IMPLICATIONS OF NEW DATA PERTAINING TO THE PROBLEM OF SYNOPTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Although attributed the status of "one of the assured results of modern scholarship" for most of this century, the two document hypothesis, whereby Mark and Q were said to be the written sources of Matthew and Luke,[1] has come under increasingly critical scrutiny. A growing body of literature advocates the Griesbach hypothesis over and against the two document hypothesis.[2] Griesbach had suggested that the Gospel of Matthew was written first, that Luke had used it as a written source, and that Mark used both Matthew and Luke. Nor has the Griesbach hypothesis been the only alternative put forward. For example, after carefully examining the distribution of the various Synoptic Gospel pericopes and the

[1]The most widely cited exponent of this view is Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1951) 150-292, although in his case, he advocated two further documents, M and L—written sources available only to Matthew and Luke, respectively.

[2]William Farmer's book, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1976), probably marks a watershed in this development. Prior to Farmer's publications, earlier protests against the two-document consensus, such as that by B. C. Butler, *The Originality of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1951), had gone virtually ignored. Since the appearance of Farmer's work, there has been a mini-deluge of articles and some substantial books and commentaries espousing the Griesbach hypothesis: e.g. William Farmer, ed., *New Synoptic Studies* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1983); Bernard Orchard, *Matthew, Luke & Mark* (2d ed.; Manchester: Koinonia, 1977); and Thomas R. W. Longstaff, *Evidence of Conflation in Mark? A Study in the Synoptic Problem* (SBLDS 28; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977); Bernard Orchard and Thomas R. W. Longstaff, *J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text Critical Studies 1776-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978). This is not to mention the many articles which have been published in the area. See also the useful bibliography in *The Two Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal* (ed. Arthur Bellinzoni; Mercer: Mercer Univ. Press, 1985); and the negative critique of this school of thought in the published version of C. M. Tuckett's 1979 Ph.D. thesis, *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), and, from a different perspective, by Sherman E. Johnson, *The Griesbach Hypothesis and Redaction Criticism* (SBLMS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). C. S. Mann's, *Mark*, in the Anchor Bible Commentary series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986) is written from an avowedly Griesbachian perspective.

variations between both their shared vocabularies and particular geographical interests, Bo Reicke concludes that no explanation based on literary sources can do justice to this data, and that the Gospels are related through common oral tradition.[3] More recently, both Bruce Chilton and, to a lesser degree, John Wenham have also argued that common oral tradition is the best explanation for the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels.[4] This is not to say that other hypotheses have not been advanced,[5] or that the two-document hypothesis has not had energetic defence.[6]

All this ferment would be little more than an interesting intellectual exercise were it not for the implications that this issue has for the interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels. The tendencies shown in the differences between the Synoptic Gospels have long been a staple of commentaries, and in some instances it makes a considerable difference to how a passage is interpreted if Matthew or Luke had Mark before them in written form, or if it was the other way round, or if neither of these events took place. Thus it is that the issue of Synoptic relationships, hedged about though it is by diagrams, statistics and suppositions, is one that is of significant importance.

[3]Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) *passim*, esp. pp. 24-33, 45-67.

[4]Bruce Chilton, *Profiles of a Rabbi: Synoptic Opportunities in Reading About Jesus* (Brown Judaic Studies 177; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), passim; John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991) 198-222, 243-44. Wenham believes that the Gospel of Matthew was written first, and that while Mark had access to a copy of Matthew, he wrote his Gospel relying mainly on the basis of his recollection of the oral tradition. The written Gospel of Matthew was used by Mark only to provide an outline, although Wenham considers that it is possible that Mark also used Matthew to check the final revision of his Gospel. Luke also relied primarily on his memory of the oral tradition, even though he knew both previous Gospels. Mention might also be made of Gordon D. Fee's suggestion that while Matthew and Luke used Mark, they also relied on oral tradition, "A Text-critical Look at the Synoptic Problem," *NovT* 22 (1980) 22-28.

[5]See, for example, Ronald V. Huggins, "Matthean Posteriority: A Preliminary Proposal," *NovT* 34 (1992) 1-22, who, as the title of his article implies, argues that there is a literary relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke, best explained by Luke using Mark, and Matthew using both Mark and Luke. E. P. Sanders and M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989), 51-119, esp. pp. 116-17, suggest a rather complex model whereby Matthew knew Mark, and Luke knew both Matthew and Mark, but they not only used other sources, they also created some sayings. Later, the three Gospel writers each revised their work as they had access to the other Gospels.

[6]For example, Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 29-138; F. Gerald Downing, "Compositional Conventions and the Synoptic Problem," *JBL* 107 (1988) 69-85, and "A Paradigm Perplex: Luke, Matthew and Mark," *NTS* 38 (1992) 15-36, esp. p. 35.

This paper grows out of research done for reasons quite removed from investigating the Synoptic problem, but which threw up data that had direct, and unexpected implications for the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels. It attempts to pursue these implications in a methodical way which lays a basis for the rather novel hypothesis advanced. It will do so by first stating some definitions, then by pursuing common ground on which all involved in the debate are agreed, by outlining the new data and its limitations, and finally, by developing a thesis consistent with this data.

