

THE TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT LECTURE 1971\*

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM REVISITED:  
SOME NEW SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE  
COMPOSITION OF MARK 4:1-34

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This lecture is entitled *The Synoptic Problem Revisited: Some New Suggestions about the Composition of Mark 4:1-34*; and like its title the lecture falls into two parts. The second part is devoted to a rather rapid study of Mark 4 and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke, in which I set out in outline an argument for regarding the Matthean form of the tradition as the oldest form. But as the force of this argument is unlikely to be fully appreciated by those convinced on general grounds that Marcan priority is an unshakably sure result of criticism, in the first half of the paper I make some general remarks about the Synoptic Problem. After remarking first on the continuing importance of source criticism in the present age of *Redaktionsgeschichte* and then warning against the danger of accepting supposedly assured results uncritically, I go on to refer to the view that the Two Document Hypothesis became accepted around the end of the last century partly at least because it was a theory that fitted the theological prejudices of the time. After that I consider some of the arguments that have been used in favour of the Two Document Hypothesis, most of them only briefly, but two of the more substantial ones rather more fully. Having set out in what is inevitably a very cursory form this general argument for regarding the Synoptic Problem as a question that needs further consideration, I turn in the second half of the lecture to Mark chapter 4 and discuss a number of things in the chapter which are left unexplained by the Two Document Hypothesis, but which are explicable if the Matthean form of the tradition is regarded as

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the most primitive. Such in outline is the course that the lecture takes.

#### A. THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM STILL AN OPEN QUESTION

##### 1. *Introduction*

The past fifty years have seen important changes of emphasis in Gospel studies. Critics generally have shifted their attention from source criticism to form criticism and more recently still from form criticism to redaction criticism. So, as this paper is an invitation to look again at the Synoptic Problem, the source critical question *par excellence*, it is appropriate to begin by pointing out that, although the source critical questions may be out of fashion at the moment, they have not become any the less important with the passing of time. Form critics such as Bultmann acknowledge that their work presupposes the findings of the source critics;<sup>1</sup> and most redaction critics in seeking to identify the characteristic theological emphases of the Evangelists Matthew and Luke start from the assumption that Mark was the main source utilized and modified in the later Gospels, as they are taken to be.<sup>2</sup> Eloquent testimony to the continuing fundamental importance of source criticism is to be found in the frequent occurrence of such expressions as 'I presuppose in the following essay that Matthew has used Mark and Q'<sup>3</sup> at the start of articles about the theology and composition of the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, E.T., Blackwells, Oxford, (1963) 3; also W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, E.T., S.C.M., London (1957) 42: 'The way to the form critical view of the gospel material can only be traversed backward, because first of all we must raise the literary-critical questions about the connection of the Synoptics among themselves and about the possible sources behind our gospels.'

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, E.T., Faber, London (1961) 9; W. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, E.T., Blackwells, Oxford (1968) 119; J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists*, E.T., S.C.M., London (1968) 19; R. H. Stein, *JBL* 88 (1969) 52.

<sup>3</sup> E. Schweizer, *NTS* 16 (1970) 213.

<sup>4</sup> There is a further point to note: the conclusions of such scholars as J. Wellhausen and W. Wrede about the nature and framework of Mark's Gospel had a considerable influence on the form critics and on their attitudes to the whole of the Gospel tradition. It is possible that Gospel criticism would have taken a different turn if either Matthew or Luke had been regarded as the first Gospel. For example, if the view recently propounded by R. L. Lindsey had been accepted, Mark's rather disjointed framework would not have been taken to indicate the artificiality of the narrative framework of all the Synoptic Gospels, but would have been explained as the result of his use of Luke and other sources (*NovT* 6 (1963)

Few would probably be found to dispute what I have said so far about the continuing importance of source criticism; but some would still question the value of revisiting the Synoptic Problem, because, in the words of R. H. Lightfoot, they would hold that 'the work of source criticism, which has produced results of permanent value, is probably now upon the whole complete'.<sup>5</sup> Their feeling would be that the Two Document Hypothesis stands as one really assured result amid all the uncertainties of contemporary Gospel criticism; or at least, if they were to admit to doubts about Q, Marcan priority would still remain in their eyes as an unshakable monument to the work of the earlier source critics.

This position might in theory be justifiable; but before I go on to consider that question, it may be worth stopping to urge the need for a critical attitude to supposedly assured results of criticism. It is all too easy to accept a generally accepted idea on inadequate grounds just because it is generally accepted; furthermore, once a theory has been widely accepted and used it is uncomfortable to have to admit that it might after all be insecurely based. It is as if the soundness of a building's foundations were to be questioned when the builders were already well advanced with work on the second and third storeys; their reaction to the critic, whoever he is, is likely to be hostile. But they will be unwise if they comfort themselves with the thought that other experts have declared the foundations sound and if they therefore ignore the critic's arguments,<sup>6</sup> or if they argue that the success of their building so far proves the soundness of the foundation and therefore that the critic's prognostications need not be taken seriously.<sup>7</sup> Both builder and scholar will be wise to take their critics very seriously and if

248). However unlikely this particular possibility may appear, the acceptance of the Two Document Hypothesis as the solution of the Synoptic Problem has very probably influenced the course that Gospel criticism has taken up to the present day, and this is in itself a reason for regarding the Synoptic Problem as of continuing importance.

<sup>5</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St Mark*, O.U.P., London (1950) 99, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Advocates of the Two Document Hypothesis can call as witnesses an impressive list of scholars who have taken their view and whose opinion should not be taken lightly; but it would be wrong to assume that there is necessarily safety in numbers.

<sup>7</sup> N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, S.C.M., London (1967) 35, says that its success in practice establishes the Two Document Hypothesis 'beyond reasonable doubt'. This strong assertion is in my view open to serious question; but I do not intend to discuss it here. It may, however, be pointed out that there

necessary to rebuild; they should resist the temptation of taking the comfortable way out.

It is all very well to plead for a willingness to reconsider well-established theories and to point out the dangers of a false conservatism. But the objections of those who think revisiting the Synoptic Problem a waste of time can only really be met if it can be shown that the normally accepted theory is not firmly established.

## 2. *The Convenience of the Two Document Hypothesis*

The first thing to raise suspicions on this score is the evidence cited by W. R. Farmer and others, that suggests that the Two Document Hypothesis rose to its position of dominance at the end of the last century and at the beginning of this century partly because it was a convenient theory at the time and one suited to the then current theological mood. It was convenient, because scholars were tending to date Matthew, traditionally the earliest Gospel, comparatively late; so to regard Mark as the first Gospel and as the record of Peter's preaching and to postulate the existence of the source 'Q' seemed a way out of an embarrassing situation for those wishing to insist on the historical reliability of the Synoptic tradition.<sup>8</sup> It was suited to the mood of the time, because Mark's Gospel was supposed to be characterized by greater simplicity and sobriety than the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, for example in his omission of the infancy stories and of most of the resurrection narratives.<sup>9</sup> This appealed to those inclined to play down the supernaturalism of the Gospel story in the aftermath of Darwin and the nineteenth-century science-versus-religion controversies.

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is a lot of ambiguous evidence in the Synoptic tradition, and that a theory may be wrong and yet appear to be very fruitful when applied, particularly if it is a versatile theory like the Two Document Hypothesis. Grand systems may be built up on inadequate foundations; but the size of the structure will largely depend on how many people have built on the foundation in question, and will not necessarily be a guide to its soundness. The question that always needs asking is whether another hypothesis might not be still more fruitful.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem*, Macmillan, New York (1964) 19; N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* S.P.C.K., London (1970) 6. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, Macmillan, London (1930<sup>2</sup>) 227, testifies to this sort of motivation, when he speaks of the immense efforts that the scholars of his day were making to 'extend the boundaries of Q', because Q was thought to be primitive and historically reliable.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Farmer, *op. cit.*, 25, 178f.

To what extent such factors as these consciously or unconsciously influenced those in the past who acclaimed the Two Document Hypothesis is hard to say. But the way that dissentient voices have tended to be ignored<sup>10</sup> and the inadequacy of many of the arguments that have been used in favour of the Two Document Hypothesis may suggest that they have played a bigger part than most think. There is, however, no need to pursue that particular matter any further, since it is the inadequacy of the arguments in favour of the Two Document Hypothesis that is the most important point for the case of those wanting to reopen the Synoptic Problem for fresh consideration; and that is what we must look at now.

<sup>10</sup> Farmer, *op. cit.*, 152, describes Streeter's failure to take note of H. G. Jameson's book, *The Origin of the Synoptic Gospels* (published by Blackwells, Oxford in 1922), as 'the single most unparalleled act of academic bravado on record'. The words are probably too strong; yet it is almost incredible that Jameson's well-reasoned critique of Streeter, Sanday, and others, accompanied as it is with a strong argument for Matthean priority, could be totally ignored by Streeter, the Oxford don, in his monumental *The Four Gospels*, which was published only two years later, and which was to become for years the standard English work on the subject. If, as Farmer claims (*op. cit.*, 153), Streeter's reference to 'ingenious persons who rush into print' has Jameson in mind, it is an unfair remark; and it shows that it is possible to get away with shoddy thinking if that thinking happens to fit in with the consensus of the time.

Another important work that deserves more attention than it has received is by J. Chapman, *Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Longmans, London (1937). It has been easy for unsympathetic critics to discount the views of such Roman Catholic scholars as Chapman and B. C. Butler on the grounds that their work has been prejudiced from the start by the decree of the Biblical Commission of 1912. But although a critic's own prejudices and presuppositions may be different from those of the one he is criticizing, this does not justify him in ignoring the other's arguments, except where these hinge directly on the unacceptable presuppositions. The arguments of Chapman and Butler (in *The Originality of St Matthew*, Cambridge University Press, 1951) are based firmly on the evidence of the texts of the Gospels; and it is on their interpretation of these that they must be judged. Of course, due allowance must always be made for any writer's presuppositions when his views are assessed; but in some ways conscious prejudices (in an honest man) are less dangerous than unconscious presuppositions. It is also worth noting that in practice Catholics have not all come up with the same answer. The British scholars, Chapman and Butler, have given quite different solutions from the French-speaking Cerfaux and Vaganay.

Other recent works in English favouring a solution of the Synoptic Problem other than the Two Document Hypothesis include Farmer's book mentioned earlier; P. Parker, *The Gospel before Mark*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago (1953); R. L. Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, Duggith, Jerusalem (1969); also from the French, L. Cerfaux, *The Four Gospels*, E.T., Darton, Longman and Todd, London (1964). In addition to these a number of writers have declared themselves uncommitted: see N. H. Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism*, Macmillan, London (1968) 161, 193; E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, Cambridge University Press (1969) 278. A. Schweitzer in the introduction to the third edition of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, E.T., A. & C. Black, London (1954) xi says on the question of whether Matthew or Mark is older: 'That is a literary question which it is scarcely possible to answer.'

