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# SYNOPTIC SELF-PORTRAITS

by ROBERT H. MOUNCE

**T**HIS paper, by the Chairman of the Department of Biblical Studies in Bethel College and Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, was read in its original form before a regional meeting of the (American) Evangelical Theological Society.

## I

THERE is a growing recognition in Synoptic criticism that the Evangelists were more than mere compilers or editors of the tradition. In his *The Theology of St. Luke* Conzelmann has shown the formative influence of Luke's own theological perspective upon the composition of his gospel. In a recent publication entitled *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* Bornkamm and two of his students build a similar case for Matthew as theologian. Although the 'theologies of the Synoptists' are modest in comparison with the Fourth Gospel, the interpretive element is far more pervasive than previously recognized in form-critical studies. A parallel emphasis for Mark may be found in J. M. Robinson's *The Problem of History in Mark*.

This development poses many interesting questions and opens several new areas for research. For example, to what extent is the personality of the Synoptist himself revealed in his writing? The purpose of this article is to investigate within a limited area the tendencies displayed by Matthew and Luke in their use of tradition and to see if they do not inadvertently sketch their own portraits in the process of composition. The verses under consideration are the twelve pericopes included by Matthew in his Sermon on the Mount but occurring outside the Sermon in Luke, and the four units in Luke's Sermon which are either omitted or occur elsewhere in Matthew.

We do not need to pursue the investigation very far to be aware of Matthew's fondness for the interpretive addition. For example, in 5: 32 he adds the well-known exception to Jesus' statement on divorce. Luke has written "everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery" (16: 18). Both here and later (19: 9) Mathew appends the qualifying clause "except on the ground of unchastity." Whether Matthew is only bringing out a point which was implicit in the shorter statement or modifying the form of Jesus' statement to bring it into agreement with the

Shammaite point of view is here beside the point. In either case he is adding an interpretive phrase.

Another fruitful place to see this tendency at work is in the Beatitudes. Luke's "poor" becomes "poor in spirit" in Matthew: "you that hunger" becomes "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5: 3-12 and Luke 6: 20-23). A good example of Matthaean expansion of a single verse in 6: 33. To Luke's "seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well" (12: 31) Matthew has added the interpretive words "first", "and his righteousness", and "all".

Another tendency of Matthew is to fragment the tradition. Luke 13: 22-30 is a single unit which moves from a geographical reference to a question about the number who are saved and into a short discourse on Exclusion From the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> In Matthew this same unit of nine verses is broken up and distributed to five separate contexts (7: 13-14; 25: 10-12; 7: 22-23; 8: 11-12; 19: 30—the last being repeated in 20: 16). Another example of fragmentation is Matthew's use of the pericope found in Luke 11: 33-36. Matthew moves Luke's verse 33 into his Sermon at 5: 15 and Luke's verses 34-35 at 6: 22-23.

A third tendency of Matthew is to make general statements more specific and personal. Where Luke writes "Salt is good" (14: 34) Matthew rephrases it more pointedly as "*You* are the salt of the earth" (5: 13; note the emphatic pronoun in Greek). Where Luke reports the request for bread in the Lord's Prayer in somewhat general terms ("Give us each day our daily bread", 11: 3) Matthew becomes more specific ("Give us *this* day our daily bread", 6: 11). While Matthew uses Luke's third person in the statement about men not lighting lamps in order to put them under a bushel (Matt. 5: 15 = Luke 11: 33), he brackets the verse with a direct affirmation ("*You* are the light of the world", v. 14) and a personal exhortation ("Let your light so shine", v. 16).

Turning now to Luke we are able to discern a somewhat different attitude expressed in the handling of the tradition. Where Matthew tends to group material topically, Luke is more concerned to retain the historical context. In the units under consideration we have two outstanding examples of Luke's regard for original context. The first is the Lord's Prayer. Matthew inserts this into his Sermon because of its topical relationship to an exhortation he has just made about guarding against false piety in prayer. In Luke, however, the Prayer is left in its proper historical context. Luke

<sup>1</sup> The paragraph designations are those of *Gospel Parallels* (Nelson & Sons).