DEFINITIONS

First, then, some definitions. As might be expected, the term "literary relationship" is used in the sense that one evangelist had an already-existing document in front of him, from which he copied, making intentional and unintentional changes. The term "oral relationship," though, is less well defined, and needs further explanation. It could be used to describe either parallel accounts of the same event, transmitted independently of other traditions, or it could be used to describe two accounts which were related by the fact that they grew out of the same stream of oral tradition. This stream of oral tradition may, but need not be a carefully controlled one, such as that which was used to preserve the oral law of the Pharisees, the so-called, "traditions of the elders".[7] In this paper, the term "independent oral tradition" will be used to describe unrelated oral traditions, while the term "oral relationship" will be reserved to describe traditions which come from the same stream of oral tradition, although initially no assumptions will be made as to how carefully that stream of tradition was controlled.

COMMON GROUND

Any of the various dates suggested for the writing of the Synoptic Gospels presupposes that there was a period of between ten and fifty years between the events of the life of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels, during which time the memory of these events was preserved orally.[8] No

[7]Mark 7:3, 5.

[8]Within the Gospels themselves there is the occasional reference to the passing of time since the events they record (e.g. the phrase "to this day" in Matt 27:8; 28:15). In his monograph, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) 352, John A. T. Robinson proposed dates as early as A.D. 40-60+ for Matthew, A.D. 45-60 for Mark, A.D. 57-60+ for the Gospel of Luke, and similar dates have been suggested by Wenham, *Redating*, xxv, 223-44. Most who work with the Synoptic Gospels would, however, tend to use dates closer to those suggested by Werner Georg Kümmel in his *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975) 98, 120, 151, of 64-70 for Mark, 80-100 for Matthew and 70-90 for Luke.

one disputes this, nor does anybody dispute the fact that some of the material in the Gospels comes from independent oral traditions. One notable example of this may be found in the passion narrative of Luke, which, although clearly describing the same events, differs so markedly in vocabulary and detail that it cannot have an oral or literary relationship with either Matthew or Mark.[9] This might be illustrated by the pericope describing the crucifixion, found in Matt 27:32-44 and Luke 23:26-38. Both these accounts give a report of the crucifixion of Jesus. Their underlying meanings agree with, and, to a large extent, complement each other. They both report that a man of Cyrene called Simon carried the cross for Jesus, that Jesus was crucified at the place called the skull, that there were two others crucified, one on either side of him, that his garments were distributed by the casting of lots, that the charge written on the cross was "The king of the Jews," and that he was mocked with the words to the effect that: "Others he saved, but himself he cannot save." In sum, there is a great similarity in the underlying information conveyed by these two accounts.

At the level of expression, however, these two accounts are remarkable for the different ways that the same information is conveyed. The common vocabulary is very small. Leaving aside conjunctions, prepositions and the like, which are common to every example of language no matter what the subject matter, only twenty-three significant words are shared: Κυρηναῖον, Σίμονα, τὸν σταυρὸν, τόπον, Κρανίον, διεμερι-, τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, βαλ-, κληρ-, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἐκ δεξιῶν, ἐξ εὐωνύμων, Ἄλλους ἐσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν. This small amount of shared vocabulary derives from a quite lengthy block of text (169 words in Matthew and 209 words in Luke), and one would be hard pressed to describe the events of the crucifixion without recourse to these words.

The differences between the accounts occur in other areas besides vocabulary. Some details are not shared between the two Gospels, as, for example, the words of Jesus to the women in Luke 23:27-31. Furthermore, specific details are sometimes presented in a different sequence. Matthew records the charge written against Jesus after describing his crucifixion and the dividing of his garments and before noting that two thieves were also crucified, and the mocking by the scribes and elders; Luke, on the other hand, places it after all these things (Matt 27:37, Luke 23:38). This all leads to the conclusion that these are two independently transmitted accounts of the same event. There is no literary or oral relationship between them. Similar statistics and observations may be

[9]Vincent Taylor persuasively argues for the independence of the passion narrative of Luke in his book, *The Passion Narrative of St. Luke: A Critical and Historical Investigation* (SNTSMS 19; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972).

adduced for the parallel between Matt 27:15-26 and Luke 23:13-25. The total number of words in this passage in Matthew is 192, and in Luke is 163. Of these only nine are common: Βαραββᾶν, Σταυρω-, Τί γὰρ κακὸν ἐποίησεν, Σταυρωθ-, Ἰησοῦν, παρέδωκεν. This parallel likewise shows no detectable relationship other than independent accounts of the same event.

If there is scholarly consensus that some pericopes found in the Synoptic Gospels derive from independently transmitted traditions, it is equally true that there is scholarly consensus that there is some relationship between many of the other pericopes. The account of the crucifixion may again serve as a suitable illustration of this. If Matt 27:32-44 and Mark 15:21-32 are compared, there is a dramatic difference to the results found from comparing Matt 27:32-44 and Luke 26:26-38. Matt 27:32-44 has 169 words, and Mark 15:21-32 has 153 words. Of these, no fewer than 93 words are the same in both accounts, which, in percentage terms, is 55% and 61% respectively. Not only this, *every* small detail mentioned is in exactly the same sequence in both Gospels.