I shall concentrate, in fact, on the arguments for Marcan priority, since the Marcan hypothesis still commands general assent from the majority of critics in a way that the Q hypothesis no longer does.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. *The Weakness of the Arguments for Marcan Priority*

The first argument, which I shall mention only very briefly, is the one based on the observation that Matthew and Luke rarely agree against Mark either in order or wording in the Triple Tradition. It is not necessary to discuss this in detail, as it is now admitted by advocates as well as opponents of the Marcan hypothesis that, unless it is supposed that our Gospels drew on some common *Urschrift*, the observation does not prove Mark's superiority or priority over Matthew and Luke, but only that Mark is the mid-point between the other two.<sup>12</sup>

A second argument is the argument from style:<sup>13</sup> the comparatively poor Greek of Mark's Gospel, the Semitisms in it, and the vivid pictorial details (such as personal names) have been thought to be proof of the primitive character of his Gospel relative to those of Matthew and Luke. But E. P. Sanders has shown that vivid details, personal names, and even Semitisms are found added into the tradition in post-canonical writings like the apocryphal Gospels, so that similar features in Mark cannot prove the Gospel to be primitive.<sup>14</sup> In fact on the particular question of vivid details Sanders' conclusion is that 'the balance of probability is that material richer in detail

<sup>11</sup> The Q hypothesis has come under quite heavy fire of late. Q always has been a difficult document to envisage, and the problems about its exact nature and extent, about the varying degrees of similarity between Matthew and Luke in the Q sections, and about the relationship of Mark and Q are well known. Recent opponents of Q have included A. W. Argyle, *ExpT* 73 (1961) 19–22; A. M. Farrer, *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham, Blackwells, Oxford (1955) 55–86; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, Part One*, S.C.M., London (1971) 38f.; C. S. Petrie, *NovT* 3 (1959) 28–33; R. T. Simpson, *NTS* 12 (1966) 273–84. Support for the hypothesis has come from E. L. Bradby, *ExpT* 68 (1957) 315–18; F. G. Downing, *NTS* 11 (1965) 169–81; B. Martin, *Theology* 59 (1956) 182–8.

<sup>12</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *op. cit.*, 46, claims that the argument from the failure of Matthew and Luke to agree in order has validity if the divergence of Matthew and Luke from Mark in sequence can be made understandable, but not the divergence of Mark from Matthew and Luke. But although it is obviously true that Marcan priority is established if this condition is fulfilled, this is in fact a different argument; and it is not the failure of Matthew and Luke to agree as such that would prove the point.

<sup>13</sup> Kümmel, *ibid.*, 48, says: 'Decisive for the recognition of Mark's priority over Matthew and Luke . . . is the comparison of language and subject matter.'

<sup>14</sup> *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition, passim.*

and direct speech is late'.<sup>15</sup> But even without the aid of Sanders' survey it should have been clear enough that such comparisons of style must be very ambiguous evidence. Why, for example, should it be thought more likely that Matthew and Luke eliminated the vivid life-like touches from Mark than that Mark added them in for the sake of increased colour?<sup>16</sup> Or why should Mark's poor and Semitizing style have been much different if he had used Matthew as his source from his style if he wrote his Gospel without written sources?<sup>17</sup> Occasional stylistic borrowing might be expected, if Matthew was his source; but unless Mark copied the earlier Gospel very closely, there is no reason why using a source such as Matthew should have inspired him to unaccustomed stylistic excellence.

Another supposed sign of the superiority of Mark's Gospel is the series of references found there, but not in Matthew and Luke, to the emotions of our Lord and to the failings of the disciples. But much the same applies to this argument as to the last, since there is no reason why Mark should not have known the slightly more respectful traditions of Matthew (or Luke) and have modified them himself in line with his own particular interest in the humanity of our Lord and the fallibility of the disciples.<sup>18</sup>

A different sort of argument for Marcan priority is the

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 274; cf. also W. R. Farmer, *op. cit.*, 134; H. G. Jameson, *The Origin of the Synoptic Gospels*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Jameson, *ibid.*, 96, thinks that such characteristic Marcan expressions could reflect knowledge of Petrine preaching; and despite Kümmel's assertion to the contrary (*op. cit.*, 48), it is not obvious in every case that Mark's version is the earlier. Why could not Mark have used *κράβαττος* instead of *κλίνη* when re-narrating the story of the healing of the palsied man in Mark 2:1-12?

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Farmer, *op. cit.*, 122; Sanders, *op. cit.*, 190f.

<sup>18</sup> On the second point it can hardly be argued that Mark was writing before the apostles achieved a position of respect and eminence in the church. So if his portrait of the apostles is taken on occasions to be derogatory and the opposite of respectful, we can only conclude that he did not intend his narrative (at these points at least) to endorse the respectful attitude towards the apostles that was current in the church. Some have thought that Mark was actually hostile to the apostles (cf. J. B. Tyson, *JBL* 80 (1961) 261-8; T. J. Weedon, *ZNW* 59 (1968) 145-58). If this were so, there would be no difficulty in imagining him altering Matthew (and/or Luke) in line with his attitude. The evidence does not seem to us to bear out the idea of Mark being hostile to the disciples—he nowhere hints that their call is revoked, and indeed in 9:9 and 16:7 he suggests that the resurrection marks a turning-point for the better. But it is still clear that he wanted his readers to know about the apostles' human frailties and about their false reactions to Jesus and his ministry. Since this was a particular Marcan interest, it is not so difficult to suppose that he might have contributed this emphasis (which he could have derived from Peter's preaching) to the Synoptic tradition, even if Matthew or Luke was his source.

negative argument that it is impossible to imagine Mark having used Matthew and having left out so much valuable Matthean material.<sup>19</sup> The obvious difficulty with an argument such as this based on the criterion of what I 'can or cannot imagine' or 'would or would not do' is that it is very subjective. It is always open to someone taking a different view to tell me that I have a poor imagination. This particular example is a case in point: it may seem to some difficult to imagine Mark omitting much of Matthew; but to others there is nothing strange in the idea that he might have wished to write a gospel of action, giving an account of the ministry of Jesus without going into the story of his birth or describing his teaching in detail.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, we are so far removed in time and circumstance from the Evangelists that there is no guarantee that by exerting our imagination we will be able to conjure up a picture of the circumstances in which they wrote the Gospels or of the motives that influenced them. B. H. Streeter's words may be appositely quoted: 'Even when we can detect no particular motive, we cannot assume that there was none; for we cannot possibly know all the circumstances of the Churches, or all the personal idiosyncrasies of writers so far removed from our time.'<sup>21</sup> Such a plea of ignorance could be an admission of weakness, and certainly it is an advantage to any theory if it can give a plausible explanation of what provoked a particular author to act in a particular way. But it is none the less salutary to be reminded that it will not always be possible for us to read the writers' minds in retrospect; and we shall be wise to speculate on questions of motive and situation only after we have reached conclusions on less subjective grounds. As H. Palmer says, 'What we would do if we were the evangelists is just irrelevant. What they would do can be discovered only by inspecting what they did.'<sup>22</sup> A final point on Marcan omissions should not be overlooked, and this is

<sup>19</sup> Kümmel, *op. cit.*, 45, says: 'The dependence of Mark upon Matthew or Luke, or of Matthew upon Luke, or of Luke upon Matthew, is unthinkable, since the extensive omissions, which then must be admitted, cannot be explained.'

<sup>20</sup> M. Dibelius, who has no obvious leanings to Matthean priority, believes that Mark knew but deliberately omitted to give a full account of the teaching of Jesus. He says: 'Obviously it was not part of Mark's plan to tell what the "teaching" of Jesus was.' (*From Tradition to Gospel*, E.T., Ivor Nicholson & Watson, London (1934) 237.)

<sup>21</sup> Streeter, *op. cit.*, 169, cited also by Farmer, *op. cit.*, 68, 85.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, 121.



that, even if we were certain that Mark did write first, it would still be far from certain that he put in his Gospel the sum total of the traditions about the life and ministry of Jesus known to him.<sup>23</sup> If, as seems likely, he was acquainted with a great deal of material (teaching material, resurrection narratives, *etc.*) which he did not record, then the problem of his selections and omissions is one that has to be faced almost as much if Mark wrote first as if he knew and used one or both of the other Synoptic Gospels.

We have now considered in a sketchy fashion some of the popular arguments for Marcan priority.<sup>24</sup> Those we have looked at have been seen to be less convincing than they are often thought to be, and the evidence on which they are based is nearly always susceptible of other equally plausible interpretations. One can only conclude that New Testament scholars generally have been insufficiently critical towards these arguments in the past. It is interesting to compare and contrast their attitude to the arguments for Matthean priority, for example the argument from the Jewish character of Matthew's Gospel<sup>25</sup> and the argument from the Early Church testimony,<sup>26</sup> since these have readily been dismissed as inconclusive.

Before we leave this first section of the paper, there are two

<sup>23</sup> Certain expressions in Mark's Gospel suggest that he knew traditions that he does not record, *e.g.* Mk. 4:33; 12:1, 38. (*Cf.* Dibelius, *op. cit.*, 236f.)

<sup>24</sup> We will probably be charged of having oversimplified the arguments, and with some justice; but we suspect that, had we had time for a more detailed study, this would only have confirmed our conclusion. In any case something will have been achieved if it is agreed that the popular arguments are not so simple or straightforward as has often been thought. For example, if it is admitted that Mark's vivid but unrefined style is not in itself a proof of priority, this is a gain worth registering, since there is a significant difference between claiming that Mark is more primitive than Matthew and Luke because his style is more vivid and claiming that he appears more primitive in each particular case where his style is more vivid.

<sup>25</sup> It is tempting to argue that Matthew, as the Gospel with most blatantly Jewish sayings, such as 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles' (10:5) and with its particular interest in Old Testament testimonia (which has an interesting parallel in the early chapters of Acts—see P. Parker, *op. cit.*, 88f.) should be earlier than Mark, which explains Jewish customs and is generally less interested in prophecy.

<sup>26</sup> This evidence is not ambiguous in the way that other evidence is which we have examined; but it is possible to discount the Early Church traditions about the authorship and writing of the Gospels. However note D. Guthrie's words: 'Where there is a strongly attested ancient tradition, it is a fair approach to suppose that this tradition is probably correct, until it can be proved wrong. In other words, where tradition and internal considerations conflict, the interpretation of the latter must be beyond challenge before it may be confidently assumed that the traditional view must be wrong.' (*New Testament Introduction*, Tyndale Press, London (1970<sup>2</sup>) 220f.)

further arguments for Marcan priority to consider; both have been propounded recently, and both at first sight appear to be less vulnerable to the charge of being inconclusive and based on ambiguous evidence. The first of these depends on observations about the use of the Old Testament in Matthew's Gospel, and in particular on the observation that those quotations which Matthew has in common with Mark are distinct from his quotations in all other parts of his Gospel. Whereas the quotations in Matthew's Q and M material are sometimes close to the LXX, sometimes not very close, and sometimes quite remote from it, the Marcan quotations stand out as being consistently close to the Septuagintal form.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly the distinctiveness of this particular group of quotations has been taken to be an indication of Matthew's use of Mark.