11 begins: "He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' And he said to them, 'When you pray, say . . .'"—and then follows Luke's version of the prayer.

The second example of Luke's regard for historical context is the saying about the Two Ways. Matthew brings it into the sermon, making it a challenge to dedicated living. In Luke, however, the saying is introduced in its proper historical context and relates to salvation rather than discipleship (7: 13-14).

Not only does Luke evidence a greater concern for historical context but he is also more sensitively aware of the context of meaning. The saying about "treasure in the heavens" comes in Luke as a proper conclusion to the discourse on Cares About Earthly Things (12: 22-34) while in Matthew it is included as part of a series of unrelated ethical exhortations (6: 19-21). Matthew has also included in this series the paragraph on anxiety (6: 25-34) which in Luke follows more naturally the Parable of the Rich Fool (12: 22-34).

It is characteristic of Luke to relate the pericopes at a more profound level than Matthew. In Luke the unit on Agreement With One's Accuser (12: 57-59) forms an appropriate transition between two parables. Jesus has just pilloried the blindness of those who can interpret the signs of nature but are unable to interpret the signs of the time. The following parable teaches the certainty of destruction apart from repentance. The intervening unit on Agreement With One's Accuser stresses the urgency of the situation and the wisdom of casting one's self on the mercy of God while on the way to the final court. Learn from the Galilean peasant, Jesus is saying: he would not let himself be taken to court with a hopeless case. In Matthew, however, the inclusion of this saying is on the basis of its semantic resemblance to the preceding statement about being *reconciled* to one's brother before offering one's gift at the altar (5: 21-26).

A third characteristic discernible in Luke's handling of tradition is his greater appreciation of literary structure. Instead of eight Beatitudes he lists but four, but these are then highlighted by four corresponding Woes which are omitted in Matthew (Luke 6: 20-26).

Blessed are you poor	Woe to you that are rich
Blessed are you that hunger	Woe to you that are full now
Blessed are you that weep	Woe to you that laugh now
Blessed are you when men hate you	Woe to you when all men speak well of you.

This awareness of literary structure is true to what we know of

Luke's fondness for poetry, evidenced by his inclusion of four poems in his first two chapters.

It is characteristic of Luke to retain in context the pointed conclusion of Jesus' "pronouncement stories." In Matthew the saying about not being able to serve two masters (6: 24) occurs in disjunction from what precedes and follows. In Luke, however, it comes as the conclusion to the parable of the Unjust Steward (16: 1-13). Apart from this context it tends to lose the force of its original application.

A final example is the unit on asking, seeking, and knocking as man's part in answered prayer (Matt. 7: 7-11 = Luke 11: 9-13). In Matthew it is preceded by the rather unrelated logion about not throwing one's pearls before swine (7: 6) and followed by the Golden Rule (7: 12). In Luke, on the other hand, it is closely linked with the preceding parable of the importunity of the friend who came at midnight to get bread for his visitor (11: 5-8). As it was only the friend's persistence which caused the man to get up out of bed where he was sleeping with his children, so also is our importunity in prayer which results in God's answering. (Note the connecting particle in verse 9.) Once again Matthew's isolation of the saying removes the full impact that it derives from Luke's contextual presentation.

## II

Thus far we have seen divergent tendencies in Matthew and Luke's handling of the tradition. While Matthew tends to make interpretive additions, fragment the tradition, and apply the sayings more specifically, Luke normally retains the historical context, relates the pericopes at a more profound level, and demonstrates a greater sensitivity to literary subtleties. With this as background we shall now attempt to discover something about the personalities of the two Synoptists as inadvertently revealed in the process. Although this part of the study is perhaps more interpretive there is no *a priori* reason why we should not be able to sketch the temperaments of Matthew and Luke as revealed in their handling of the tradition. If one should turn out to be a bit more mellow than the other, this would only be another indication of the freedom of expression enjoyed by the Biblical writers.