This is not an isolated example, or even a particularly outstanding example of close parallelism between different Gospel accounts. Matt 24:15-25 has 149 words, Mark 13:14-23 has 153 words, of which 115 are the same. Expressed in percentage terms this is 77% and 75% respectively. Matt 13:1-9 has 131 words, Mark 4:1-9 has 151 words, and they share 95 in common, which is 73% and 63% respectively. Examples may be multiplied, but there is no real need, because nearly all agree that there is some relationship between these accounts. All also agree that the closeness of this relationship varies in different places in the Gospels. In some parallels, there does not seem to be any relationship, in others, a slight relationship, and in yet others, a close relationship. It was research investigating this particular variance that threw up the data which has some bearing on the disputed question of whether this relationship should be explained in terms of a literary or oral hypothesis.

NEW DATA

The statistics in the accompanying tables derive from research on the Gospel of Matthew. The research was initially aimed at refining the comparison between Matthew and the other two Synoptic Gospels, so that where pericopes were patently unrelated, as for example, the beatitudes in Matthew and Luke, significance would not be given to small differences between them. Rather than use a three-column synopsis with its attendant complexities, it was decided to compare parallel columns. At the time, it was easier to do this using photocopiers and scissors and paste than with computers, although that was to change within a couple of years. Parallel passages to each of the Matthean pericopes were placed on separate

sheets, and the common vocabulary underlined. At the time this process was begun, some form of literary relationship was assumed, and so words that were exactly the same root were underlined, and some effort was made to distinguish words that were in exactly the same sequence without any intervening words.[10] During this process an increasing disquiet concerning the validity of a literary relationship was experienced, although it did not come into focus until the different sheets were being classified according to the closeness of their relationship. It was possible to reliably, if somewhat subjectively, assign most of the passages to the following broad categories—closely related, less closely related, slightly related, unrelated—but there were some parallels between Matthew and Luke which defied such classification. While most of these particular pericopes were clearly unrelated, embedded within them were several long sequences of words which were exactly the same in grammatical form, sequence and in their lack of interruption by other words. These appeared to represent the type of phenomena which would derive from literary dependency, while the other close parallels might be thought to derive from close oral relationships. Appearances based on subjective evaluations are all very well, but any new proposals, such as the one just outlined, needed to be placed on a more objective basis. Thus, word count statistics were laboriously collected on two different characteristics.

First, raw percentages of common words were collected for words that were from the same root, though not necessarily of the same case, person, tense, mood, or voice. Synonyms were deliberately excluded, as were

[10]The issue of exactly which words to compare is a subtle one, and one that has had several different and incompatible answers. Mgr de Solages, in his *A Greek Synopsis of the Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) 24-25 explains how he distinguishes between identical words (of the same root, in the same case, number, tense, mood, person, etc), and equivalent words (those of the same root or origin, but in different cases, numbers, tenses, moods, persons, etc). A. M. Honoré, in his article, "A statistical Study of the Synoptic Problem," *NovT* 10 (1968) 97 only considers the same grammatical form of the same word as a verbal agreement. But in doing this he also counts καὶ even when the contexts are different. In his *Synopticon* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969) xi, William R. Farmer distinguishes between complete verbatim agreements and significant, but incomplete agreements. Robert Morgenthaler, in his *Statistische Synopse* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1971) 31, counts only words of the exact same grammatical form and in the same order. Joseph B. Tyson and Thomas R. W. Longstaff, in their *Synoptic Abstract: The Computer Bible Volume XV* (Wooster, OH: Biblical Research Associates, 1978) 11, refine de Solage's categories, and keep track of three levels of agreement: continuity (identical words in continuous agreement), identity (identical words not in continuous agreement), and equivalency (words of the same root, but with different grammatical inflections). The method adopted for this paper gives tighter control of the differences between oral and literary relationships, and is slightly different to all of the above!

common conjunctions like καὶ if the context was different. These statistics are listed in the following tables under the headings "No of words," and "% common." There are only two parallels considered at one time, and the total number of words in Matthew, Mark or Luke are given, together with the number of common words (these are listed under the headings Mt, Mk, cm, Lk, cm). Next, the percentage of common words for both Gospels was calculated for pericopes in each Gospel.

The second characteristic for which statistics were kept was the number of words which were exactly the same, in root, case, person, tense, mood, voice, and sequence. These are listed in the following tables under the heading "Sequence." The column headed "0D" gives the number of such words with no interruptions or displacements, or differences. In this context, "interruption" is defined as a word either added or missing in one or other parallel; "displacemnt" is defined as a word which, while present in the parallel, is out of sequence. Under "1D" is given the number of such words with only one interruption, displacement, or difference. Likewise, "2D" and "3D" list the number of such words with only two or three interruptions, displacements or differences respectively.

This research had not been intended to interface with other research on the Synoptic problem, so little thought had been given initially to making the selection of pericopes consistent with that of others. The original parallel columns were subdivided largely as they were in the 3rd edition of the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament.[11] In practice, though, most of these subdivisions are natural ones in the text, and so there is a great deal of overlap with what others have done. What did prove problematical, though, were several short passages of less than 60 words, where the statistics showing percentages of common words proved to be a poor indicator of the actual characteristics of the passages. These passages have been left out of consideration in the following tables.