However, the argument, though attractive, is not cogent. One way round it for those inclined to doubt Marcan priority (but not inclined to opt for Luke as the first Gospel) is via the suggestion that Mark deliberately reproduced only the Septuagintal quotations which he found in Matthew, perhaps because the LXX was the version which he and his readers were most familiar.<sup>28</sup> But although such an explanation cannot be excluded as impossible, it is scarcely as simple as the view that Matthew used Mark, and it looks too like special pleading.

There is, however, another much more substantial explanation possible, which only becomes clear when two things about the Matthean and Marcan quotations are noticed: first, that Mark hardly ever uses Old Testament quotations editorially; all but one of the quotations in his Gospel are to be found on the lips of participants within the narrative;<sup>29</sup> and, second, that although Matthew's editorial citations are often quite far

<sup>27</sup> For a recent authoritative statement on this see R. H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St Matthew's Gospel*, Brill, Leiden (1967). He observes that it is 'the pure LXXal form of the Marcan formal quotations which stands out and calls for explanation' (150f.). For an earlier statement of the argument see P. Wernle, *Die Synoptische Frage*, J.C.B. Mohr, Freiburg (1899) 115f.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. B. F. C. Atkinson, *JTVI* 79 (1947) 56.

<sup>29</sup> We are limiting our consideration to direct or formal Old Testament quotations, and are not considering linguistic allusions to the Old Testament.

The one exception, where Mark does use a citation editorially, is ch. 1 verses 2 and 3, verses that raise a number of other problems. Where Mark uses the Old Testament on the lips of one of the participants in the narrative, the quotation is quite often indispensable to the story (cf. 4:11f., 7:10f., 10:4 and 6f., 11:9, 12:19, 12:26, 12:29f., 12:36f.). The impression given is that Mark was not so interested in the fulfilment of prophecy as Matthew and Luke (cf. the thesis of A. Suhl, in

removed from the LXX wording,<sup>30</sup> the ones he places on the lips of participants within the narrative are generally close to the LXX. This last observation applies as much to those in the so-called Q<sup>31</sup> and M<sup>32</sup> sections of Matthew as in the Marcan sections. There thus turns out to be no difficulty for the person who wishes to argue that Mark used Matthew: the reason Mark reproduces the Septuagintal citations from Matthew and ignores the others is because he only reproduces those that are part of the narrative and which often cannot be omitted. If my argument is correct, it turns out that what needs explaining is not the distinctiveness of the Marcan quotations in Matthew, but the distinction between Matthew's editorial citations and the others in his Gospel. That is itself a problem; but it is a different problem, and it is not solved by the hypothesis that Matthew used Mark.

The other, and this time entirely modern, argument for the traditional solution of the Synoptic Problem which must be faced is based on the statistical analysis of the Synoptic tradition. It has probably been most cogently presented by A. M. Honoré in an article in *Novum Testamentum*, 'A Statistical Study of the Synoptic Problem',<sup>33</sup> and the case he sets out

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*Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspielungen im Marcusevangelium*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, 1965); or perhaps as likely he did not regard the prophecy-fulfilment motif as of particular relevance to his readers.

<sup>30</sup> Notable exceptions are 1:23, 21:4f.

<sup>31</sup> Gundry accepts the D reading in 4:4 contrary to most modern editors (*op. cit.*, pp. 66f.); we are working on the basis of the more commonly accepted reading. K. Stendahl, *The School of St Matthew*, C. W. K. Gleerup, Uppsala (1954) 149, counts 11:10 as Q material, probably rightly.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Chapman, *op. cit.*, 261f.; P. Parker, *op. cit.*, 91f. I am inclined to accept Chapman's view that 5:31, 33, 34 are paraphrases by the Evangelist (also 22:24); they probably do not reflect a particular Old Testament text form. Also 2:5f. is exceptional.

Gundry says that 'Parker's view that quotations on the lips of Jesus are conformed to the LXX is simply not true, for the majority of the allusive quotations which diverge from the LXX represent words of Jesus' (*op. cit.*, 151). It is true that Parker reckons only with the formal quotations; but it is not obvious that this invalidates his suggestion about them, since one would hardly expect the allusive quotations to be assimilated to the LXX in the same way. Gundry himself shows in the case of Mark that the formal quotations are Septuagintal, whereas the allusive ones are not. It is a pity that Gundry does not appear to have seen Chapman's fuller treatment of both the formal and the allusive citations.

<sup>33</sup> *NovT* 10 (1968) 95-147 (I am indebted to the author for supplying me with an offprint of the article). For an earlier attempt to solve the Synoptic Problem along statistical lines see B. de Solages, *A Greek Synopsis of the Gospels—A New Way of Solving the Synoptic Problem*, Brill, Leiden (1959). De Solages claims for his results 'a precision and certainty superior to any reached through other methods' (*ibid.*, 1118); but we doubt whether he in fact does much more than restate the

there has been hailed by C. E. Carlston and D. Norlin in an article in *Harvard Theological Review* for 1971 as completely successful. They comment: 'The sobriety of his method, his inclusion of all options, and even the fact that he began his study with quite a different outcome in mind all suggest that these two conclusions' (*i.e.* that Mark was used by Matthew and Luke and that Luke did not know Matthew) 'may now be considered fairly well established. In any case the burden of proof, it is now clear, lies with those who challenge, not those who accept, these two nearly universally acknowledged conclusions.'<sup>34</sup> To go into a detailed exposition and analysis of Honoré's argument would be beyond the scope of this paper; but in view of the claims that have been made for it I must at least indicate why Honoré's painstaking analysis appears to me to bring us little nearer to the definitive solution for which we are looking.

In the first part of his article Honoré claims to reduce the number of possible solutions to the Synoptic Problem to five; but the calculations that lead him to this conclusion all start from the assumption, which is stated openly, that the Evangelists' selection of material was 'unbiased'.<sup>35</sup> To give an example of what this means: on the Griesbach theory of Synoptic origins Luke is thought to have used the Gospel of Matthew, and Mark is thought to have used Luke. Now if Mark was unbiased in his selection of material from Luke, he will have taken the same percentage of Luke's Matthean material and the same percentage of Luke's non-Matthean material. It is on this assumption that Honoré calculates; and as a result he

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old arguments in statistical dress. His approach seems vulnerable at two points in particular: (1) by dividing up the Gospel material in the way he does, he gets a series of partial statistics of doubtful value. Thus he treats by itself what he calls the 'simple Marcan tradition' (*ibid.*, 1052), and he discovers that Luke and Matthew have few agreements against Mark in this material. These he dismisses as almost all grammatical alterations—note, a literary critical argument, not a statistical one—and he then concludes that Luke cannot have known Matthew. Having reached this conclusion on the basis of the 'simple Marcan tradition', he goes on to consider the 'Q' material afterwards (*ibid.*, 1067f.; he calls 'Q' 'X'). If, instead of treating the 'simple Marcan tradition' and the 'Q' material separately, he had considered them together, he might have been slower to explain away the agreements of Matthew and Luke in the former. (2) A second observation is that this sort of statistic only takes positive agreements into account. But, whereas two positive agreements may look insignificant by themselves, they may look very different if they are accompanied by agreements in omission.

<sup>34</sup> *HTR* 64 (1971) 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*, 99, 104.

concludes that the Griesbach hypothesis (among others) is impossible. If Mark, however, was not unbiased, but quite deliberately preferred Luke's Matthean material to his non-Matthean material, because he wanted to produce a conflation of the two earlier Gospels, the whole of Honoré's argument collapses.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for his case unbiased editing is not a likely assumption at all, as he himself recognizes at one point,<sup>37</sup> and this vitiates a crucial section of his argument; options which he regards as excluded cannot be got rid of so easily.

Honoré's way of excluding the idea that Luke knew Matthew is the traditional one of pointing out that Matthew and Luke scarcely ever agree in order against Mark,<sup>38</sup> which has as much or as little cogency as it ever had. But his argument against Matthean priority is new. It depends on a theory about the use of sources.<sup>39</sup> In essence the argument is that, if a writer is drawing on one source in one part of his writing and then begins to use a second source as well in a later part, two things may be expected to happen: (a) he will be likely to write more fully than before; (b) his writing will not be as heavily dependent on the first source as it was. With this key Honoré thinks it is possible to compare two sections of a writing and to decide if an additional source is being used. Applied to Matthew and Mark this test reveals to Honoré's satisfaction that in the Double Tradition, where Matthew and Mark only run parallel, Matthew is using Mark only; but in the Triple Tradition, where Matthew, Mark and Luke all run parallel, Matthew knows a second source (such as Q) as well as Mark. There are a number of difficulties with this, among them the problem of

<sup>36</sup> According to Honoré Mark has 33.49% of Luke's words in the Triple Tradition (*i.e.* where the three Gospels run parallel). If Mark's use of Luke was unbiased, he will have used approximately the same percentage (33.49%) of all the different strata of material in Luke, including that material that Luke has in common with Matthew. Given this figure and a figure for the words in common in all three Synoptic Gospels (22.22% of the words in Matthew), Honoré can calculate what proportion of Matthew's words must be found in Mark's text. The figure he arrives at is 59.60%. In fact Mark has only 45.11% of Matthew's words, and so Honoré regards the Griesbach theory as excluded. However it is only necessary to assume that Mark use approximately 60% of Luke's Matthean material (not the unbiased 33.49%) in order to arrive at a figure that makes the Griesbach theory seem quite reasonable.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 101: 'The theoretical figure is arrived at on the hypothesis that the selection of material by the second compiler was random vis-à-vis that of the first. This is not a realistic assumption, because there would be a tendency for both, even if acting independently, to select that material which was of greater interest.'

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 110f.

the classification of material; for example, Honoré includes the full temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke in the Triple Tradition, though they would usually be thought of as Q.<sup>40</sup> But what may be the most significant weakness of the argument becomes apparent if the figures that go to make up the supposedly significant totals are examined. Honoré notes that Matthew is relatively longer in the Triple Tradition than in the Double Tradition and that he uses relatively less of Mark in the Triple Tradition, and he draws conclusions accordingly. However, a close examination of the material suggests that the total figures are not really representative of any general trend. It is true that at the start of the Triple Tradition Honoré's argument works: Matthew is longer than in the Double Tradition and has a relatively smaller proportion of Marcan material; but for the greater part of the Triple Tradition his length relative to Mark is much the same as in the Double Tradition. Towards the end of his Gospel Matthew is again noticeably longer, but he also uses proportionately more of Mark. The trouble with the sort of general statistical comparison used by Honoré is that it does not take account of the

<sup>40</sup> When he defines the Triple Tradition in this sort of way it is not surprising that he finds in it a large number of agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark.

