

## Meet the hidden Holy Spirit's work in the Gospels:

Remark on Multiple Ensemble Learning hypothesis to describe origin of Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel

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### Abstract

Several scholars such as the late Prof. Eta Linnemann suggested that the original authors of New Testament Gospels wrote their work independently from each others, that is called *independence source hypothesis*. Meanwhile others including Mark Goodacre wrote that even the Gospel of Thomas was written by acknowledging earlier sources from Synoptic Gospels. In this short review article we are humbly suggesting that it is possible that each of authors of Synoptic Gospels, John Gospel and even Thomas Gospel, were writing their work both independently based on their own memory recollection, and partly influenced by Holy Spirits's inspiration, and also based on other earlier sources such as Quelle from Hebrew material, that we can preferably call the process as *Multiple Ensemble Learning* model of Gospels in New Testament. Small contribution of the present article is to clarify the process with more clarity scheme based on methods known in machine learning.

### Introduction

As we wrote in an article submitted to this journal, one of the most interesting insights came from Iain McGilchrist. In his book, *The master and his emissary*, he suggests us to look at our divided brain: the deep polarization caused by two hemispheres of human brain has led mankind astray.<sup>1</sup>

In essence, his arguments can be summarized as follows: learning from church fathers until St. Augustine around 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, we can read more or less an integrative perspective and harmony between the left and right brain hemisphere. But since then and especially to the work of scholastic theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, most accepted theological thoughts have gone down the road where the left brain predominated the entire brain function.

Even with a great movement known as Reformation starting in Germany in early 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, the tendency was still to follow the path down with left brain predominating the theology thoughts. The situation went more awkward with

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<sup>1</sup> Iain McGilchrist. *The Master and His emissary*. (London: Yale University Press, 2015)

the so-called Enlightenment movement. Unlike what most historians wrote that era brought modern era, actually the entire theology scholarship suffered to become more and more rationalistic, hence came the term “*historical criticism*” beginning in 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. And such a methodology can be traced back to German Enlightenment, in the words of Leonhard Goppelt,

...separated the present from the past in order to liberate the present from the domination of tradition. Out of this level of awareness and reflection arose the programmatic concerns of the historical-critical investigation of scripture. Such investigation maintained that even the biblical writings must first of all be seen as historical documents of the past and not as a word laying claim upon the present.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, we can recall how Ferdinand C. Baur went on with his speculative interpretation of Gospels development, based on Hegel’s dialectic view of history. And even though von Harnack refuted that Tuebingen school with his book, we can still perceive Baur’s influence to contemporary theologians.

Perhaps for a moment, we can take a breath with a sort of relief that God has come to rescue at the beginning of the 20th century, with the emergence of the new Pentecostalism movement (cf. Azusa street movement, 1906-1908). Nonetheless, it seems only few scholars admitted on how Holy Spirit influenced and inspired Gospel authors with clarity.

Alternatively, several scholars such as the late Prof. Eta Linnemann suggested that the original authors of New Testament Gospels wrote their work independently from each others, that is called *independence source* hypothesis (Linnemann, 1993; Linnemann, 2001). Meanwhile others including Mark

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<sup>2</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Jürgen Roloff, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), 1:256. Also in *The Editor*, Haddington House Journal, 2004.

Goodacre wrote that even the Gospel of Thomas was written by acknowledging earlier source from Synoptic Gospels.

Apart from that problem, what actually happened is more severe: i.e. there is great crisis faced by theology as a discipline today, as several notable scholars admitted, in particular because the contemporary scholars have brought higher criticism into more and more radical, and even come to the point jeopardizing their own discipline, with approaches such as *deconstructivism* and also *hermeneutics of suspicion* (cf. Ricoeur). Eventually, that would mean that the entire Bible reading has been reduced to merely *literary critics*.

Other than that there is also a hidden assumption behind historical criticism, which is often regarded as effort toward more objective interpretation of the Bible texts, i.e. modern historiography forbids Divine role to be acknowledged. In other words, such a viewpoint puts modern Bible interpretation to be in stark contradiction with traditional premises of Holy Spirit's inspiration to authors of the four Gospels.