The tables were then sorted so that first, those with the longest sequences of words in exactly the same order were selected, then, for those with the highest percentages of common vocabulary. The first table shows those passages which share more than twenty-four words in sequences with no displacements or changes, and the second shows those

[11]The Bible Society graciously gave their permission to publish these as an appendix to the author's dissertation, "The Problem of Synoptic Relationship in the Development and Testing of a Methodology for the Reconstruction of the Matthean Community," (PhD, Andrews University, 1988) 389-604. There is the occasional departure from the paragraph divisions of the *UBSGNT*. At times material clearly extraneous to the parallel was excluded. For example, the parallel to Matt 24:45-51 was taken to be Luke 12:42-46, not Luke 12:41-48.

with sequences of twenty-four words or more with either one or two changes. These are followed by tables showing pericopes with more than 50% of common vocabulary in both Gospels.

Table A-1

Pericopes which share more than twenty-four words in sequence with no displacements or changes

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	cm	Lk	cm	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
3:1 -12		3:1 -20	236			379	129	55		34	24	44	48	62
6:24		16:13	27			28	27	100		96	26	27	27	27
7:7 -11		11:9 -13	74			75	59	80		79	24	25	27	27
8:5 -13		7:1 -10	159			186	55	35		30	25	32	35	35
8:18 -22		9:57 -62	82			117	54	66		46	24	31	32	32
10:16 -22	13:9 -13		120	97	67			56	69		31	32	32	32
11:25 -27		10:21 -22	69			76	58	84		76	28	39	39	45
12:38 -42		11:29 -32	121			96	66	55		69	24	40	46	53
24:45 -51		12:42 -46	111			106	88	79		83	28	28	28	28
TOTALS			956	97	67	1063	536				234	298	314	341

Table A-2

Pericopes which share more than twenty-four words in sequence with one or two displacements or changes

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	cm	Lk	cm	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
11:2 -19		7:18 -35	266			305	168	63		55	22	23	25	25
11:20 -24		10:13 -15	94			49	46	49		94	12	24	26	26
12:22 -32		11:14 -23	216			168	76	35		45	15	21	34	35
12:43 -45		11:24 -26	67			55	53	79		96	14	19	26	31
16:21 -28	8:31 -9:1		189	204	114			60	56		23	28	33	33

16:21 -28	9:21 -27	189			131	73	39		56	16	21	27	30
20:17 -19	10:32 -34	53	73	37			70	51		13	24	25	27
20:20 -28	10:35 -45	168	193	117			70	61		17	18	30	31
24:15 -25	13:14 -23	149	153	115			77	75		23	25	27	33
24:32 -35	13:28 -31	64	65	62			97	95		16	28	32	46
24:32 -35	21:29 -33	64			66	45	70		68	13	19	25	29
26:17 -25	14:12 -21	155	182	90			58	49		23	30	30	30
TOTALS		1674	870	535	774	461				207	280	340	376

Table B-1

Pericopes of over sixty words which have a very high frequency of shared vocabulary (over 60% in each Gospel)

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	om	Lk	om	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
4:18 -22	1:16 -20		91	82	55			60	67		9	9	9	12
6:25 -34		12:22 -32	189			174	117	62		67	13	16	18	19
7:7 -11		11:9 -13	74			75	59	80		79	24	25	27	27
9:14 -17	2:18 -22		104	129	78			75	60		13	14	16	17
11:25 -27		10:21 -22	69			76	58	84		76	28	39	39	45
12:43 -45		11:24 -26	67			55	53	79		96	14	19	26	31
13:1 -9	4:1 -9		131	151	95			73	63		14	17	17	17
20:20 -28	10:35 -45		168	193	117			70	61		17	18	30	31
21:23 -27	11:27 -33		117	125	83			71	66		11	11	11	14
22:23 -33	12:18 -27		163	171	102			63	60		10	11	12	16

24:3 -9	13:3 -9	116	117	79			68	68		11	14	17	21
24:15 -25	13:14 -23	149	153	115			77	75		23	25	27	33
24:32 -35	13:28 -31	64	65	62			97	95		16	28	32	46
24:32 -35	21:29 -33	64			66	45	70		68	13	19	25	29
24:45 -51	12:42 -46	111			106	88	79		83	28	28	28	28
26:26 -30	14:22 -26	87	77	64			74	83		11	12	16	16
26:31 -35	14:27 -31	87	79	56			64	71		8	9	10	12
TOTALS		1851	1342	906	552	420				263	314	360	414

Table B-2

Pericopes of over sixty words which have
a very high frequency of shared vocabulary
(over 60% in one Gospel, over 50% in the other)

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	om	Lk	om	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
9:9 -13	2:13 -17		93	109	59			63	54		10	11	12	13
10:16 -22	13:9 -13		120	97	67			56	69		31	32	32	32
11:2 -19		7:18 -35	266			305	168	63		55	22	23	25	25
12:38 -42		11:29 -32	121			96	66	55		69	24	40	46	53
12:46 -50	3:31 -35		90	81	50			56	62		8	14	14	14
13:53 -58	6:1-6		107	125	67			63	54		9	16	18	19
16:21 -28	8:31 -9:1		164	204	114			70	56		23	28	33	33
24:29 -31	13:24 -27		91	71	53			58	75		14	14	16	19
26:36 -46	14:32 -42		195	211	116			59	55		10	15	16	20
27:32 -44	15:21 -32		169	153	93			55	61		9	14	20	20
TOTALS			1321	954	552	401	234				129	175	200	216