Another query concerns the classification of material as belonging to the 'Double' or the 'Triple' Tradition. Honoré's distinction is quite simple: where only Matthew and Mark run parallel, this is Double Tradition; where Luke joins them, this is Triple Tradition. Honoré goes on to compare the relationship of Matthew and Mark in the Double and the Triple Tradition, and finds that there is a difference. He claims that Matthew is using a source in addition to Mark in the Triple Tradition. But the difficulty with this is that the distinction between the Double and Triple Traditions, as so defined, depends on Luke's use of Mark. If Luke had used more of Mark, this material would have had to be classed as Triple Tradition material. Why then should the relationship of Matthew and Mark be any different in the Double and Triple Traditions? Why should Matthew get relatively longer at those points where Luke uses Mark, if he had no knowledge of Luke at all? Honoré's argument is that where Luke runs parallel to Mark and Matthew together, another source (traditionally called 'Q') also runs parallel, and this was known to Matthew. But Honoré would presumably not wish to argue that this was always the case, only that it was sufficiently often the case to be reflected in the statistics. Often Luke will have used Mark, where the other source had no parallel material. What this means is that the distinction between the Double Matthew-Mark Tradition and the Triple Tradition has more to do with Luke's editorial preferences than with the existence of any non-Markan source. Thus, for example, had there been no Lukan Great Omission (of Mark 6:45-8:26), almost half of Honoré's 'Double' Tradition would have had to be categorized as 'Triple' Tradition. These observations do not necessarily nullify Honoré's argument completely; but the fact that so much of the Double Tradition might have been Triple and vice versa, had Luke's preferences been different, should make us aware of some of the limitations of Honoré's statistics.

possibility that an author may act in one way in one part of his writing and in another way in another part.<sup>41</sup> By lumping together the different parts an average figure is produced that may be deceptive, because it does not correspond to the actual state of affairs in any or the majority of the parts considered separately. This appears to be the case with Honoré's argument about Matthew in the Double and Triple traditions. Here, as with the earlier argument that presupposed unbiased editing, our conclusion is that Honoré's statistics take insufficient account of the all important human factor. Unless this can be allowed for, arguments based on statistics will always prove inconclusive.

#### B. MARK 4:1-34—SOME NEW SUGGESTIONS

Enough has now been said in general terms to justify the contention that the Synoptic Problem is still an open question that deserves further consideration; and so we can turn now in the second part of this paper from the general argument to a particular case. The examination of Mark 4 which follows will confirm what I have said about the uncertainty of the Two Document Hypothesis and will suggest that it may prove profitable in this and other passages to explore avenues other than those trodden by the majority of scholars over the last 50-100 years.

##### 1. *Evidence of Editorial Modification in Mark 4*

My starting-point is the observation that there are difficulties in Mark chapter 4, which are best explained if the traditions contained in the chapter are thought to have undergone some sort of editorial modification before reaching their present form.

The first place where this applies is in the short passage immediately following the parable of the Sower. The peculiarities

<sup>41</sup> In the course of testing Honoré's total figures to see if they were representative of a general trend, I divided the 84 sections of the Triple Tradition, which he lists, into four blocks (sections 1-21, 22-42, 43-63, 64-84). The length relative to Mark in these four blocks varied from 78.5% in sections 22-42 to 124% in sections 64-84. If the same test is applied to the 21 sections of the Double Tradition the length of Matthew relative to Mark is 78.5% in sections 16-21 and 117% in sections 11-15. If these figures prove anything, it is that whichever Evangelist used the other's work used it differently at different times.

of this section (verses 10–13) are well explained if verses 11 and 12, which contain the difficult saying about the purpose of parables, are regarded as having been inserted in the context. It appears that originally the parable of the Sower was followed by a statement to the effect that the disciples asked Jesus concerning the parable, *i.e.* concerning the meaning of the parable. This was followed immediately by Jesus' double question now found in verse 13, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all parables?' and this led into the interpretation of the parable. At some stage the saying about the purpose of parables was inserted after the disciples' question about the meaning of the parable, which was accordingly reworded so that the disciples ask concerning the parables (plural) rather than about the parable (singular), *i.e.* of the Sower. The evidence for this in the present text of Mark may be summarized as follows: (a) the expression in verse 10, 'They asked him concerning the parables' sounds somewhat peculiar in its present position immediately after the single parable of the Sower; a question about the meaning of the parable leading on to its interpretation that follows would be much more natural. (b) As it stands at the moment Jesus' question in verse 13, 'Do you not understand this parable . . .?' is unprovoked by anything the disciples have said and lacks any introduction.<sup>42</sup> If originally it was preceded

<sup>42</sup> Some have wanted to take 'They asked him concerning the parables' as a request for the interpretation of certain parables including the parable of the Sower; but in its present position after only one parable and before verse 11 the expression is not naturally taken in this way.

G. H. Boobyer, *NTS* 8 (1961–2) 66f., argues that verse 13 should not be assumed to be referring to the parable of the Sower. If it was meant to, it is clumsily separated from it; and the question 'Do you not know this parable, and how will you know all parables?' does not make good sense if the Sower is being referred to, since it is not clear how understanding the parable of the Sower would help understanding the other parables (*e.g.* 3:23f.; 4:21f.; 7:14f.). Boobyer suggests that 'Do you not understand *this* parable?' is referring to 4:11f., and the meaning is that if they will waken up to their spiritual gift, they will realize that they do 'know all parables'. But among the objections to this are (1) that verses 11, 12 are not very aptly described as *τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην* (even though Mark may have used the word *παραβολή* in a fairly wide sense). (2) If it is not referring to the parable of the Sower, then the following interpretation of the parable is introduced without any warning or preface; and, if it is referring back to verses 11, 12, then apparently it is a despairing comment, since Jesus does not attempt to cure their ignorance, whereas, if it refers to the Sower (which was clearly indirect teaching, and by itself less intelligible than verses 11, 12), Jesus goes on in what follows to enlighten them, as also in 7:18f. and in 8:17f. (at least partially), where similar rebukes are found. (3) If verse 13a is taken to refer to the Sower, 13b need not be taken to mean that the parable is the key to the meaning of all the other parables.



by a question from the disciples about the meaning of the parable of the Sower, its present position would be easily intelligible. (c) The saying about the purpose of parables in verse 11 is introduced by the imperfect *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς*, whereas normally in Mark the reply to a question is introduced by an aorist<sup>43</sup> or historic present tense.<sup>44</sup> The verb of saying in verse 13 is in the present; and the oddity of the previous *καὶ ἔλεγεν* is well explained if verses 11, 12 were added in between the original question of verse 10 and the answer in verse 13. The use of the imperfect is an indication that the editor recognized that he was interrupting the original sequence.<sup>45</sup> (d) The unusual double-barrelled description of the questioners in verse 10, 'those who were about him with the twelve', may be regarded as a further sign of editorial activity: it may possibly have resulted from the conflation of two different

It is more simply taken as a rhetorical question, suggesting that, if they cannot understand this one parable, it is likely that they will have difficulty with others also. Boobyer's view, that it means that if they wake up to what was said in vs. 11f. they will realize that they do know all parables, seems very much harder.

<sup>43</sup> 8:5, 27f.; 9:11f., 28f.; 10:2f., 17f.; 12:18f.; 13:3f.; 14:61f.; 15:4f.

<sup>44</sup> 5:9; 7:17f.; 8:29; 10:10f. This is an intelligible use of tenses: the verb of asking is introductory and sets the scene in the imperfect for the answer that follows in the aorist or present. On two occasions, both in dialogue, the reply is introduced by the imperfect *ἔλεγεν* (7:27, 8:23; cf. also 9:33); but both times this is intelligible in the same way as the imperfect of the verb of asking, since both the question and in these cases the answer may be seen as introductions to what follows; and on neither occasion is the saying thus introduced a teaching word of Jesus. There is in fact no parallel in Mark, where *καὶ ἔλεγεν* introduces the answer of the person questioned and then *καὶ λέγει* introduces more of the same person's speech (pace J. Gnilka, *Die Verstockung Israels*, Kösel-Verlag, München (1961) 24. Mk. 7:5f. is the opposite and more normal phenomenon). C. F. D. Moule, in *Neotestamentica et Semitica* (Festschrift for M. Black) T. & J. Clark, Edinburgh (1969) 102, wishes to take both the *ῥημάτων* and with it the *ἔλεγεν* iteratively. He claims that this is a legitimate interpretation of *ῥημάτων* since the imperfect of *ῥημάτων* occurs in Mark twice only, so that one cannot generalize as to any normal usage. However, with Mark's usual verb of asking, *ἐπερωτᾶν*, a clear pattern emerges, the imperfect being regularly used in an intelligible, non-iterative sense. The imperfect of *ἔλεγεν* is better explained as above; and, despite Moule's plea to the contrary, *ὅτε ἐγένετο κατὰ νόμον* is not likely to be iterative (cf. 7:17). In general it seems unlikely (to me at least) that Mark imagined Jesus repeating verses 11, 12 on numerous occasions as a sort of prelude to giving a parable's interpretation. Also it seems curious to take Mark as recounting a parable straightforwardly, then describing in general the procedure whereby an interpretation was introduced, and then reverting to the particular interpretation with no particular introduction to it.

<sup>45</sup> H. G. Jameson, *op. cit.*, 120, observes that frequently Mark's use of the phrase *καὶ ἔλεγεν* and others like it in the middle of a section of discourse coincides with his divergence from Matthew; he suggests that Mark thus shows his consciousness of altering the Matthean sequence. For a more recent study of Mark's use of the imperfect of *λέγειν* see M. Zerwick, *Untersuchungen zum Marcus-Stil*, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome (1937). He calls verse 11 'der nachträglich sich eindrän-

expressions in two different sources.<sup>46</sup> (e) The final and quite important argument for seeing verses 11, 12 as an insertion is based on a comparison of the section in Mark 4 with the later passage in Mark 7:14–18. Put simply the point that emerges is that the structure of the later passage is strikingly similar to that of the section in Mark 4 if verses 11, 12 are left out,<sup>47</sup> and it thus confirms the plausibility of the view propounded about the original text of Mark 4:10–13. If then Mark 4:11, 12 have been inserted in the context, this immediately raises such questions about the history of the Marcan tradition as—When was the saying added? Why was it inserted?—and it proves that our Mark is not the oldest form of the tradition. To these questions we shall need later to add the question about the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark in the saying about the purpose of parables and to re-examine the whole of the Triple Tradition at this point.

A second place in Mark 4 where the traditions show signs of having suffered editorial modification is in the parable of the Mustard Seed. The awkwardness of the Marcan version can be properly appreciated in English only if the Greek is fairly literally translated. After the opening rhetorical questions that ask what the kingdom of God should be compared to, which themselves are none too easy,<sup>48</sup> the parable proceeds as follows: '(It is) like a grain of mustard seed, which when it

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gende Gedanke' (70). He has an interesting discussion of the exact function of the imperfect *ἔλεγεν* in Mark's Gospel (60f.). It is not used as a simple alternative to the aorist or historic present tense, but it frequently seems to be used to add on an independent saying to a context. *εἶπεν* and *λέγει* may have been preferred, when a saying was felt to have a firm historical link with the preceding context; 'tritt dagegen die lebendige Vergegenwärtigung eines bestimmten geschichtlichen Zusammenhanges im Denken des Evangelisten zurück, ist er gleichsam schon ganz in der Rede selbst, dann steht *καὶ ἔλεγεν*.' (67).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. among others J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, E.T., S.C.M., London (1963<sup>2</sup>) 14; V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, Macmillan, London (1952) 255; Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 67. Since *οἱ δώδεκα* is a characteristic expression of Mark himself, it could be regarded as his own addition to an earlier *οἱ περὶ αὐτόν*. However, even *οἱ περὶ αὐτόν* may be regarded as Marcan, since Mk. 3:32, 34 are some sort of precedent.