Therefore, in this short review article we are humbly suggesting that it is possible that each of authors of Synoptic Gospels, John Gospel and even Thomas Gospel, were writing their work both independently based on their own memory recollection, and partly influenced by Holy Spirit's inspiration, and also based on other earlier sources such as Quelle from Hebrew material, that we can preferably call the process as *Multiple Ensemble Learning* model of Gospels in New Testament.

### **Theoretical background**

The New Testament Gospels are a collection of four books that tell the story of Jesus Christ. The authors of these Gospels are anonymous, and there is no consensus among scholars about when or where they were written, except a range of 60-100 AD as tentative formative years. However, there is general agreement that the Gospels were written by people who were familiar with the

life and teachings of Jesus, and that they drew on a variety of sources, including oral traditions, eyewitness accounts, and written documents (possibly including *Quelle* in Hebrew, cf. Hwang, 2011).

#### A. The Independence Source Hypothesis

One of the most influential theories about the relationship between the Gospels is the Independence Source Hypothesis (cf. Linnemann, 1993; Linnemann, 2001). This theory argues that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) did not use each other's work as sources. Instead, they each independently drew on a common source, known as Q, as well as possibly other sources, such as Mark's Gospel.

The Independence Source Hypothesis is supported by a number of factors. First, the Synoptic Gospels share a great deal of material, but they also have significant differences. This suggests that they were not copied from each other, but rather that they drew on the same common source. Second, the order of the stories in the Synoptic Gospels is often different, which further suggests that they were not copied from each other.

#### B. The Multiple Ensemble Learning Model

The Multiple Ensemble Learning Model is a more recent hypothesis that challenges the Independence Source Hypothesis. This theory argues that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels did use each other's work as sources, but that they also drew on other sources, such as verbal traditions and written documents.

The Multiple Ensemble Learning Model is supported by a number of factors. First, the Synoptic Gospels share a great deal of material, including not only the stories, but also the wording of the stories. This suggests that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels were familiar with each other's work and that they may have borrowed from each other. Second, the order of the stories in the Synoptic Gospels is often similar, which further suggests that they were influenced by each other.

The term Ensemble Learning itself is a phrase known from learning methods, especially known in machine learning models. Ensemble learning is a general meta approach to machine learning that seeks better predictive performance by combining the predictions from multiple models.

Although there are a seemingly unlimited number of ensembles that you can develop for your predictive modeling problem, there are three methods that dominate the field of ensemble learning. So much so, that rather than algorithms per se, each is a field of study that has spawned many more specialized methods.<sup>3</sup>

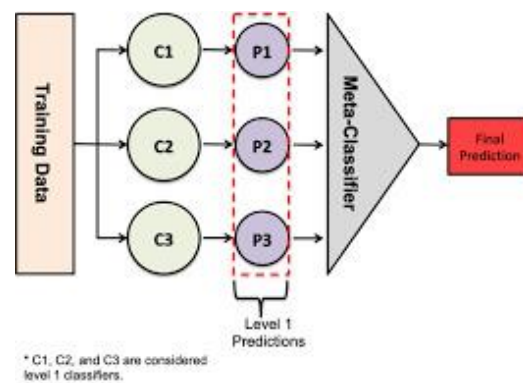


Diagram 1. Simple model of Ensemble Learning

Provided it is conceivable to apply the same perspective of ensemble learning towards Gospel writing process in 1<sup>st</sup> AD, then we can call the hypothesis MEL (multiple ensemble learning). That is a multitude of approaches, including initial verbal tradition of Jesus's teachings, Quelle in earlier Hebrew manuscript (mostly intractable today), and author's own personal memory recollection.

Now, allow us to move one step forward, by assuming also Holy Spirit's inspiration in Gospel writing process which for most of the time has not been

<sup>3</sup> <https://machinelearningmastery.com/tour-of-ensemble-learning-algorithms/>

acknowledged properly in schematic form, see Diagram 2.