Table B-3

Pericopes of over sixty words which have
a very high frequency of shared vocabulary
(over 50% in both Gospels)

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	cm	Lk	cm	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
4:1 -11		4:1 -13	184			203	104	57		51	6	7	16	18
15:32 -39	8:1 -10		129	146	74			57	51		16	18	18	21
17:1 -13	9:2 -13		233	209	120			52	57		10	12	13	13
18:6 -9	9:42 -48		120	124	68			57	55		10	11	11	11
21:23 -27		20:1 -8	117			118	64	55		54	9	10	15	16
22:15 -22	12:13 -17		115	106	60			52	57		11	12	13	19
TOTALS			898	585	322	321	168				62	70	86	98

Table B-4

Extended passages (of over sixty words) which have
a high frequency of shared vocabulary
(over 50% in one Gospel, over 40% in the other)

Text			No. of words					% common			Sequence			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Mt	Mk	cm	Lk	cm	Mt	Mk	Lk	0D	1D	2D	3D
7:1-5		6:37 -42	83			136	65	78		48	14	16	17	18
8:18 -22		9:57 -62	82			117	54	66		46	24	31	32	32
12:1 -8	2:26 -28		136	108	60			44	56		11	17	18	23
19:1 -11	10:1 -12		184	153	81			44	53		12	15	15	15
21:33 -46	12:1 -14		238	183	97			41	53		9	9	9	9
26:6 -13	14:3 -9		109	124	60			55	48		7	12	13	15
26:17 -25	14:12 -21		155	182	90			58	49		23	30	30	30

26:47 14:43 -51 -50	189	121	79		42	65	12	15	20	20
26:57 14:53 -68 -65	196	223	109		56	49	6	8	8	8
27:45 15:33 -56 -41	196	149	85		43	57	5	11	12	12
TOTALS	1568	1243	661	253	119		123	164	174	182

Tables A-1, A-2, and B-1 through B-4 do indeed show the characteristics first noted before the word counts were made: that long sequences of exactly the same words are characteristic of parallels between Matthew and Luke, while high percentages of common vocabulary were characteristic of parallels between Matthew and Mark. The following summary table, which includes statistics from lower percentages as well for comparison, highlights this:

Table C-1

Summary table showing number of occurrences of pericopes with high counts of words in exact sequence

Category	Criteria: high count of words in exact sequence	No. of occurrences in: Mt/Mk	Mt/Lk
A-1	Greater than 24 words in sequence: no differences	1	8
A-2	Greater than 24 words in sequence: no more than two differences	6	6
TOTALS		7	14

Table C-2

Summary table showing number of occurrences of pericopes with high percentages of common vocabulary

Category	General criteria: passages of more than 60 words with more than the indicated percentages of common vocabulary	No. of occurrences in: Mt/Mk	Mt/Lk
B-1	More than 60% in both Gospels	11	6
B-2	More than 60% in one, 50% in other	8	2
B-3	More than 50% in both	4	2
B-4	More then 50% in one, 40% in other	8	2
TOTALS		31	12

The pattern revealed in the summary is highlighted further if the passages already listed in A-1 and A-2 are removed from the statistics of tables B-1 to B-4. These are shown by table C-3.

Table C-3

Summary Table showing frequency of occurrence of pericopes with high percentage of common vocabulary (omitting pericopes already listed in Tables A-1 and A-2)

Category	General criteria: passages of more than 60 words with more than the indicated percentages of common vocabulary	No. of occurrences in: Mt/Mk	Mt/Lk
B-1	More than 60% in both Gospels	8	1
B-2	More than 60% in one, 50% in other	6	0
B-3	More than 50% in both	4	2
B-4	More then 50% in one, 40% in other	7	1
TOTALS		25	4

Space limitations mean that it has not been possible to include the detailed statistics for categories B-4 through B-8.[12] Parallel passages with less than 50% common vocabulary do not show the same preponderance of parallels between Matthew and Mark, as those with more than 50% common vocabulary. In parallel pericopes with over 60 words:

Table C-4

Summary table showing number of occurrences of pericopes with high percentages of common vocabulary

Category	General criteria: passages of more than 60 words with more than the indicated percentages of common vocabulary	No. of occurrences in: Mt/Mk	Mt/Lk
B-5	More than 40% in both Gospels	3	1
B-6	More than 40% in one, 30% in other	13	8
B-7	More than 30% in one, 20% in other	10	13
B-8	Smaller percentages	9	38
TOTALS		35	60

The tables published in this present paper show slight variations to those of the dissertation. As the dissertation was concerned primarily with the material unique to Matthew these instances were gathered into a

[12]These are included as tables in McIver, "Problem of Synoptic Relationships," 111-14, 375-78.

separate table, and were excluded from tables A-1 & A-2; and B-1 through B-8.[13]

How significant is the difference? Can it be demonstrated to be significant in *statistical* terms? The null hypothesis that there is no difference between the relationships between the three Synoptic Gospels, gives the following results: the difference in A-1, the first entry in table C-1, is significant at a 95% confidence interval;[14] the difference in entries B-1 to B-4 in table C-2 is not significant, while the difference in the same entries of table C-3 is significant at a 95% confidence interval.[15] While it would be preferable to have confidence intervals of 99% for both results, these statistics do show that the observed differences are statistically significant.