<sup>47</sup> On this see especially W. Marxsen, *ZTK* 52 (1955) 259f.

<sup>48</sup> What we appear to have in Mark is a hybrid—a question worded like the LXX of Is. 40:18, *τίνι ὁμοιώσατε κύριον καὶ τίνι ὁμοιώματι ὁμοιώσατε αὐτόν*; but functioning like one of the questions that introduce Rabbinic parables. (Cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1937) 88; J. Hawkins, *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (W. Sanday & others) O.U.P., Oxford (1911) 51f.; H. W. Bartsch, *TZ* 15 (1959) 126f., who reads an extraordinary significance into the question.)

is sown on the earth, being smaller than all the seeds on earth; and when it is sown, it grows up and becomes bigger than all vegetables, and makes large branches, so that the birds of heaven can lodge under its shade.' The parable starts all right: '(It is) like a grain of mustard seed, which when it is sown on the earth, being smaller than all the seeds on earth . . .'. But then it breaks down completely; and leaving grammatical chaos behind him, the narrator repeats the words 'and when it is sown'. He then proceeds without so much difficulty, but repeating a further phrase 'on the earth'. Various explanations of this state of affairs are possible. Some would be tempted simply to appeal to Mark's generally poor literary style; but this apparently easy get-out is not so easy. Mark could write competent Greek, even if it is colloquial; and this sort of breakdown in the narrative cannot be explained as the result of his linguistic inexpertise. Others would try to explain it as reflecting the language of oral preaching; and others again have thought it the result of an error in transmission<sup>49</sup> and/or translation.<sup>50</sup> But there is, in my view, only one explanation that is fully satisfactory; and this is that the Evangelist was familiar with something like the Lucan form of the parable, which has no reference to the seed being smaller than all seeds or to the grown plant being larger than all vegetables, and that the unfortunate dislocation in his version is the result of his attempt to insert the references to the size of the seed and of the

<sup>49</sup> For outstanding ingenuity see E. A. Abbott's suggestions in *The Corrections of Mark*, A. & C. Black, London (1901) 94f. P. Joüon, *L'Evangile de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*, Paris (1930) 205f., suggests that the first *ἐν τῇ γῇ* and also the *ὅν* after *μικρότερον* may be examples of dittography, an original *ἐστὶν* having dropped out. This conjecture, though not entirely implausible, involves rather too many coincidences and still leaves the repeated *ὅταν σπαρῇ* unexplained.

<sup>50</sup> According to M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels*, O.U.P., Oxford (1967<sup>3</sup>) 165, the second and redundant *ὅταν σπαρῇ* may have resulted from the misreading of *וְשָׂא* 'seed' for *וְרָיָא* 'sown'. C. C. Torrey on somewhat similar lines proposes that originally the text read '(It is) like a grain of mustard seed, which is less (*וְרָיָא*) than all the seeds; but when it is sown (*וְרָיָא*) upon the ground, it grows up and becomes greater than all the herbs.' (*Our Translated Gospels*, Hodder & Stoughton, New York, 1936, p. 123, as cited in V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 270.) But although both suggestions are ingenious, they both presuppose that a translator not only misread the straightforward consonantal text, but also as a result produced a far harder reading than the original. Neither solution explains the problem of the participial clause *μικρότερον ὅν*. (None of the 'examples . . . of the use of the participle where normal Greek would have used a finite verb or imperative' cited by Moule seems very closely parallel to the participle here. See his *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge University Press, (1960<sup>3</sup>) 179.)

grown plant into the earlier form of the parable.<sup>51</sup> Having quite successfully begun, 'the mustard seed, which when it is sown on the ground, being smaller than all the seeds on earth', the editor lost his way and so repeated himself with 'and when it is sown, it grows up . . .'. If this is the correct explanation of Mark's dislocation—and I cannot here give a detailed account of the reasoning that makes me think it to be so<sup>52</sup>—then for the second time within this chapter we find evidence to show that Mark has modified the tradition he received.

A third place where an earlier tradition appears to have been modified by Mark in this chapter is in his concluding summary statement in verses 33, 34. The commonly held view is that verse 33 represents the earlier tradition with its primitive understanding of parables as readily intelligible to the hearers—'With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.' Then verse 34 is thought to be the editor's addition with the later negative view of parables, which is found also in verses 11, 12—'He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.'<sup>53</sup> I am not inclined to accept the argument that two mutually contradictory views about the purpose of parables are to be found here side by side;<sup>54</sup> and in any case

<sup>51</sup> Among the scholars who regard the reference to the smallness of the seed as a possible insertion are C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, Cambridge University Press (1959) 170; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Fontana, London (1961<sup>2</sup>) 142. A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, Mohr, Tübingen (1910<sup>2</sup>) Vol. 2, 574, speaks of 'Schwerfälligkeiten, wie sie leicht bei dem Streben, in einen vorliegenden Satz Neues hineinzupropfen, sich einstellen'.

<sup>52</sup> Those interested in a more detailed discussion of this and other points in the second half of this paper are referred to the author's unpublished thesis, *The Composition of Mark 4:1-34*, submitted to the University of Manchester in July 1970.

<sup>53</sup> For this view see E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin (1966) 173; D. O. Via, *The Parables*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia (1967) 9f.; and many others.

<sup>54</sup> I am not inclined to accept that the editor responsible for the inclusion of verses 11, 12 of Mark 4 had a wholly negative view of parables. He was probably aware that they were meant to teach and to be understood; but he also knew that the application of the parables sometimes needed explaining. His so-called 'hardening theory' should not be taken as meaning that parables were in themselves intended to conceal; rather it is explaining why Jesus only explained them to His followers and not openly. What we have then in verse 33b *καθὼς ἡδύνατο ἀκοῦεν* is the first aspect of his understanding of parables: they were designed to bring home the message to the people in the sort of language they could appreciate. What we have in 34b is another side of the picture—'he explained everything privately to his disciples'. Mark does not indicate how these two aspects cohere logically; but then he was not writing a theological treatise. And, although it may not be easy to relate the two sides to each other with analytical precision,

the structure of the Marcan saying seems to favour the alternative view, which has been held by a few scholars:<sup>55</sup> this is that verse 34 is not to be regarded as separate from verse 33, but that the break comes rather between verse 34a and 34b.<sup>56</sup> Thus there is the double statement, positive and negative—‘With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear; and without a parable he did not speak to them’; and this is followed by the additional clause, ‘But in private he explained all things to his disciples’. This last clause stands on its own rather awkwardly and may well be regarded as a sort of after-thought tacked on to the double logion. If this is the correct interpretation—and the evidence is less decisive than in the two previous cases—we have a third example of editorial modification of the tradition.

There are thus at least three places in this chapter of Mark, where peculiarities of the text, which need explanation, can plausibly be explained as due to an editor’s attempts at modifying earlier traditions. In itself this conclusion proves little, and it need not necessarily be a cause for alarm to advocates of the Two Document Hypothesis. The view that Mark’s is the earliest surviving Gospel is not incompatible with the view that Mark made use of earlier sources. However, although this is true, there is an important difference between saying that a certain problem can be explained if a particular theory is true and saying that that theory explains the problem. In this case the peculiarities of Mark’s text can be explained if the Two Document Hypothesis is true; but the Hypothesis as such does not, and does not claim to, explain them.

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this does not prove that the Evangelist could not quite well have viewed the question from these two perspectives.

However, even if the Evangelist did hold a more negative view of parables than I think, there are still difficulties with the view that contradictory theories about parables are to be found in verses 33 and 34. *E.g.* If verse 33 so clearly contains a different view of parables from that favoured by the editor who added verse 34, why did he not modify or omit it?

<sup>55</sup> See V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 271; F. D. Gealy, *ExpT* 48 (1936–7) 42; H. Kahlefeld, *Paraboles et leçons dans l’Evangile*, du Cerf, Paris (1969) 27f.; Q. Quesnel, *The Mind of Mark*, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome (1969) 85.

<sup>56</sup> The rather odd double δέ is better explained on this view than on that advocated by C. Masson, *Les Paraboles de Marc IV*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchâtel (1945), 47f. He argues that the verse 34 is an addition on the basis of the repetition of δέ in successive clauses. The evangelist is seen to be correcting what has gone before. But although the verse reads rather oddly with the double δέ, regarding verse 34 as an addition does not alleviate the difficulty very noticeably. Why should the editor who added the verse have used δέ twice in this rather awkward way?

In some ways this is a most unspectacular observation; and yet the atmosphere of Gospel studies has been such over the past fifty years that one might have concluded that the Two Document Hypothesis left few, if any, problems about the growth of the Synoptic tradition unsolved. This is an example of an unsolved problem for which some additional explanatory hypothesis is required, if the Two Document Hypothesis is to be maintained as the general solution of the Synoptic Problem. And the fact that there is a need for such additional hypotheses means that there is at least a theoretical possibility of improving on the Two Document theory, if an alternative can be found which is more comprehensive and requires less qualification or supplementation. In this particular case the evidence points to the existence of pre-Marcian traditions, and so it would appear to give *prima facie* encouragement to those whose proposed solution of the Synoptic Problem does not entail Marcan priority; but whether their explanations will in the event prove more satisfactory or whether they will leave different and equally difficult problems unsolved will only be discovered through further study of the texts involved in the light of the different hypotheses considered possible.

## 2. *The Explanation of Mark's Editing*

It is to this that I turn next, though I cannot and do not intend to examine all the possible hypotheses. Instead I shall restrict myself to pointing out a few of the weaknesses of the traditional interpretation of the chapter and to describing very briefly how one alternative interpretation might prove fruitful.

First then to verses 10–12 of Mark 4. It is frequently claimed that the Marcan form of the saying about the purpose of parables is primitive, also that Matthew and Luke have in different ways tried to alleviate the harshness of the saying. But the evidence for the primitive Palestinian origin of the saying in Mark, as it is presented for example by Jeremias,<sup>57</sup> turns out to be really very flimsy. The final phrase *καὶ ἀφεθῇ αὐτοῖς* appears to reflect the Targum text of Isaiah 6:10;<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> The Targum in question is the Targum of Jonathan. For the text see J. F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah*, Oxford University Press (1949) 23.

The translation of the Targum is striking, since the verb used means 'forgive'

but nothing else in the saying is distinctively Targumic, despite Jeremias' arguments to the contrary.<sup>59</sup> To some even the occurrence of the one phrase may seem significant; but all it necessarily proves is that whoever was responsible for the present form of the saying was acquainted with the Targum,<sup>60</sup> and it is not difficult to see why an alternative to the LXX was used at this point, since the LXX's phrase 'and I will heal them' would hardly have made sense within the Marcan context.<sup>61</sup> Another supposed Semitism in Mark's form of the saying is the use of *γίνεται* in verse 11, 'To those outside in parables all

rather than 'heal'. It is in this and in the use of the impersonal passive form that Mark agrees with them against the MT and the LXX.