Illustration 2. How Holy Spirit possibly influenced Gospel writing process in the past

Now, in the extended model of MEL, allow us to call the hypothesis: GIMEL (God-inspired-multiple-ensemble-learning). It can be expected that the proposed viewpoint of Gospel writing process can bring clarity on the dialogical role of which the Holy Spirit inspired the Gospel authors, in particular in the sense of Buber for instance (cf. Fee, 2011; Paulus, 2006; Telford, 2014).

The diagram as shown below may depict the hypothetical process:

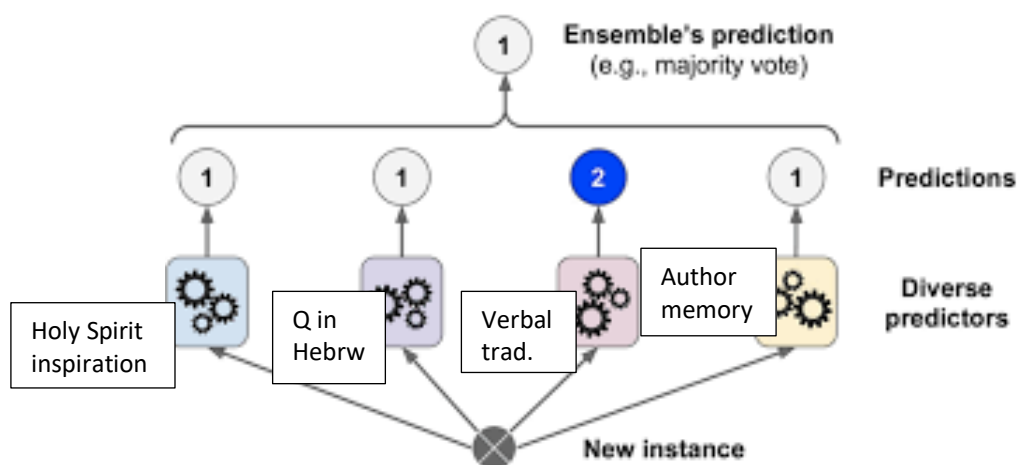


Diagram 3. God-inspired-multiple ensemble learning (GIMEL hypothesis)

We hope that the proposed GIMEL scheme can bring clarity to Holy Spirit inspiration which until now is hidden process under hermeneutics discourses among theology scholars.

### C. Remark on The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas is a non-canonical gospel that was discovered in Egypt in 1945, among Nag Hammadi scrolls. The Gospel of Thomas contains sayings of Jesus that are not found in the canonical Gospels. However, some of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are similar to sayings in the Synoptic Gospels (cf Christianto, *NPTRS*, 2022).

The Multiple Ensemble Learning Model can also be used to explain the relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels. It is possible that the author of the Gospel of Thomas drew on the Synoptic Gospels as a source, but it is also possible that the author of the Gospel of Thomas drew on a common source, such as Q, that was also used by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels.

All in all, this author doesn't pretend to offer a conclusive remark on the role and connection between Gospel of Thomas and Q document, despite Mark Goodacre for instance arguing to support author of Gospel of Thomas already knew other Gospels.

## **Discussion**

### **Deep lessons for today Christians especially those in higher educations**

As this author already discusses in 2 articles in this journal (Christianto, 2022; Christianto, 2023), it seems quite clear that many problems in modern civilizations can be traced back to gradually emphasis on left brain hemisphere functions, that is analytical and rationalism thinking mode, while the other hemisphere seems prone to be neglected in education curricula. Notably, we can read story of Western scholar who reportedly found many troubling experiences while encountering with people in the East, for instance see (Mulder, 2006).

Such an experience can also be traced to many reports by seminarian students in almost everywhere, when gradually they were told that praying to God is almost fruitless, our faith in birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ is put to questions, and even spiritual formation as discipline is put aside as useless virtue of the past. Of course, not all seminaries teach such radical criticism as we mentioned above.