The way the research project from which these figures are derived was set up means that corresponding figures for the parallels between Luke and Mark are not available, but other evidence strongly suggests that if such statistics were available they would either confirm, or at least not contradict the observed pattern. For example, Farmer's *Synopticon* reveals

[13]The purposes of this paper are different, and it made better sense to include unique material that was embedded in the parallels. This has entailed seven changes. For example, Matt 26:47-56 (table B-4) was listed in the dissertation as Matt 26:47-51, 54-56, as Matt 26:52-53 is unique to Matthew. This meant that it was included in table B-2 in the dissertation. Matt 7:1-5 is an interesting case. It is parallel to Luke 6:37-38, 41-42. Luke 6:39-40 is parallel to Matt 15:14 and 10:24. If Luke 6:39-40 is excluded then this parallel to Matt 7:1-5 belongs in table B-1; if it is included it belongs in table B-4. This paper placed this parallel in table B-4. But the important point is this: either classification of these seven pericopes shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the types of parallels that exist between Matthew and Mark and Matthew and Luke.

[14]H_0 = "there is no difference between the usage of the three Gospels" means that one would expect a binomial distribution between the two entries (A-1), with $p = q = 0.5$. The one-tailed probability of a result of 1 and 8 is 0.0195, the two-tailed probability is 0.039. This is not significant with a confidence interval of 99%, but is at 95%. It hardly needs to be said that this measure of probability is very crude, and could be refined in many ways. For example, there are 65 relevant parallel pericopes between Matthew and Mark, and 72 between Matthew and Luke. If p was derived from this ratio, it would give $p = 0.474$. The one-tailed probability of an outcome of 1 and 8 with $p = 0.45$ and $q = 0.55$ is 0.0259, which is still significant with a 95% confidence interval. Other possible refinements likewise do not change the fact that the difference is significant at a 95% confidence interval, but not at 99%.

[15]The chi-squared statistic for categories B-1 to B-4 in table C-2 is 4.54, and for table C-3 is 8.97. With two degrees of freedom (K - M - 1 = 4 - 1 - 1), the 99% confidence levels of a two tailed chi-squared value is 10.6, while the 95% confidence levels are 7.4. Thus the difference in table C-2 is not significant at a 95% confidence interval, while the difference in table C-3 is statistically significant for that interval.

but one parallel between Mark and Luke which has over 24 words in exactly the same order in exactly the same sequence: (Luke 4:34-35, Mark 1:24-25). Thus, the overall statistics for the difference in this feature between Mark and Luke are the same as between Matthew and Mark. This same *Synopticon* reveals similar patterns of dependence between Mark and Luke as were shown between Matthew and Mark: percentages of common vocabulary could be quite high, but there were very few long sequences of words in exactly the same order and form. Generally speaking, Luke has slightly lower percentages of common vocabulary in its parallels to Mark than Matthew does.[16] Without collecting the data it is hard to determine whether this would prevent the possibility of any statistically significant differences in percentages of common vocabulary between Luke-Mark and Luke-Matthew that would parallel the one already documented between Matthew-Mark and Matthew-Luke, but for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to note that what evidence is available makes it highly unlikely that further investigations will discover statistical information which contradicts the difference documented by this paper.

In summary, then, there does appear to be a significant difference between the type of parallels that exist between Matthew and Mark, and Matthew and Luke. The parallels between Matthew and Mark at times exhibit a very high percentage of shared vocabulary, while the parallels between Matthew and Luke have a much lower percentage of shared vocabulary but in at least fourteen cases have long sequences of identical words in exactly the same order with no interruptions. What hypothesis can be advanced to explain this difference?

THE THESIS

It is difficult to explain these observed differences by means of either the two document or Griesbach hypotheses. The two document hypothesis would explain the close parallels between Matthew and Luke by means of the now-lost source document Q. But it is precisely at this point that the data is so difficult for that hypothesis to assimilate. Why should the same evangelist, using written sources, treat Q so dramatically differently from Mark? The data poses a similar problem for an explanation based on the Griesbach hypothesis. This hypothesis is likewise based on an explanation of *literary* dependency, and it is difficult to conceive of an explanation why the same evangelist (Luke, in this hypothesis) should treat one written source (Matthew) so differently in different parts of his Gospel. Instead, a new explanation needs to be sought.

[16]Cf. Tyson & Longstaff, *Synoptic Abstract*, pp. 169, 171.

This article proposes to explain these observed differences by postulating that the long sequences of exactly the same words found in the parallels between Matthew and Luke are characteristic of a literary relationship, while the kind of phenomena exhibited by the parallels between Matthew and Mark which, although they have higher percentages of common vocabulary, do not exhibit these kinds of long sequences, are best explained by means of an oral relationship, based on carefully controlled oral tradition. This thesis will be developed in the following stages: first the plausibility that the teachings of Jesus were carefully preserved in oral traditions will be investigated, second the characteristics of human memories and how they effect orally transmitted material will be noted, then finally, the implications of this regarding the data outlined in the previous section will be explored.