<sup>59</sup> Jeremias says: 'Whereas in the Hebrew text and the LXX Isa. 6:9a is couched in the 2nd person, i.e. in oratio recta, Mark 4:12a (*ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν*, etc.) and the Targum have the 3rd person. Moreover, only in the Targum have the participles *βλέποντες* and *ἀκούοντες* (Mark 4:12a) a participial equivalent (*ḥazan*, *šam*<sup>o</sup> 'in') (*op. cit.*, 15). These two arguments are remarkably unconvincing. (a) The fact that Mark like the Targum uses the 3rd person plural rather than the 2nd person, as do the MT and the LXX, might be significant if this were a formal quotation in Mark. But in all three Gospels the words are contained in a speech of Jesus, in which He contrasts 'you', to whom the mystery is given, and 'those outside', for whom everything is in parables. The Isaiah citation is introduced to refer to this second group, 'those outside', and so inevitably the 3rd person plural is used. No conclusions may be drawn from this about the text form being used. Furthermore, although it is true that both the MT and the LXX use the 2nd person in Is. 6:9, they both revert to the 3rd person in verse 10, to which part of Mark's verse 12 corresponds. (b) The argument from Mark's use of the participles *βλέποντες* and *ἀκούοντες* (which does not occur in the first English edition of Jeremias' work) falls down in two ways: i. The participles in the Targum are not equivalent to the participles in Mark. In the Targum the participles are in fact the main verbs (as often happens in Aramaic) and so they correspond to Mark's subjunctives; the equivalents of Mark's participles in the Targum are infinitive absolutes, *מבטל* and *מאזין*. ii. Jeremias' claim that the Hebrew and the LXX have no participles equivalent to those in Mark is only partially true, since the LXX does have the participle *βλέποντες*. It is true that it has no equivalent of *ἀκούοντες* (instead it has *ἀκοῇ ἀκούετε*); but since Mark for some reason has reversed the order of the verbs 'hear' 'see' in his version the reference to 'seeing' comes first, so that his first participle *βλέποντες* has an exact equivalent in the LXX's *βλέποντες βλέπετε*. Having used the one participle, it is not surprising that he goes on to use another, i.e. *ἀκούοντες*.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. A. Schlatter, *Markus Der Evangelist für die Griechen*, Calwer, Stuttgart, (1929) 99; A. Suhl, *op. cit.*, 147. C. C. Torrey, *Our Translated Gospels*, New York (1936) 11, recognizes the Targumism in the *μήποτε* clause; but he regards it as a misplaced addition to the original tradition.

<sup>61</sup> The third meaning given in H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford University Press, 1940<sup>o</sup>), for *γίγασθαι*, is 'of events, take place, come to pass, and in past tenses to be'. Of the examples given it is worth noting Plato Rep. 164A: 'Α μὲν τοίνυν, ἡν δ' ἐγὼ, ζώντι τῷ δικαίῳ παρὰ θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀθάλα τε καὶ μισθοὶ καὶ δῶρα γίγνεται πρὸς ἐκείνους τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς αὐτῇ παρελχέτο ἡ δικαιοσύνη, τοιαυτ' ἂν εἴη. 'Such then while he lives are the prizes, the wages, and the gifts that the just receives from gods and men in addition to those blessings which justice herself bestowed.' (Text and translation in *Plato the Republic* (Loeb ed.) Vol. 2, 490f. Ed. P. Shorey, London, 1956.)

things *happen*.' But on this it is enough to say that the usage does not seem impossible Greek,<sup>62</sup> and that in fact the last two words *πάντα γίνεται* ('all things happen') could quite possibly have been Mark's own way of completing the sense of the sentence which begins 'To those outside in parables'.<sup>63</sup>

Not only is the Marcan form of the saying not provably primitive;<sup>64</sup> but it is not obviously much harsher than the Matthean and Lucan forms either. Even if it was, this would not necessarily prove Mark's to be the older; but in fact both Matthew and Luke seem to agree with Mark that the giving of parables was in some sense a privation and punishment for those who did not receive the interpretation.<sup>65</sup>

So much then for two of the points supposedly in favour of

<sup>62</sup> Mark is quoting the Old Testament allusively; to make use of the LXX with its use of the 1st person he would have had to rephrase using an explicit quotation. Mark may also have preferred the Targum because it uses the verb 'forgive' and not the verb 'heal' in a metaphorical sense.

<sup>63</sup> The phrase *τὰ πάντα γίνεται* could have been chosen to balance the wording of the preceding clause with its perfect passive *τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται*. See on this our later discussion.

<sup>64</sup> Jeremias finds other Semitisms in these verses: he points to the parallelism of the Marcan saying; but it is doubtful if this need be Semitic or primitive. Then he regards Mark's *ἐκείνοις* as a 'redundant demonstrative'; but the same can be said about this. We agree, however, with Jeremias that *παραβολή* is used in the sense of the Hebrew/Aramaic *מַשְׁלָה/משל*; but we do not accept that this points to the primitive origin of the Marcan form of the saying.

<sup>65</sup> Luke is said to have softened Mark and to have produced a less esoteric version in four ways: (a) by altering the opening question; (b) by omitting reference to the privacy; (c) by the use of *τοῖς λοιποῖς* not *ἐκείνοις τοῖς ἕξω*; and (d) by leaving out the final *μήποτε* clause which is found in Mark. Only the last point seems at all substantial; and even this may be explained in other ways, e.g. as due to stylistic considerations. Luke might have been expected to revise his material much more thoroughly had he wished to eliminate the harshness of the Marcan version.

In Matthew we find essentially the same elements as in Mark: two groups, one of which has been given the mystery, the other of which has not; those in the second group receive parables only, those in the first receive also the interpretation. The reason for the first group receiving parables without interpretation is, according to Mark, 'so that they may not perceive, understand, turn, and be forgiven'. In Matthew the purpose of such parables is made clear in verse 12, 'whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him'. The parables have the role of 'taking away' from the people 'even what they have'. Since 'having' and 'not having' are defined in terms of 'hearing', 'seeing', and 'understanding' (verse 13), we have the same picture in Matthew as in Mark and Luke, where it is stated directly that the parabolic teaching is 'so that they may not perceive . . . understand'. As for Matthew's *οἱ*, it is not just a replacement of Mark's *ἐν* making the blindness of the people the cause and not the purpose of parables, since Matthew's whole phrasing is different from Mark's. The result of this rephrasing is that, whereas Mark describes the blindness as the purpose of parables, Matthew describes it as both cause and purpose: it is because they do not see that Jesus teaches in parables, so that they may see still less. This is no easier than Mark.



Marcan priority in this saying. On the other side there are two things which the generally accepted view does not account for very satisfactorily. The first is the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark in this saying. There are important agreements in the first phrase, 'To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom' (Matthew and Luke) versus Mark's 'To you the mystery has been given of the kingdom . . .';<sup>66</sup> and then there are further interesting resemblances between Matthew and Luke where Mark has the *ἵνα* clause, 'so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing may hear and not understand, lest they turn and it be forgiven them.' Not only have Matthew and Luke omitted the last *μήποτε* clause, but they have both simplified the wording of the first clause. Thus Luke has 'so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand', and Matthew has 'because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor understand'. If these last resemblances should be counted as agreements against Mark,<sup>67</sup> it seems impossible not to conclude that Luke and Matthew were both acquainted with a non-Marcan form of the saying.<sup>68</sup>

The next and obvious question provoked by that conclusion concerns the relationship of the Marcan and non-Marcan versions. The question is made slightly complicated by our ignorance of the original non-Marcan version. Is Matthew closer to it, or is Luke? Although the second possibility is not without its attractions,<sup>69</sup> the view that Matthew is closest to it

<sup>66</sup> The agreements of Matthew and Luke in the immediately preceding context (in verse 9 *ὁ ἔχων ὅρα* and in verse 10 *οἱ μαθηταὶ* and *ὁ δὲ ... εἶπεν*) are not demonstrably significant.

<sup>67</sup> It is possible that Matthew and Luke independently simplified Mark. But, although they do differ slightly from each other, their similarities are remarkable, especially as their versions appear less Septuagintal than Mark's. And since their agreement in the previous verse can hardly be regarded as coincidental, it is reasonable to suspect knowledge here also of a non-Marcan form of the saying.

<sup>68</sup> J. P. Brown, *JBL* 78 (1959) 215f., does not take account of these last resemblances, and to explain the agreements at the start of the saying he suggests that Matthew and Luke knew a revised version of Mark's Gospel, a version that still survives in the Caesarean mss tradition. It remains easier, however, to regard the Caesarean text as having been assimilated to the texts of Matthew and Luke than to suppose that at some very early date an editor made a revision of Mark, which became so well established that both Matthew and Luke happened to use it and not the older text, though this was still in circulation. Brown's theory not only fails to explain the similarities in the parallels to Mark's verse 12, but also leaves the plural *τὰ μυστήρια* unexplained.

<sup>69</sup> If Luke's was the original form, Mark added the words *τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι* to

seems simpler, since it is easier to explain Luke's version as a conflation of Mark and something like Matthew than it is to explain Matthew from Mark and Luke. I shall therefore proceed on this basis and comment on the comparison of Matthew and Mark.

It would be impossible for me to set out the detailed analysis of the structure of the saying in the two Gospels, which is a necessary part of such a comparison; but the results of the comparison can be simply stated: it is possible to hold that the Matthean pericope is a superbly edited amplification of the Marcan equivalent,<sup>70</sup> though this leaves certain things, such as the order of the verbs in Mark's verse 12,<sup>71</sup> unexplained. But the alternative view, which is that Mark has compressed and partially reworded something like the Matthean form of the saying, seems preferable. It accounts for the lack of logical parallelism between Mark's verse 11a 'To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been given', which describes the disciples' position of privilege, and verse 11b 'to those outside in parables all things happen',<sup>72</sup> which describes the preaching policy and practice of Jesus in His ministry.<sup>73</sup> It helps to account for the order of the verbs in the quotation of Isaiah 6, since Matthew's verse 13 is an allusion to Isaiah 6:10 not to the

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complete the phrase 'to those . . . in parables' and to balance the previous clause of the saying.

<sup>70</sup> The editing would have had to have been superb, since there is little or nothing in Matthew's text as it now stands to betray the fact that material from a number of different sources has been brought together in this section of his Gospel.

<sup>71</sup> Mark's allusion to Isaiah 6 resembles most closely Is. 6:9, except for the final *μήποτε* clause which is taken from Is. 6:10b. The jump from 6:9 to 6:10b is made easier for the editor (a) by the fact that he is using the LXX, which has *μήποτε ἰδῶσιν* in 6:10b where part of *βλέπειν* might have been expected, and (b) by the reversal of the order of the verbs 'hear' 'see' found in Is. 6:9. On this change of order Gnika, *op. cit.*, 26, comments that the idea of *seeing* salvation is strong in the Jewish thought-world; but it is doubtful if this explains Mark's text, which echoes Is. 6:9 strongly. It is notable also that Mark seems to stress the idea of hearing in this chapter (*e.g.* verse 3).

<sup>72</sup> The words 'to those in parables' are found in Matthew; 'all things happen' could be Mark's phrase.