What can be said to prepare better theology education and to rekindle the high spiritual tradition of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Early Christianity believers? Not so difficult to grasp if we can reconcile the left and right brain hemispheres back into our education processes. That is perhaps what David Benson argues in his article, "God's Curriculum: Reimagining education as a journey toward shalom," where he summarizes his suggestion: "What is education for? Despite their differences, secular and religious schools alike are often busy with the mechanics of delivering their prescribed curricula. Relatively little attention is given to metaphysics, discerning the end toward which they labour. What, then, might be a sufficiently inclusive and encompassing Christian vision of education for all citizens in our simultaneously secular and religious pluralistic democracy? Christian educational leaders rightly seek an integrated vision of faith and learning. What is arguably lacking, however, is a unifying metaphor of faith and learning which is capable of sparking our imagination and serving our differently believing neighbours studying in our midst. The most comprehensive purpose for humanity as a whole and education therein is arguably shalom."

Similarly, other authors wrote for better balance in terms of returning back mental health: "*Harmonization of the Activity of the Left and Right Cerebral Hemispheres.*" They stated, among other things, that:

"According to modern scholars (N. Maslova, B. Astafiev), one of the important causes of the global planetary crisis, including the modern education system in particular, is the violation of the conformity of natural principles in the process of perception and cognition of the world, caused by excess development of logical and rational thinking and lack of development of figurative, spiritual-



intuitive thinking in contemporary schools at all levels. The modern educational system at all levels (school, higher education, postgraduate studies, and doctorate) is aimed primarily at the development of left hemisphere mechanisms of rational, logical thinking, and analytical perception of reality. Such a one-way orientation leads to inhibition of right-sided processes, does not contribute to the development of creativity, disclosure and activation of the individual's spiritual and intuitive abilities, as well as the individual's alienation from the World, loss of a sense of personal integrity, unity with the World; namely the individual's disharmony with his own nature and environment. The personal development of a person in modern conditions takes the form of "Homo technicus" ("technical person"), "Homo informaticus" ("informational and technogenic person"), "consumers" ("person who consumes"), "Reified man" ("people who have material excess"), "Nomo Festivus" ("people who have fun") (Butenko, 2017). As a result, a person is born with a technocratic, rational, pragmatic and consumerist outlook on the world, and as a consequence, harmony in "human-human", "human-nature", "human-society", the "human-universe" system, and hence, the balance in the interaction of the integrated energy-information system "Man – Society – Earth – Universe" is violated." (Tyurina & Stavkova, 2020)

In our view, this is in accordance with the findings of McGilchrist, who stated that there was a decline in Western civilization precisely because of excessive emphasis on left brain function. Indeed, the function of the left brain is mainly to focus on analysis and rationality. However, it should still be placed under holistic function of the right brain hemisphere, including, spirituality, holistic thinking, intuition, empathy ...not the other way around (cf. McGilchrist, 2015).

Even the story of the collapse of the island of Atlantis told by Plato, seems to have been triggered by civilization that had become high while morality had declined. On the other side, the Lord Jesus taught us to learn to pray in spirit and truth (cf. John chapter 4). This means that there must be a balance between left brain function / rationality and healthy holistic-spiritual function. That is a way to pray to the heavenly Father, and at the same time a healthy way to meet and develop

close relationship with the true *Living Water*, namely the Son of God Himself. Because in essence Christianity is nothing other than an encounter with the Heavenly Father through His Living Son.

Therefore, it is our hope that the proposed perspective of GIMEL model can be considered not only as how the Gospel texts were written in the past, but hopefully education planners and educators as well also would be encouraged to consider GIMEL approach for improving education practices, especially those Christian educators in higher education (cf. Luetz *et al*, 2018; Moulin-Stozek, 2020).