First, then, is it plausible that carefully controlled oral tradition existed in early Christianity? Jesus functioned in a way recognized by his contemporaries as analogous to that of a rabbi.[17] A rabbi gathered a group of disciples, and taught them. This teaching, like all teaching in the ancient world, was by means of memorization.[18] The text was first memorized before any attempt was made to understand it.[19] Within rabbinic circles, the teaching of the rabbi was characterized by their double tradition—the written (Scripture) and the oral. First-century rabbis taught their disciples to memorize the essentials of both their own teachings and the teachings of important rabbis before them. Considerable effort was given to preserving the exact wording of the teacher, who, on his part, assisted by abbreviating and condensing his thoughts and providing mnemonic helps. Jesus appears to have departed from this norm in

[17]Rainer Riesner carefully develops the evidence for the historicity of this in his "Jesus as Preacher and Teacher, in *Jesus and the Oral Tradition* (ed. Henry Wansbrough; JSNTSup 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 185-88.

[18]"There is little in the general structure of the rabbinic schools, as I have sketched it, which is distinctively rabbinic. We know enough about the rabbinic schools to be able to say with confidence that they belong to a type of institution attested throughout the Middle East in late antiquity. . . . the norm was a small group of pupils gathered round a teacher—the analogue of the rabbinic disciple-circle. . . . There was a strong emphasis on orality, and memorization played a significant role in learning . . . it represented a definite ideological stance." So Philip S. Alexander, "Orality in Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism at the Turn of the Eras," in *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (ed. Henry Wansbrough; JSNTSup 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 166-67. While most of the detailed description of rabbinic teaching methodology comes from a much later period and after the changes brought about by the reverses of the first and second Jewish revolts, the prevalence of this teaching model dating from times much earlier than that of Jesus and the early church makes quite credible the picture presented subsequently by this paper.

[19]Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1961) 126.

that he taught only his own teaching, not the teachings of those that preceded him,[20] but his basic technique cannot have deviated too greatly from his contemporaries, or else he would not have been called by the title "rabbi". In fact, one can see some aspects of the teachings of Jesus which were ideally suited to oral transmission: parables, short pregnant sayings, and the like. Thus, it is a priori likely that Jesus taught his disciples to memorize the important aspects of his teachings, and that he, like other rabbis, took some pains to structure his teachings in ways suitable for memorization.[21]

There is scant evidence of how the early church preserved the teachings of Jesus, but such as there is also supports the concept of careful preservation of oral tradition. For example, in Acts 2:42 it is reported that the earliest converts to Christianity devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. By any analogy known from the ancient world, whatever else is implied by their devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, this meant that they were memorizing. No information is given concerning the subject matter of their memorization. At the very least, it would include the teachings of Jesus given to his disciples, and in all probability, key elements of his ministry and death.

That there was perceived to be a line of tradition that reached back to the earliest apostles, is shown by Paul's exhortations to his followers to remain in the teachings in which they were instructed (Rom 6:17; 16:17; 1 Cor 11:2), and in his statements that he himself received instruction (1 Cor 11:23).[22] Other evidence comes from allusions to the existence of Christian scribes (Matt 13:52) and to those that act in the role of rabbi, even though they are denied the title (Matt 23:8).[23] These functionaries received and transmitted material by memorization of oral traditions.

[20]This appears to be the probable meaning of the observation that Jesus taught as one having authority not as the scribes (Matt 7:29). He taught on his own authority because, in contrast to the scribes, he did not cite other authorities.

[21]Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings: A Study in the Limits of 'Formgeschichte'* (London: Mowbray, 1957) 24-26; see also Riesner, "Jesus as Preacher and Teacher," 202-7.

[22]Despite his protestations of independence from the Jerusalem apostles in Gal 1:15-17, Paul still went back to Jerusalem to compare his teachings with the Jerusalem apostles when there was a serious dispute in the church (Gal 2:2). It is also unlikely that during the fifteen days Paul spent with Peter (Gal 1:18) that Peter told Paul nothing of the time when he was in close association with Jesus.

[23]The comment of W. Trilling is to the point: "Zum Inhalt ist zu bemerken, dass nur Titel und Titelgebrauch («Lasst euch nicht *nennen*»!) abgelehnt werden, nicht aber Funktionen und deren Träger. Die Existenz und Legitimität «christlicher Schriftgelehrter» ist nicht in Frage gestellt, sondern vorausgesetzt." "Amt und Amtsverständnis bei Matthäus," in *Mélanges Bibliques en hommage au*

This scattered evidence, together with what is known about the teaching methodologies of the ancient world, raises the a priori possibility that the relationship between the closely parallel materials of the Gospels could have been transmitted orally.[24] What is needed is some way to distinguish material that is transmitted orally from that which is transmitted by literary means. This is provided by what is now widely known about the characteristics of human memory.

Short-term memory can retain up to approximately seven words in their exact form and sequence.[25] This exact retention is only characteristic of short term memory, long term memory preserves underlying meaning. When a subject is asked to repeat a saying or story, the underlying meaning is preserved, but changes can be observed in: 1. the words employed; 2. the mood and tense of the verb; and 3. the order of words or incidents. With the passage of more time, more of the details of the story or event drop out.[26] If conscious effort is made at memorization using techniques

R. P. Béda Rigaux (ed. Mgr Albert Descamps & du R. P. André de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970) 31. Cf. also R. Hummel's comment on Matt 23:8-10: "Das Verbot, sich mit den Ehrentiteln der jüdischen Schriftgelehrten anreden zu lassen, setzt die Existenz christlicher Schriftgelehrter voraus." *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche unde Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (Munich: Kaiser, 1963) 27.

