

Pahl, Michael W. Review of Matthew C. Williams, *Two Gospels from One: A Comprehensive Text-Critical Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels*. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (2007): 392-394.

[p. 392]

Two Gospels from One: A Comprehensive Text-Critical Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels. By Matthew C. Williams. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006, 256 pp., \$21.99 paper.

In *Two Gospels from One*, Matthew Williams's aim is straightforward: to examine "the so-called text-critical (or linguistic) argument for the Synoptic Problem, which says that Matthew improved the language and style of Mark's gospel and is, therefore, the

[p. 393]

later gospel" (p. 11). The result of this examination is a good case for Markan priority, even if there are some niggling difficulties with the book and its argument.

Williams opens his study with an introduction to linguistic and text-critical approaches to the Synoptic problem (chap. 1). Williams appropriately highlights B. H. Streeter's formulation of this linguistic argument for Markan priority, following this up with a survey of major studies on the argument since Streeter. Then, because Williams proposes to use text-critical principles to approach the linguistic argument, he provides a chapter survey of the history of textual criticism and its criteria for discerning between primary and secondary readings of a text (chap. 2). These first two chapters establish Williams's general approach and specific methodology: he is

focusing solely on the linguistic argument for Markan priority as compared with Matthew, and he is testing this argument by applying what are generally agreed to be the most reliable principles of textual criticism for distinguishing primary from secondary readings.

Williams begins the heart of his argument by examining Mark's textual apparatus for approximately 27 percent of Mark's Gospel (chap. 3), using the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament as the base text and considering the major variants as scribal changes to Mark's Gospel. This is not done uncritically, but with a recognition throughout that the NA 27th may not always reflect the "original text" of Mark and that some of the variants in the textual apparatus may be closer to an original reading. Throughout the analysis, Williams thus judges the primary and secondary readings where possible, according to the best practices of textual criticism discussed earlier, and notes the kinds of changes that scribes tended to make to Mark's Gospel. The next chapter then examines the textual differences between Matthew and Mark, once more using the NA 27th as the base text (chap. 4). Again, Williams makes judgments on primary and secondary readings according to text-critical principles—determining that Matthew almost always has the secondary reading—and notes the kinds of changes that Matthew made to Mark. The final chapter then compares these Matthean-Markan differences with the scribal variants noted earlier, concluding that Matthew made the same types of changes to Mark's Gospel that Markan scribes made and that text-critical criteria clearly and consistently support Markan priority and Matthean posteriority.

The book is well-written, with helpful previews and summaries for each chapter to guide readers through even the most technical discussions. As one would expect, Greek is used throughout in textual discussions, but always with

accompanying translation. The book displays an adequate but not comprehensive breadth of research in the relevant subject areas, which is reflected both in the body of the book as well as in the bibliography at the end. The book concludes with what appears to be a thorough subject index.

There are some general difficulties that I see with the book and its argument, problems of varying significance which nevertheless do not detract from the overall positive achievement of the book. First, although one is not to judge a book by its cover, one should be able to judge a book to a certain extent by its title, and the title simply does not fit the contents well. The book is not about two gospels (i.e. Matthew and Luke) deriving from one (i.e. Mark), but rather it is purely concerned with Matthew's use of Mark. I suspect the title was to be an antithetical play on the Griesbachian *One Gospel from Two* (ed. David B. Peabody, Lamar Cope, and Allan J. McNicol; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002). Also, the book is not "a comprehensive text-critical analysis of the Synoptic Gospels," in spite of its subtitle. Any future editions of the book should consider a change of title to reflect better the book's contents.

Second, the book evinces occasional category confusion regarding Synoptic source theories. This is especially grievous in the suggestion that Williams's research effectively substantiates the "Two Source Hypothesis" (p. 204) or "Oxford Hypothesis"

[p. 394]

(p. 215) when in fact it merely supports Markan priority: Q is no better off after Williams's research than it was before. Markan priority is not equivalent to the Two

Source Hypothesis; rather, Markan priority is one foundation for the Two Source Hypothesis, just as it is for other theories such as the Farrer Hypothesis (Mark without Q). This same category confusion is evident early in the book when the Farrer Hypothesis is mentioned as a variation on the Two Source Hypothesis (p. 26, n. 24), when more properly both are alternatives based on Markan priority. Anyone in doubt about this distinction should read Mark Goodacre's *The Case Against Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), a work absent from Williams's bibliography. While this may seem like a minor issue to some, the detailed nature of the Synoptic problem and the technical nature of its proposed solutions demands that we use precision in our terminology for discussing the problem and its solutions.

Third, I would object to the use of "objective" language that appears early in the book to describe the nature of Williams's text-critical approach (e.g. p. 22). The method is not entirely objective, as Williams himself later in the book makes clear (e.g. p. 63). It is much better to leave the language of "objectivity" out from the beginning than to use it early and be forced to qualify it often.

Fourth, moving to more substantive matters, there is a lack of clarity throughout the book on the role of ancient scribe versus the role of ancient author or even biographer, that is, how the role of the Evangelists as authors might be similar to or different from the role of scribes as copyists. The issue is raised at several points, but Williams's argument lacks any significant, sustained discussion of this matter. This is no small thing, as the comparison between the roles of ancient scribes and authors is foundational to the basic validity of Williams's text-critical approach to the Synoptic problem.

Fifth, Williams works through the text-critical apparatus of Mark, but not the text-critical apparatus of Matthew. Thus we only have one side of the coin in terms of

foundational text-critical research for the comparison of Matthew and Mark that follows. Are there significant scribal changes made to Matthew that parallel proposed Markan changes to Matthew? I doubt this is the case, but we cannot say for certain without any parallel investigation of scribal changes to Matthew in the Matthean manuscript tradition.

In spite of these difficulties, Williams's research has put more teeth into the linguistic argument for Markan priority, and thus this book has value for scholars and students involved in Synoptic studies.

Michael W. Pahl

Prairie Bible College, Three Hills, AB, Canada