### **Concluding remark**

In this short review article we are humbly suggesting that it is possible that each of authors of Synoptic Gospels, John Gospel and even Thomas Gospel, were writing their work both independently based on their own memory recollection, and partly influenced by Holy Spirits's inspiration, and also based on other earlier sources such as Q (possibly from Hebrew material), that we can preferably call the process as Multiple Ensemble Learning hypothesis of Gospel writing in the New Testament. Small contribution of the present article is to clarify the Gospel text writing process with more clarity based on methods already known in machine learning.

The *Multiple Ensemble Learning Model* is a complex theory, but it offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Gospels. This theory acknowledges that the authors of the Gospels were influenced by each other, but it also recognizes that they were drawing on a variety of sources, including by Divine/Holy Spirit inspiration, of which few scholars admit properly His role. The Multiple Ensemble Learning Model can be viewed as a useful tool for understanding the complex process of gospel text writing.

We hope that the proposed GIMEL scheme can bring clarity to Holy Spirit inspiration which until now is hidden process under hermeneutics discourses among theology scholars.

### **Acknowledgement**

Special gratitude to his friends in East Java, notably Rudi Asahi for giving the author a copy of W.R. Telford's book on the *New Testament*. While this author tried to keep a balanced perspective on the dilemma of New Testament origins, but this article does not necessarily reflect organizational view.

Version 1.0: 15<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2023, pk. 19:07

Version 1.1: 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2023, pk. 14:16

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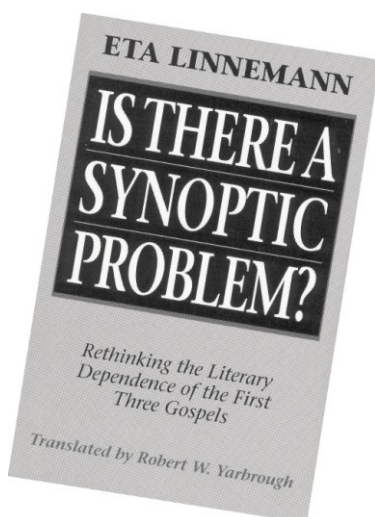


## **A Didactic Review of Linnemann's, *Is There A Synoptic Problem?***

*In the 2004 Haddington House Journal, we have included a section called "A Didactic Review." The purpose of this kind of review is for broader instruction than simply discussing a particular book, hence the name – didactic review, or instructive review. This review acquaints the reader with several technical terms and issues in the field of biblical studies; it will help students taking advanced biblical courses; and it also surveys some of the key authors in German Higher Criticism. We believe that students and readers need to know that there have been significant works written challenging several of these false assumptions. These books by Eta Linnemann are catalogued in the Haddington House Library and may be consulted by readers coming for study and sabbatical.*

The Editor

***Is There a Synoptic Problem?  
Rethinking the Literary  
Dependence of the First Three  
Gospels***  
Eta Linnemann. Trans. R.W.  
Yarbrough.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker  
Book House Co., 1992, 219 pp.  
ISBN 0-8010-5679-9



*Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels* has already received due attention a number of years ago in the book reviews of respected journals. However, the case for literary independence set forward by Linnemann still maintains a measure of relevance in the field of Source Theory. (We will define this in the following paragraph.) This is evidenced by the small but growing number of New Testament scholars who are drawing attention to the necessity for the re-evaluation of the long propagated Two-Source Hypothesis, the child of German Historical Criticism.

Historical Criticism of the Scriptures emerged as the Enlightenment and its understanding of history interacted with the Reformation's principles governing Scripture. The Enlightenment, in the words of Leonhard Goppelt,

...separated the present from the past in order to liberate the present from the domination of tradition. Out of this level of awareness and reflection arose the programmatic concerns of the historical-critical investigation of scripture. Such investigation maintained that even the biblical writings must first of all be seen as historical documents of the past and not as a word laying claim upon the present.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the theological task of Historical Criticism was to analyse the Scriptures using historical science and interpret them using philosophy, which, "...should in the end communicate to persons in the modern world the content of the New Testament, which is of importance to them but is obscured by church tradition."<sup>2</sup> This historical examination of the Scriptures leads to developmental assumptions and further questions about the layers of sources behind the Scriptures as well as the identity and nature of these sources. This historical investigation focused also on the process of oral and written transmission, on the order of the writing, in this case, of the Gospels, and on the literary dependence between them.

