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## Review: The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem

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**Goodacre, Mark S.**

***The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem***

Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002. Pp. x + 228, Paperback, \$30.00, ISBN 1563383349.

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This volume represents the views of Mark Goodacre regarding a solution to the Synoptic Problem that accepts the priority of Mark but finds little use for hypothetical Q materials. As such, *The Case Against Q* combines previously published articles and unique material into an argument for Luke's use of Matthew and against the existence of Q. Goodacre leans heavily on the theories of Austin Farrer and Michael Goulder, while at the same time bringing a fresh application of postmodern critical methodologies to the study of the Synoptic Gospels. Goodacre acknowledges from the start "I have tried but have found myself unable to be persuaded that there ever was such a document" as Q (p. vii.), and he spends some 189 pages elucidating the reasons for his "Q skepticism." Impressively navigating the challenging realm of Synoptic studies, Goodacre offers a different reading of the Synoptics that essentially comprises his obituary for the hypothetical source Q. Although many Q supporters will no doubt find his arguments unpersuasive in some places, Goodacre nonetheless offers a refreshing reading of the Synoptics that may well breathe new life and excitement into a field that sometimes seems stuck in a quagmire of consensus. If *The Case Against Q* does nothing else, it certainly challenges the status quo in Synoptic studies.

Goodacre divides his book into nine chapters with an epilogue. Chapters 1 and 2 cover material that is essentially favorable to an argument for the existence of Q. Chapter 1 deals with the celebrity status of the hypothetical Q document. Here Goodacre expresses the potential first impressions of students as they come into contact with theories regarding Q. Those students who get their primary introduction to Synoptic studies through the text of an introductory NT class may be led to assume that the existence of Q is a foregone conclusion. Goodacre notes that the sheer weight of

scholarly consensus and the apparent lack of a credible attack on that consensus could cause students to conclude that Q is indeed an actual existing source for Matthew and Luke. Chapter 2 then focuses on the priority of Mark in Synoptic studies and scholarly attempts to discredit that theory. Utilizing scholarly debates on the order, dates, and possible editorial relationships of the Synoptics, Goodacre presents a concise argument in favor of Markan Priority. In fact, Goodacre's view of the relationship between the Synoptics necessitates his acceptance of Markan priority. This chapter offers a helpful synopsis of views on Markan priority and, as such, should cause little controversy.

Chapters 3 and 4 form a sort of introduction to the obituary for Q found in later chapters. Chapter 3 represents in some way the first nail in Q's coffin, as Goodacre gives a critical reading of Q theories by examining certain problems inherent within them. Goodacre identifies negative and positive arguments in favor of the existence of Q. The negative arguments focus on reasons that seem to indicate that Luke did not use Matthew, while the positive arguments emphasize the unique character of Q and "the plausibility of redaction critical studies that assume Q" (p. 46). In both the positive and negative cases, Goodacre presents intriguing arguments against the conclusions of those who accept the existence of Q as the only logical explanation for differences between Luke and Matthew in the double tradition. In doing so, Goodacre argues that many Q theorists have ignored Luke's creativity in a quest to find a "primitive" source to explain the differences between Luke and Matthew. Matthew's creativity is rarely doubted, while Luke's creativity is questioned or equated with his reliance on Q. Goodacre also notes that the distinctive character of Q results from a type of circular reasoning; namely, Luke would not have eliminated some of Matthew's creative contributions, so if Luke differs from Matthew in this material, it must be because he has access to other more primitive materials. This perspective, according to Goodacre, fails to take into account Luke's editorial creativity and ignores instances where Luke apparently agrees with Matthew against Mark in some triple tradition materials. In other words, some Q theorists are so intent on finding Q in Luke that they neglect to see where Luke may well have used Matthew.

In ch. 4 Goodacre earnestly attacks the existence of Q by focusing on the redaction of Luke's gospel and the appearances of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and Luke. The introduction of the Sermon on the Mount here establishes the primary battleground upon which Goodacre will wage his war against Q. In this section, Goodacre focuses on the argument from Lukan order that appears to lend credence to the existence of Q. Acknowledging that some Q theorists see Matthew's order as "artistically superior" to Luke's, Goodacre wonders if such a value judgment is legitimate (pp. 85-86). He proceeds to show how the use of both narrative and redaction critical methods could lead to the conclusion that Matthew and Luke were equally "artistic." After discussing the ways in which Luke rearranges the material found in Mark, Goodacre considers that Luke may have handled Matthew in the same way. Not relying too heavily on either source, Luke shows an impressive urge to creatively rework materials to emphasize his own concerns. Goodacre concludes that an argument against Luke's use of Matthew based on order is not completely plausible. Another nail has been

hammered into the coffin of Q as Goodacre furthers his view that Luke needed only Mark and Matthew to arrive at his distinctive Gospel.