<sup>73</sup> In Matthew verse 11 describes what has been granted by the divine providence to the disciples, on the one hand, and to the crowd, on the other. Then verse 13 spells out what this leads to practically in Jesus' ministry for the crowd (*i.e.* parabolic teaching); and verses 16-18 explain what it means for the disciples (*i.e.* interpretation of parables). In Mark verse 11a explains the providential will of God for the disciples; but 11b is not strictly parallel, since it describes in practical terms what the crowds receive from Jesus in His ministry. This lack of strict parallelism could be the result of his having compressed and abbreviated the fuller version of Matthew.

previous verse in Isaiah.<sup>74</sup> Where Mark has reworded Matthew, he has used expressions with which we are familiar in the Pauline Epistles,<sup>75</sup> and he has also conflated the Old Testament allusion to Isaiah 6:10 found in Matthew with the LXX of Isaiah 6:9, 10, thus producing the rather mixed-up form of quotation that we find in his Gospel. The advantage, then, of the view that the Matthean form of the saying is older than Mark's over the opposite hypothesis is that it explains relatively easily not only the differences between the two versions, but also some of the difficult features of the Marcan version. So much for the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark.

The second thing unexplained by the Two Document Hypothesis in Mark 4:10–13 is the awkwardness of the insertion of the saying. The way that the saying interrupts the natural sequence from the parable to the interpretation is scarcely explained on Jeremias' view, which is that Mark inserted the saying because of a catchword connection with verse 10.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Is. 6:9 has the order 'hear' 'see'; 6:10 has 'see' 'hear' 'understand'. But note, if Matthew modelled his verse 13 on Is. 6:10, he amplified it slightly by adding the participles *βλέποντες* and *ἀκούοντες*, perhaps under the influence of the previous verse of Isaiah.

<sup>75</sup> The singular of *τὸ μυστήριον* is much more frequent in Paul than the plural (contrast the DSS where the plural of the equivalent Hebrew word מִסְתָּרִים is more common). Paul's usage has affinities with that in Mark, and Cerfaux, *NTS* 2 (1955–6) 241, comments: 'μυστήριον au singulier a trop de parallèles dans Paul pour que nous ne soupçonnions pas Marc d'avoir subi une influence de celui-ci.' Cf. also J. Weiss, *TSK* 64 (1891) 301; J. A. Findlay, *Jesus and his Parables*, Religious Book Club, London (1950) 5. By itself the singular *μυστήριον* would not be significant; but it is followed by the phrase *τοῖς ἔξω*, which is an expression used four times in the Pauline Epistles to refer to unbelievers. Finally the expression *τὰ πάντα* is frequently, though not exclusively, paralleled in the Pauline corpus. Even though common vocabulary does not prove acquaintance, the occurrence of possible Pauline idiom at precisely those points where Mark differs from Matthew makes it reasonable to surmise that it may be a clue to the differences between Matthew and Mark, particularly as Mark's use of *ἐπιθυμία* in 4:19 may be similarly explained.

<sup>76</sup> *Op. cit.*, 18; also V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 256. If the original reading in verse 10 was *ἡρώτων . . . τὴν παραβολὴν* the verbal similarity to *ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται* is not particularly great.

W. Marxsen, *op. cit.*, 257f., also rejects Jeremias' view, and instead offers a redaction critical explanation. He claims that the saying and the preceding parable of the Sower are really concerned with the church's preaching. In the parable the seed that falls on the good ground and yields an enormous harvest is distinguished from that which falls on the path, the rock, or among thorns, and which produces no fruit. In the saying that follows these two responses are explained—those who respond have been blessed with supernatural illumination. Seen in this light the position of the saying makes sense. Mark's source had already revealed the different lot of those 'inside' and those 'outside' by reserving an interpretation for the disciples alone; Mark goes further: 'Innen hat man die "Interpretation" durch den Vater, der dieses μυστήριον . . . 'gibt', hat man also—durch den Geist—den Zugang zu dieses μυστήριον. Denen draussen begegnet

It is, however, explicable if Mark found a version of the Gospel tradition, such as Matthew's, in which the saying was firmly imbedded between the parable and the interpretation. If he was acquainted with it just as a floating logion, he might have accommodated it elsewhere in the chapter more comfortably; but he would not have felt free to do so, if he knew a tradition like Matthew.<sup>77</sup>

The two strands of the arguments here converge, since on the one hand the form of the Marcan saying is explicable as a compressed form of something like what we have in Matthew, and on the other hand the awkwardness of the insertion is intelligible if Mark was familiar with a tradition with the sequence of pericopes found in Matthew. Put together the two points add up to suggest that Mark's primary tradition had the parable of the Sower followed immediately by its interpre-

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alles *ἐν παραβολαῖς*; ihnen bleibt alles rätselhaft. Sie können die Verkündigung hören—und hören doch nicht. Derselbe Same wird gesät, der Erfolg des Säens ist ganz unterschiedlich' (pp. 268, 9). Marxsen thus deals with the difficulties in the Marcan sequence by denying that Mark wanted to write a historically coherent account and by arguing that the intrusive saying about the purpose of parables fits in with the theological ideas that the Evangelist is trying to express in the passage. There are at least three difficulties with Marxsen's view: (1) If the Evangelist's primary aim was to speak about the contemporary church situation (which we doubt), this would still not make probable the idea that he would have been oblivious to glaring inconsequences in the narrative sequence, since he does set out to express his ideas within a narrative framework. (2) There is very little, so far as I can see, to favour the view that the editor intended these verses as a statement about the church's preaching generally rather than as one about parables and about why only some received interpretation (the latter being the *prima facie* intention). A doctrinaire form critic might regard the second view as unacceptable, since it implies some historical interest on the writer's part; but there is every reason why the church of Mark's day should have been interested in the question of parables, if they knew them in the tradition. If, as appears to be the case, they knew a tradition of Jesus interpreting certain parables to the disciples apart from the crowd, then the question 'Why?' would naturally have arisen. Although no doubt Mark and his readers could and did draw conclusions from the saying about preaching in general, it is excessive subtlety to suppose that the primary reference of the logion is to such preaching. There is nothing to suggest that Mark was consciously carrying on the theme of the parable of the Sower, identifying 'those outside' with the first three types of soil; the link with the parable is much simpler: it is the first proper parable that Mark gives, and the saying concerns the purpose of parables. (3) In comparing verses 11, 12 to the parable of the Sower, Marxsen is in danger of ignoring the strongly marked fourfold structure of the parable and treating it instead as a simple contrast parable.

<sup>77</sup> The best alternative view is slightly different from those of Jeremias and Marxsen. If it is assumed that, although Mark knew the logion out of context, he took it to be an explanation of the phenomenon of parabolic teaching, then as he was about to launch into the giving of the interpretation of the first parable to the disciples, he may have added the logion in as a sort of preface to what follows.

tation, but that he may also have been acquainted with something like Matthew; as a result he inserted a compressed form of the Matthean pericope about the purpose of parables.

In the parable of the Mustard Seed we have our second editorial insertion. The references to the size of the seed when sown and to the size of the grown plant were added, and this led to the grammatical chaos to which I referred earlier. Matthew's version also has the size references; but apart from that, his is very close to the Lucan version,<sup>78</sup> so that it might almost be described as the Lucan version plus the size references. In Matthew and Mark, then, we have parallel insertions, and the usual view is that Matthew borrowed from Mark, his version being a conflation of the Marcan and Q versions.<sup>79</sup>

Once again there is no denying the possibility of the generally accepted view. But it should be noted first that, if Matthew was using Mark as his primary source, as is usually held, he has remarkably little that is demonstrably Marcan. He is supposed to have conflated Mark and Q; but he appears to have preferred Q almost every time. Thus in verse 31 he opens the parable with wording almost identical to that in Luke;<sup>80</sup> his *ἐσπείρεν ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ αὐτοῦ* is different, but need not reflect the influence of Mark. It could be the original wording of the tradition that Matthew and Luke have in common; but, even if it is not, Matthew could well have been responsible for the choice of words himself, since he uses the same expression earlier in the chapter.<sup>81</sup> In verse 32 the reference to the smallness is evidently parallel to that in Mark, as is the reference to the size of the grown plant; but the Lucan wording shows through in Matthew's *ἀνέξηθῃ*; and then the final sentence is very closely parallel in Matthew and Luke both in wording and order. It has been said by some that Matthew betrays his knowledge of Mark's version by using the present tense *γίνεται* in his verse 32 after beginning the parable with aorists in verse 31: he is accused of having abandoned the narrative style with which he started. But in fact

<sup>78</sup> The view that Luke here preserves a tradition independent of Mark's seems probable, not only in view of the different wording, but also in view of the position of the pericope in Luke's so-called 'Travel Narrative'.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. among others Streeter, *op. cit.*, 247.

<sup>80</sup> Luke, like Mark, introduces the parable with a double question, which is omitted in Matthew.

<sup>81</sup> 13:24, 27.

the change of tense need have nothing to do with Mark at all. It is quite possible that Matthew was responsible for it himself, the switch to the present tense following quite naturally after the addition of the explanatory size references. An attractive alternative view is that Matthew has faithfully reproduced the tenses of the version which he has in common with Luke,<sup>82</sup> and that Luke is the one who has made the alterations—for the sake of consistency. In this case, the change from aorist to present in Matthew would be parallel to the tense usage found in his parable of the Treasure<sup>83</sup> and should not be taken to indicate any abandonment of the narrative form.<sup>84</sup> It turns out that there is very little in Matthew's version of the parable to suggest knowledge of anything other than the version also attested in Luke. Almost the only thing that Matthew has in common with Mark and that has no sort of parallel in Luke is the μέν . . . δέ sentence comparing the size of the seed and the grown plant. In fact apart from this Matthew and Luke are probably as close to each other in this parable as they are in

<sup>82</sup> See A. Harnack's Q text in *Sayings of Jesus*, Williams & Norgate, London (1908) 27f.

<sup>83</sup> 13:44. N.B. the verbs ἐκρυψεν, ὑπάγει, πωλεῖ, ἀγοράζει.

<sup>84</sup> Anyone coming to Matthew's version not knowing Mark would expect after the opening, 'The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field . . .', to find next a description of what happened to the seed. A study of the preceding parable of the Tares and the following parable of the Leaven would lead one to expect this, as well as the natural sense. Instead an explanatory relative clause is found, which has two parts balanced with μέν and δέ, 'which is smaller than all seeds; but when grown is bigger than all vegetables'; and we are still left waiting for the conclusion of the matter. Thus when we come to the next phrase καὶ γίνεται δένδρον we should naturally expect it to be the continuation or completion of the story, the sequence of which has been interrupted. There would be little difficulty in this if an aorist ἐγένετο was read; but because a present tense is found, it is easy to assume that the γίνεται is part of the preceding relative clause. But there is no good reason why Matthew, who elsewhere uses the narrative style consistently in the parables of the kingdom, should be accused of forgetting what he was doing here, when it is quite possible to take γίνεται as a sort of historic present continuing the narrative started in ὃν λαβὼν ἐσπείρεν. In the context of the whole parable this is the natural and logical way to take καὶ γίνεται δένδρον. It is not so satisfactory to take it as a continuation of the double relative clause, which is an alternative possibility, since then it would upset the parallelism of the two clauses, and, furthermore, it would fit the sense poorly, since the relative clause contrasts the state of the seed when sown and the state of the grown plant; 'becoming a tree' (γίνεται δένδρον) is not the state of the mustard seed when it is grown, and so it is not parallel to μείζον . . . ἐστίν. We conclude, therefore, that the double relative clause should be viewed as if in parentheses, and the sequence then runs: 'the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field . . . and it became a tree.' Matthew has not abandoned the narrative form, but has obscured it by his insertion.

the parable of the Leaven that follows.<sup>85</sup> This agreement with Luke rather than Mark is rather surprising if Matthew was using Mark as his main source at this point.

