 15]

- (6) Also compare: parable of the talents ('pounds') [229]
- (7) Also compare: parable of the rich fool [182]
- (8) Figs: [240], [262]

### Speculative reconstructions

In examining the following texts, we will see if it is possible to reconstruct the original meaning of sayings (or anecdotes) that are obscure or very hard to interpret in the texts as we have them, by making use of the philosophical hypothesis (i.e., the theory that Jesus is influenced by Greek theism) [texts marked with asterisks are those that we do not cover in class]:

- (1) Figs [238] [262]; see Discourses [p. 40]
- (2) Salt [51]
- (3) The Beelzebul episode [108] also T 21 + 35; see also thief sayings at [266] [58]
- (4) Son of Man has no place to rest [76] also T 86; also Son of Man serves [226]
- (5) Master and servants mix up? [266] [267] [184] [201]
- (6) Tenants in the vineyard [243]
- (7) The sound eye [58]
- (8) Hating one's family [?] [193] [95]
- (9) The confused pronoun? [193] [95] T 77 T 100