

*Christology and the Synoptic Problem: An Argument for Markan Priority*, by Peter M. Head. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 94, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xvii + 337.\*

Is there a Synoptic problem? Despite Eta Linnemann's recent claims to the contrary, scholarship on the relationships among Matthew, Mark, and Luke continues to pour from the presses unabated. The present book, a revision of the author's doctoral dissertation at the University of Cambridge, England, makes a major contribution to the ongoing debate about the Synoptic problem. Dismissing views such as Linnemann's (favoring the Synoptics' literary independence) at the outset as implausible, contending that "the common wording in Greek, extending even to 'redactional links,' as well as the common order and selection of material in the Synoptic Gospels, militates against purely nonliterary approaches" (p. 7), Head devotes his work to adjudicating between two major views: Markan priority (the notion that Mark's Gospel was the first to be written, advocated by the "two- or four-source hypothesis") and Matthean priority (as asserted by advocates of the "Griesbach" or "two-Gospel hypothesis"). Since very few advocate Lukan priority, Head's discussion focuses on comparing Matthew and Mark.

Also at the very outset, Head shows conclusively that the charge leveled by William Farmer, an ardent proponent of the "Griesbach hypothesis," that British scholars followed their German counterparts uncritically in favoring Markan priority, is false (p. 18). Thus he has cleared the way for his own investigation: there is some kind of literary relationship between the Synoptics, and Markan priority is, and has been, the most frequently held view for the last century and a half, not merely on the basis of political pressure or prejudice (as Farmer's "conspiracy theory" holds) but at least in part because of the force of evidence. As the subtitle of his work indicates, Head's own research supports Markan priority. However, the author arrives at this conclusion by a different route than the one usually taken. Rather than comparing the respective chronological arrangements found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke or engaging in general source or redaction-critical investigations, Head focuses on the Christological outlooks of the Synoptists. What he finds is that differences between Matthew and Mark are much better accounted for by the notion of Markan priority than by the theory that Matthew was written first.

A case in point is Matthew's and Mark's use of the terms "teacher" and "Lord" for Jesus. Of these two terms, "teacher" occurs eleven times in Matthew and twelve times in Mark, while "Lord" is found twenty-seven times in Matthew but only seven times in Mark. The terms "Son of God" and "Son of Man" likewise are used more frequently in Matthew than in Mark (nine vs. four references to "Son of God," thirty vs. fourteen references to "Son of Man"). This seems to suggest that Mark's Christology presents Jesus primarily as teacher and Son of Man, while Matthew portrays him more explicitly as Lord and Son of God (see also "Son of David," which is found nine times in Matthew but only four times in Mark). Regarding the use of "teacher" in the Synoptics, Head points out that, while Luke and Mark both feature the address on the lips of a variety of personages, Matthew restricts the use of the vocative *didaskale* ("teacher") to the Jewish leaders (8:19; 12:38; 22:16, 24, 36) and the Rich Young Ruler (19:16), while the vocative *kurie* ("Lord") occurs in sixteen places used by disciples and other Luke sympathizers. Mark, on the other hand, has only a single instance of the vocative of the

*kurie* (on the lips of the Syrophenician woman, 7:28 // Matt. 15:27) and uses *kurios* only seven times compared with Matthew's twenty-seven and Luke's forty-one. Head observes that the instances of the term "Lord" in Matthean and Markan *narrative sections* are quite similar; the major difference pertains to their usage of "Lord" as an address for Jesus (vocative use). The whole issue boils down to this: if Mark wrote first and Matthew used Mark, it makes perfect sense for Matthew to change consistently various Markan vocatives with reference to Jesus to "Lord" in order to streamline his presentation along the lines of the early Christian confession "Jesus is Lord." But why, under the assumption of Matthean priority, would Mark, using Matthew, "diversify" Matthew's references to Jesus as Lord, replacing them with a wide variety of (lesser) terms? As Head puts it, "Why would a Christian writer, who obviously accepts that Jesus is Lord, and values and even works with the idea, relatively systematically omit the vocative *kurie* in favour of other titles, and yet not use a consistent alternative?" (pp. 169-70). According to Head, there does not seem to be any plausible answer to this question.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the author's many other findings that support the notion of Markan priority; a synopsis of the major conclusions of this work must suffice. Head states the implications of his research in no uncertain terms: "In no single passage or aspect of our investigation did the Griesbach hypothesis emerge as preferable to the two-source hypothesis in terms of the coherence and plausibility of the redactional activity which the hypothesis requires" (p. 260). However, the author's support of Markan priority does not mean that he endorses the conventional argument for it. To the contrary: Head contends that "the traditional" Christological argument for Markan priority is fatally flawed and unable to support on its own the priority of Mark in relation to Matthew" (p. 259). Nevertheless, "The data we have surveyed provide little encouragement for modern defenders of the Griesbach hypothesis" (p. 260). Head quotes K. Lachmann, who in the nineteenth century described Griesbach-Mark "as a bungling dilettante, unsure of his way, borne hither and thither between Matthew's and Luke's Gospels by boredom, desire, carelessness, folly or design." C. G. Wilke went even farther, charging that Griesbach-Mark "was not an abbreviator, nor an epitomator, nor even an excerpter, but was rather a castrator of the sources, how else could one designate the mutilator of secure sentences and the confusion of that which is mutilated?" (p. 260). While Head does not agree with the method used by these early scholars favoring Markan priority, he concurs with their conclusion: Mark was written first, then Matthew.

It remains to be seen whether Head's arguments prove to be conclusive. But the ball is now clearly in the court of the proponents of Matthean priority. Adherents of the Griesbach hypothesis must formulate a response to Head's Christological case for Markan priority and produce an alternative explanation that is more plausible than that advanced by the present author.

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