[24]Paul J. Achtemeier, in his article "*Omne Verbum Sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1990) 3-27 has conveniently gathered together a range of evidences showing how important orality was in the ancient world, even in written works. He stresses correctly that the knowledge of writing did not necessarily mean that the environment in which the NT developed ceased to be an oral environment. Works were dictated, not written, and even solitary readers read aloud (although it was more common to have works read aloud by a slave). Thus the environment in which the Synoptic Gospels developed was an oral environment. As he says on p. 29, ". . . the NT documents . . . are oral to the core, both in their creation and in their performance."

[25]George A. Millar, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information," *The Psychological Review* 63 (1956) 90-95. In the rest of his article, Millar surveys an extensive range of experiments showing that over a whole range of stimuli (such as taste, sound intensity, length, etc.) the number seven plus or minus two keeps appearing as the limits of the ability to accurately distinguish between discrete stimuli (pp. 81-90, 95-96). See also Donald E. Broadbent, "The Magic Number Seven after Fifteen Years," in *Studies in Long Term Memory* (eds. Alan Kennedy and Alan Wilkes; London: John Wiley, 1975) 3-18; Alan Baddeley, *Human Memory: Theory and Practice* (Hillsday: Erlbaum, 1990) 40-42. Broadbent points out that the limit of seven actually is built upon groupings of two, three, or four elements. Several of the experiments he discusses deal with short term linguistic recall.

[26]These observations are common to almost all general introductory books on psychology or memory, but they are nicely set out and illustrated with respect to the problem of Synoptic relationships in John Bradshaw's article, "Oral Transmission and Human Memory," *ExpTim* 92 (1980-81) 303-7.

such as frequent rehearsal, then the process of the dropping or changing of details is retarded, but not stopped.

Consequently, the difference between material that is orally transmitted and material that is transmitted by literary means is to be found in the fact that orally transmitted material shows changes in the words used, in their mood and tense, and in their order.[27] It is precisely this kind of contrast that has been discovered between the character of the parallels between Matthew and Mark when compared to the parallels between Matthew and Luke. Even in passages where the percentage of common vocabulary is very high, parallel passages between Matthew and Mark show pervasive differences in word order, in words used (Greek is rich in synonyms), and, especially, in mood and tense. As well as this, while the sequence of events between Matthew and Mark shows great similarity, even down to the smallest components,[28] there are many small differences in detail. All these differences are characteristic of orally transmitted material.[29]

In contrast to Matthew/Mark, there are some parallels between Matthew and Luke which, while they do not show high percentages of shared vocabulary, have embedded in them long sequences of exactly the same words in exactly the same order. One notable example of this is Matt 3:1-12 and Luke 3:1-20. If these texts are placed side by side, and their common vocabulary underlined, it is striking that while most of the material shares no common vocabulary, three blocks of material are

[27]Changes in word order are more observable in Greek, where word order is of less importance than it is in English.

[28]Aside from Matthew 5-13, where the material has been gathered thematically, in the passages that Matthew and Mark have in common there is only one deviation in the major sequence of events (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 has the cursing of the fig tree in two separate accounts, while Matt 21:18-22 has both the curse and the result combined into the one account). This is presented visually in Allan Barr, *A Diagram of Synoptic Relationships* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963); and by means of separate text columns in J. F. Springer, "The Synoptic Problem: II. Facts and Conclusions as to the Synoptic Orders of Events," *BSac* 81 (1924) 67-70.

[29]Such is also the conclusion of Albert B. Lord, "The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature," in *The Relationships Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (William O. Walker, Jr., ed.; San Antonio: Trinity Univ. Press, 1978) 33-91. It is tempting to view the kind of oral phenomena reported by Wallace L. Chafe (e.g., "The Deployment of Consciousness in the Production of a Narrative, in *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production* [Wallace L. Chafe, ed.; Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1980] 9-50) as somewhat analogous to the data observed in the Synoptic Gospels. Chafe talks of "idea units" as the basic component of narratives. These would correspond rather well to the short clusters of words which form the common elements of the Synoptic Gospels.

almost exactly word for word (in the same order of words): Matt 3:3 and Luke 3:4; Matt 3:7b-10 and Luke 3:7b-9; Matt 3:11 and Luke 3:16-17. This is the kind of characteristic that one would expect of parallel accounts which have a literary relationship. This kind of relationship can only be detected occasionally in the parallels between Matthew and Luke. Most of the other parallels between those two Gospels exhibit the characteristics of material that, where there is a relationship, it is a relationship based on common oral tradition.

It is for these reasons that this paper proposes a new way of reconstructing the relationship between the three Synoptic Gospels. Broadly speaking, the relationship between them is to be explained in terms of underlying common oral traditions, the traditions underlying Matthew/Mark being closer than those underlying Luke/Matthew or Luke/Mark. As well as this, it is possible to detect the existence of at least one common literary source used by both Matthew and Luke. This hypothesis has the added attractiveness of explaining the relationships between the three Gospels in a way which fits better the oral, as opposed to literary, nature of the ancient world.