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## **Evidence to Support the Farrer Theory**

### ***The Synoptic Puzzle***

Analysis of parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels yields the following data:

- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
- Some parallel material is found in Matthew and Mark but not Luke.
- A small amount of parallel material is found in Luke and Mark but not Matthew.

The question of how to explain these relationships is called the “Synoptic Puzzle” (or the “Synoptic Problem”).

### ***The Farrer Theory***

- Mark was written first.
- Matthew was written second, using Mark as a source.
- Luke was written third, using Matthew and Mark as sources.

The following points are often cited by supporters of the Farrer Theory as evidence for the validity of that hypothesis.

*Evidence That Matthew and Luke Used Mark as a Source*

The significant overlap of material between Mark and the other two Gospels suggests either (1) Mark used Matthew and/or Luke as a source, or (2) both Matthew and Luke used Mark. The latter seems more likely for these reasons:

- Omission of Markan material from Matthew and Luke is more explicable than omission of Matthean and Lukan material from Mark.

Matthew and Luke may omit Mark's reference to being "salted with fire" (Mark 9:49) because the expression is not easy to understand, or they may omit Mark's story of the fleeing young man (14:15) because it seems irrelevant. But why would Mark omit the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, or the story of the good Samaritan, much less stories of Jesus's birth or of his resurrection appearances?

- Divergences in Matthew and Luke from the sequence of material in Mark are more explicable than would be divergences in Mark from the sequence of material in Matthew or Luke.

Miracles scattered throughout the first half of Mark are gathered together in Matthew 8–9 to provide a topical "miracle section" of the Gospel comparable to the

preceding “teaching section” in Matthew 5–7; the story of Jesus’s rejection in Nazareth in Mark 6:1–6 is moved forward in Luke (4:16–30) because a hometown story makes logical sense before stories of his ministry elsewhere and because the story introduces the rejection of Jesus as a programmatic theme to be developed in the narratives of the ministry that follow. If we were to assume that Mark was copying from Matthew or Luke, the rationale for his altering their sequence of such events would be difficult to comprehend.

- Minor differences of language or fact are better understood as Matthean or Lukan improvements of Mark rather than as Markan corruptions of Matthew and Luke.

Greek syntax and grammar is more colloquial in Mark and more refined in both Matthew and Luke; Herod is incorrectly called a king in Mark 6:4 but, correctly, called a tetrarch in Matthew 14:1.

- Numerous inconsistencies in Matthew and Luke are more explicable on the premise that they use Mark as a source than they would be otherwise.

Matthew actually does call Herod a king in 14:9 but a tetrarch everywhere else because at 14:9 he is following Mark (6:26) and neglected (this time) to correct his source; Luke 4:23 speaks of miracles in Capernaum that haven’t

happened yet (cf. Luke 4:31–37) because Luke bases the story in 4:16–30 on Mark 6:1–6, which in Mark’s Gospel follows the account of the Capernaum miracles (Mark 1:21–28; 2:1–12).

*Evidence That Matthew and Luke Were Not Produced Independently of Each Other*

Matthew and Luke contain a large amount of material in common that is not found in Mark. This implies that (1) Matthew used Luke as a source; (2) Luke used Matthew as a source (the view preferred by this theory); or (3) both Matthew and Luke used some other source. The third alternative (preferred by proponents of the Two-Source Hypothesis, who call the other source “Q”) posits that Matthew and Luke were produced independently of each other (i.e., neither Matthew nor Luke had a copy of the other author’s work).

Proponents of the Farrer Theory hold that this is unlikely for the following reasons:

- There is no mention of any such source in church tradition and no evidence of its existence—it remains a purely hypothetical construct. The simplest, default solution to the Synoptic Puzzle should be to explain parallels without recourse to a hypothetical document for which there is no external evidence.
- Matthew and Luke often agree with each other against Mark in passages common to all three Gospels.

For example, with regard to the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32), both Matthew and Luke contain the words “a person having taken it,” “becomes a tree,” and “branches” (Matt. 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19), although those words are not found in Mark. Likewise, in the account of Jesus’s abuse by soldiers, both Matthew and Luke have the soldiers ask Jesus, “Who is it that struck you?” (Matt. 26:68; Luke 22:64), words not found in the Markan parallel (Mark 14:65).

Presumably, these passages would not have been found in Q (even scholars who believe there was a Q source do not believe it contained these particular stories). These minor agreements could all be explained if we assume that Matthew used Mark but sometimes made minor changes to the text, and then Luke used both Mark and Matthew, sometimes sticking to Mark’s text and other times accepting the changes Matthew had made. (Hypothetically, they could also be explained if Luke used only Mark, and then Matthew used Mark and Luke—but see the next section.)

### *Evidence That Luke Used Matthew (Rather Than the Other Way Around)*

- Luke explicitly says in the prologue of his Gospels that “others” (plural) have already written accounts of Jesus. This implies that he had at least two sources for the life and

teaching of Jesus at his disposal. Matthew makes no such comment.

- Luke's editorial changes to what he would have found in Matthew's Gospel are held to be more explicable than the changes Matthew would have had to make, supposedly, in Lukan material if the situation were reversed.

For example, Luke can be understood to have split up the long teaching sections found in Matthew's five great discourses and redistributed that material throughout his narrative; this provides the story with a more linear flow and also serves his interest in presenting much of Jesus's teaching with the context of a journey. It seems unlikely, however, that Matthew would have omitted many stories found only in Luke if he had known them (e.g., the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14, which would fit perfectly with Matthew's frequent denunciation of Pharisees).