Chapters 5 and 6 apply narrative and redaction critical methodologies to an examination of the Sermon on the Mount in Luke. Chapter 5 looks at how narrative critical techniques may unlock the logic behind Luke's presentation of the Sermon on the Mount, while ch. 6 offers a fresh attempt to bring current applications of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in movies about Jesus as a way of examining how Luke may have redacted the Sermon to suit his own "cinematic" purposes. Chapter 5 represents the scholarly "meat" of Goodacre's argument, and in it he clearly shows a strong grasp of the narrative and source critical problems in reading Luke's Sermon on the Plain in comparison to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. While some may argue with Goodacre's evidence or methods, undoubtedly most will agree with his conclusion that Luke is almost as skilled and creative a writer as Matthew. Goodacre argues that the differences between Matthew and Luke may well result from Luke's rewriting of some of Matthew's materials. Chapter 6 then acts as a modern example of how someone may rewrite the Sermon on the Mount in order to adapt it to a specific audience. Here Goodacre uses the examples of several films of Jesus' life to show that even modern producers rewrite some of the Sermon on the Mount to make it relevant to their audience. This chapter is perhaps the weakest in Goodacre's argument, while at the same time it includes some of the most interesting material. The analogy between Luke and modern producers is not exact (as Goodacre readily acknowledges), but the similarity in treatment of the material raises some interesting questions as well as some fascinating possibilities for future studies.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the first beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount ("blessed are the poor") and on the agreements between Matthew and Luke. Chapter 7 examines the source-critical problems and conclusions regarding the differences between Matthew and Luke on the issue of the blessing of the poor. Noting Luke's focus on those who were deemed socially unacceptable in Jesus' ministry, Goodacre argues that Luke's use of "eschatological reversal" practically required him to redact Matthew's more spiritual beatitude into an eschatological pronouncement against the rich. Introducing a possible parallel to Qumran materials (*IQM* 14.7), Goodacre argues that Matthew's beatitude may well be the earliest of the two, representing not a "spiritualizing" of the blessing, but a description of the true disciples of Jesus as those who are "humble/afflicted in spirit" (pp. 145-146). Although many will not agree with Goodacre's conclusion, his narrative critical reading of the evidence supports his insistence on Lukan creativity. Chapter 8 then shines a critical spotlight on the agreements between Matthew and Luke as evidence that Luke relied more on Matthew than on the alleged document Q. Using parallel columns, Goodacre focuses primarily on the minor agreements in an attempt to show how these Gospels are similar. While he acknowledges that some will see the "minor" agreements as "minor" arguments in favor of Luke's use of Matthew, Goodacre also reminds us that these agreements actually show that Luke sometimes "includes Matthew's substantive additions to Mark" (p. 163). Goodacre concludes, "[T]he minor agreements show that Luke knew Matthew, and

Lukan knowledge of Matthew compromises the premise of the Q theory, that Luke and Matthew were independent of one another” (p. 168). The skill (and zeal) with which Goodacre presents his evidence seem particularly convincing, but this chapter will no doubt cause a lot of discussion among Q theorists and skeptics.

Chapter 9 effectively closes the coffin on Q by showing how different the hypothetical source Q is from its supposed closest relative, the Gospel of Thomas. Here Goodacre focuses on the presence of narrative sequences in Q that are relatively absent in the Gospel of Thomas. He argues that the logic of Thomas practically rules out the presence of narrative sequences, while Q (as reconstructed by scholars) resembles more a “narrative Gospel” than a “sayings Gospel.” The Gospel of Thomas, emphasizing the power of Christ’s words to produce spiritual transformation, places its spotlight directly on the esoteric teachings of Jesus rather than on his deeds. On the other hand, by including such details as Jesus’ baptism and his experiences with John the Baptist, Q reveals a narrative sequence that points forward to future events and reads like a geographical itinerary of Jesus’ ministry. Such details would be absent from a true “sayings Gospel” according to Goodacre’s reading of Thomas. When Thomas and Q are placed side by side, they do not appear to be from the same family. Finally, Goodacre closes with an epilogue that reads like a eulogy for Q. Here Goodacre properly lays Q to rest and offers his qualified obituary for the hypothetical source. It remains to be seen whether or not the community of scholars will agree with the sounding of Q’s death knell, but anyone who reads this work will no doubt concede that Mark Goodacre offers some intriguing and refreshing arguments in favor of doing away with Q. Although some may question his conclusions, the fact remains that Goodacre’s work offers a fresh breath to Synoptic studies. His application of narrative critical methodologies and his interaction with modern cinematic views of Jesus provide an ample amount of interesting material to engage. While including some technical language, his book is still fairly easy to read and his arguments are logically presented. This book would offer great material for a seminar on Q and the Synoptic Problem, while serious students of the Synoptic Gospels will find this book both challenging and useful.