The first conclusion from a comparative study of the "displaced logia" is that Matthew has a strong tendency to moralize. Where Luke is content simply to state that a lighted lamp is placed on a stand and not under a bushel (11: 33), Matthew goes on to preach a little sermon. He adds "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your

Father who is in heaven" (5: 16). This is not to deny the words to Jesus. It is only to note that the exhortation occurs in Matthew rather than Luke, which suggests that the former feels more constrained to keep the moral issues before his readers.

In Luke 13: 24 Jesus answers the question "Will those who are saved be few?" with "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." The parallel in Matthew (7: 13-14) is expanded into a rather complete statement about the Two Ways—the hard way of self-denial which leads to life and the undisciplined way which leads to destruction. The sermonette proceeds through a series of antitheses: wide gate—narrow gate; easy way—hard way; destruction—life; many enter—few enter. This more elaborate treatment stands in contrast to Luke's rather simple affirmation that not many will be able to enter by the narrow door.

Along with this tendency to moralize Matthew is characterized by a certain severity of outlook. For Matthew the way to life is hard. It is entered through a narrow gate and few find it. Somewhat the same outlook is reflected by Matthew's addition of a warning following the Lord's Prayer: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6: 14-15). The original context of this saying seems to be that of Mark where unforgiveness is added to disbelief as a further obstacle to answered prayer (11: 20-25). Matthew's inclusion of this rather severe warning as an immediate sequel to the Lord's Prayer suggests a temperament more exacting than that of Luke.

This same quality of severity is seen in Matthew's emphasis upon the role of persecution in the life of the Christian. The expansion of the eighth Beatitude ("Blessed are those who are persecuted") by the addition of a "ninth" on the same theme, and the inclusion of the two parables on salt and light (which emphasize the necessity of the Christian to stand out against his culture and act as a preservative to retard its putrefaction) underscore the logical certainty of persecution in the life of the Christian. There is no use for salt that has lost its savour or rationale for light that is hid beneath a bushel. Stand forth and be persecuted! Matthew is saying.

That Luke is of a milder temperament is clearly seen in his application of three specific sayings of Jesus. The first is, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6: 39). In Luke these rhetorical questions follow the ad-

monition not to judge. The context indicates the inadvisability of judging because of the relative blindness of everyone involved. In Matthew, however, the utterance is no longer a plea for tolerance but an accusation directed against the Pharisees (15: 14): "Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." This does not mean that Jesus could not have used the same proverbial statements in two distinct contexts. It only notes that Luke has chosen the more tolerant of the two.

The second saying follows immediately: "A disciple is not above his teacher" (Luke 6: 40). The contextual meaning is, "Since I the Teacher do not judge in this way, neither should you, the disciple." In Matthew, however, the saying is appended to a paragraph on persecution. It underscores the intense opposition which awaited the followers of Christ. It is a grim reminder to the Christians that "if they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matt. 10: 25).

The final saying is, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6: 43). In Luke the development of thought in the context is quite clear. Look to yourself before correcting the faults of others. What you are will inevitably manifest itself in the quality of your life. Luke is suggesting that each man exercise his gift of ethical insight upon himself rather than his neighbour. In Matthew, however, the same saying is no longer directed towards one's self, but towards others. It is a method for the detection of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but are actually ravenous wolves. Matthew repeats the saying in chapter 12 to prove that the evil speaking of the adversaries is evidence that they are in fact evil men—a brood of vipers (Matt. 12: 34).

Thus we conclude from a comparative study of the "displaced Sermon verses" that Matthew tends to be more severe in temperament and more likely to sermonize on any given occasion. In contrast, Luke reveals a more tolerant attitude and suggests that a man look to his own faults before correcting the faults of others. Whether these conclusions would be substantiated or modified by a more comprehensive analysis of all the Synoptic materials must await further work in the area. At present we can only say that the personalities of the Synoptists themselves are definitely revealed in their differing attitudes and ways of handling the tradition at hand.

*Bethel College and Seminary,  
Saint Paul, Minnesota.*