But if the evidence for Matthew's knowledge of Mark is so slender, does the hypothesis that Mark knew Matthew have anything to commend it? Could it be that Matthew was the first to insert the explanation about the smallness of the Mustard Seed and the size of the 'tree' and that Mark copied it from Matthew? There is one thing that strongly favours this idea, namely that it would help to explain the awkwardness of Mark's version. Although in textual criticism the more difficult reading is usually to be preferred, it cannot be taken for granted that the same rule will necessarily apply in literary critical questions of the sort being considered; and in this case the difficulty of Mark's text needs explaining. The most probable explanation, as I said earlier, is that it was the insertion of the size references that got him into difficulty. But even this by itself is not a fully satisfying explanation. Why was he unable to fit the size references in more elegantly, if he was responsible? Perhaps it was a last minute idea of his, rather poorly executed. But the simpler answer proposed by Lohmeyer is that Mark was conflating two versions of the parable: trying to mix two forms of a story is liable to land an editor in trouble.<sup>86</sup> My proposed explanation in this case is as follows: Mark was

<sup>85</sup> At a first glance Matthew appears to agree almost word for word with Luke's version of the Leaven, except for the opening question, but to diverge quite considerably in the Mustard Seed. This has naturally been taken to support the view that Matthew had two versions of the parable of the Mustard Seed (*i.e.* Mark and Q), which he conflated together, but only one of the Leaven (*i.e.* Q), which he transmitted without much alteration. But if the argument presented above is correct, the two Gospels are much closer in the Mustard Seed than at first sight appears.

<sup>86</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (ed. W. Schmauch) Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1962) 216. Lohmeyer explains the history of the traditions as follows:

Step 1. (A) + (B) = Lk.

Step 2.

Mt.

Step 3.

Mk.

Form A describes the 'mustard seed, which is smaller than all seeds; but when it grows, it is larger than all shrubs, so that the birds of heaven come . . .'. Form B resembles the parable of the Leaven: 'A man took a mustard seed, And threw it in his garden, And it grew and became a tree, And the birds of heaven dwelt in its branches.' Lohmeyer's suggested diagram needs some modification, since, although Mark seems to have been working with a text similar in content to that of Luke, there is little that suggests his knowledge of an identical Greek text

B





'and makes larger branches'. Finally, having referred to the branches once, he doesn't refer to the birds as in the tree's branches, as do Matthew and Luke; but using a phrase from Ezekiel 17 he speaks of them lodging 'under its shade'.

My argument has inevitably been compressed; but if it is properly appreciated, its strength is that it explains both the dislocations in Mark and also the differences between the wording of Mark and that of the Matthew/Luke version, which are not very well explained in terms of the authors' difference of theological outlook and intention.<sup>89</sup> If the argument is correct, this is a second point in the chapter where it helps to postulate Marcan acquaintance with the Matthean tradition.

The third place where we found evidence of editorial activity in Mark's text was in his verses 33 and 34; and in view of the conclusions reached about the two previous places where such evidence was found it seems reasonable to see whether the hypothesis that Mark knew Matthew illuminates these verses as well. As it turns out, it seems again to have much to recommend it: Mark may be thought to have taken over the formula with which Matthew ends the section in his chapter of parables addressed to the crowd,<sup>90</sup> and to have adapted it as

<sup>89</sup> The attempts to differentiate between the Q parable as a parable of growth and the Marcan parable as a contrast parable have, in my view, been unsuccessful. The contrast made explicit in Mark is also implied in Luke, the mustard seed being proverbially minute and therefore a contrast to the 'tree' it grows into. In neither version is the emphasis on the growth process; but it would be unwise to conclude from this that the idea of 'growth' is of no importance whatsoever to the parable (in either version). It is important to both versions that it is the same thing which is at one time minute and at another time enormous. (Cf. also E. Percy, *Die Botschaft Jesu*, C. W. K. Gleerup, Lund (1953) 208.)

<sup>90</sup> Some scholars have argued that Matthew betrays his knowledge of Mark by placing the formula in the middle of his chapter of parables, when it would more naturally come at the end, and also by separating the parable of the Tares from its interpretation. It is against both these arguments that they make the editor of Matthew a man of contradictions: at one moment he is supposed to have felt bound by Mark his main source with the result that he unnaturally separates the parable of the Tares from its interpretation and awkwardly has a concluding formula before his conclusion; at another moment he is supposed to have been free with his source, transforming the saying about the purpose of parables with great skill, replacing the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly with his own parable of the Tares, adding in the parable of the Leaven, which is not found in Mark. But in fact there is no need to accuse Matthew of such contradictoriness, since the supposed unnaturalness of Matthew's version seems more imaginary than real; and the idea that it is here probably results from certain scholars having read Matthew in the light of Mark and not as a Gospel in its own right. The formula in Matthew's verse 34 has a perfectly intelligible role in its present position: it is not a concluding formula to the whole parable chapter, but it marks the end of

the conclusion for the whole of his parable discourse. As Mark did not share Matthew's keen interest in the fulfilment of prophecy, his failure to reproduce Matthew's verse 35 is only to be expected; and his other alterations are also easy enough to appreciate. Thus in verse 33 his reference to 'many such parables' may, as some have thought, be an indirect acknowledgment by Mark of his failure to reproduce the whole of the Matthean discourse, as may also be the case with his expression at the start of the chapter where he says 'He taught them many things in parables, and he said to them in his teaching'.<sup>91</sup> Mark continues verse 33 with the words 'he spoke to them the word', a typical piece of Marcan phraseology,<sup>92</sup> and then with 'as they were able to hear', which spoils the parallelism found in Matthew but which is again well explained if Marcan.<sup>93</sup> Verse 34a is more or less as in Matthew; but then Mark tacks on in 34b a general reference to the interpretation of parables being given to the disciples; this can be taken as a further possible indicator of his knowledge of the Matthean tradition, since this has the interpretation of the parable of the Tares precisely at this point.<sup>94</sup> The plausibility of this interpretation of the Synoptic relationship in this final section of the Marcan parable chapter should be clear enough. The evidence does not amount to proof and the opposite view is not so far-fetched as to be unthinkable; but I think I have shown that an alternative to the view usually advocated as the explanation of these verses makes good sense and deserves fair consideration.

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the first section of that chapter and the transition from the parables that are addressed to the crowd to those addressed to the disciples. As for the separation of the parable of the Tares and its interpretation, it is not at all obvious that it is unnatural or that it would have been better editing to keep the parable and its interpretation together.

<sup>91</sup> See J. Chapman, *op. cit.*, 5f. A parallel to 4:2 is to be found in 12:38 which Chapman explains in the same way. (Cf. also W. Bussmann, *Synoptische Studien*, Halle (Saale) (1925 +) Vol. 1, 17; but contrast his revised view in Vol. 2, 84.)

<sup>92</sup> Cf. 2:2; 8:32; also Bussmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 96; E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1967) 59. On the basis of the expression Schweizer rejects the view that verses 33, 34a are pre-Marcan.

<sup>93</sup> 'Hearing' is a dominant theme particularly in Mark's version of the chapter: he begins the words of Jesus in verse 3 with *ἀκούετε*; in verses 23, 24 the phrases *ἐλ-τις ἐχει ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκούειν* and *βλέπετε τί ἀκούετε* follow hard on each other. *δύνασθαι* is a word used more frequently by Mark than Matthew and Luke (note the use of it in Mark's version of the Mustard Seed (verse 32) where Matthew has the harder *ἐλθεῖν*). *καθώς* is used considerably more by Mark than by Matthew though considerably less than by Luke.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Chapman, *op. cit.*, 6.

### 3. Conclusion

We have completed our very quick look at the three places in Mark chapter 4 where the traditions appear to have undergone editorial modifications of some sort or other; and in each the plausibility of a different hypothesis to that generally accepted today as the solution to the Synoptic Problem has been noted. We have not in these passages exhausted the evidence that seems to point to the greater antiquity of the Matthean version of the parable chapter. Perhaps more convincing than any of the evidence yet put forward is that to be found in the three versions of the parable of the Sower and its interpretation. But that cannot be considered fully in this paper.<sup>95</sup> It has been one of the unsatisfactory things about the latter half of this present study that I have attempted to compress a long and complex argument into comparatively few words. Inevitably much that might have been said has been omitted. But it is my hope, none the less, that despite the omissions and compressions sufficient has been said to illustrate the contention, for which I argued on general grounds in the first half of the paper, that the Two Document Hypothesis is not as certain as many have made out. Whether the particular thesis for which I have argued (involving Matthean priority) will stand the test of time, or whether Synoptic scholars will continue to find something like the Two Document Hypothesis the most satisfactory solution of the Synoptic Problem, or whether some quite different theory, such as that recently

<sup>95</sup> In a nutshell my conclusions about the interpretation of the Sower (which are more interesting than those about the parable) are as follows: the earliest form of the interpretation probably began with approximately these words—'That which was sown by the path, this is the man who hears the word of the kingdom; and the devil comes and removes the word from his heart.' Matthew's present wording is closest to it, but the Evangelist has turned the verse around in order to bring the reference to 'hearing the word' to the start of the sentence. Mark has the correct order; but he, followed by Luke, adds at the opening of the interpretation a phrase identifying the seed with the word, and this is the cause of the ungainliness and repetitiveness that are so obvious at the start of Mark's interpretation. After the opening verse, Matthew's version of the interpretation is to be regarded as nearest to the original form, characterized as it is by a regular *casus pendens* construction; Mark's is a rather freer version (probably a different translation) of the same original, but may well have been influenced by the Greek of our Matthew. (Mark's version may, however, be nearest the original wording in the final phrase of the parable.) (See the author's thesis for a detailed exposition of the above view.)

proposed by R. L. Lindsey,<sup>96</sup> will gain acceptance, I am unable to predict confidently; but I believe sincerely that the Synoptic Problem needs a serious revisitation and that unpopular solutions should not be dismissed too quickly. I trust that this paper may spur others to reopen the question in their own minds and to look again at the evidence.

<sup>96</sup> Lindsey's view is set out in the introduction to his *Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, Jerusalem (1969). But see also *NovT* 6 (1963) 239–263. Lindsey's book is not without interest; but it leaves certain questions unanswered. *E.g.* (1) he does not discuss the view that Luke's Hebraic style is a deliberate affectation on Luke's part. (2) He does not discuss differentiating between Hebraisms and Aramaisms. His idea of Mark as a 'word-magician' will not be readily accepted.