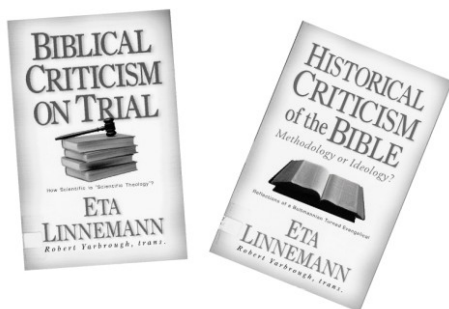
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<sup>1</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Jürgen Roloff, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), 1:256.

<sup>2</sup> Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:256.

The phrase, “Literary dependence... means that a writer used the writing of another as a source” (p.47). Thus, within the realm of Historical Criticism the field of Source Criticism took shape. The Two-Source theory of literary dependence postulates that Matthew and Luke independently followed Mark and another hypothetical source named Q (from the German, ‘quelle’, which means, ‘source’).

Eta Linnemann wrote, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* initially in German, under the title *Gibt es ein Synoptisches Problem?* This was written as a “specific example” of the first book, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical.*<sup>3</sup> Both of these have been translated into English by Dr. Robert W. Yarbrough, of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, along with the latest, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is “Scientific Theology”?*<sup>4</sup>



Eta Linnemann’s conversion deserves special mention. She was a student of well-known eminent German scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann. She advanced in her studies and became honorary professor of New Testament at Philipps University, Marburg, West Germany. Eventually, certain observations lead her into disillusionment until her dramatic conversion experience. After which she vehemently rejected her prior academic position

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<sup>3</sup> Eta Linneman, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Butmannian Turned Evangelical*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 201), 169 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Eta Linneman, *Biblical Criticism on trial: how Scientific is “Scientific Theology”?*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 217 pp.



and successful writings. Linnemann now writes from the position of an Evangelical Conservative repudiating the historical-critical theology she once zealously embraced. The extraordinary nature of her conversion is only heightened upon reflection on Bultmann's teaching. Rudolf Bultmann, who began to exercise influence from 1920, sought to demythologize the Scriptures, that is to say, to interpret them using existential philosophy, to reach beyond the obsolete and mythical view of the world presented in the Scriptures and grasp the intrinsic New Testament message as distilled in the kerygma, the primitive proclamation. It is with a knowledge of this that Eta Linnemann's conversion is justifiably termed, "dramatic".

*Is There a Synoptic Problem?* is divided into four parts. Part one, containing two chapters, is a critical review of the history of the presuppositions and method of theological science as well as that of academic pedagogy. Part two, consisting of six chapters, sets out to answer the question, "Is there literary dependence among the Synoptic Gospels?", by the quantitative comparison and vocabulary investigation of the Synoptics. Part three, containing two chapters, discusses "The possibility of understanding the Synoptic Gospels without literary dependence", and the implications of this to our understanding of the origin of the Gospels. Part four, in concluding fashion, deals with the purpose of and treatment of the four Gospels.

The introduction to the content of *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* provides the reader with a useful orientation to the general nature of the contention in Source Theory *via* answers to questions frequently asked Linnemann. Almost immediately, her austere but evocative manner of presenting the material becomes vividly apparent. However, owing to the book's specialized material, it is only moderately readable. From the start Linnemann plainly asserts, regarding the literary relationship among the Gospels, that "The alleged literary dependence is not proven." (p.10) The reader is continually reminded of this initial statement at all significant junctures throughout the book. Among five reasons stating why the issue of literary dependence has unfavourable implications for Christians, she maintains that, "...the authority of God's Word is undermined by the systematic exercise of critical predisposition to reduce the Word of God to literary-

theological construction instead of seeing it as the revelation of our creator and redeemer.” (p.15)

Linnemann begins chapter one by writing, “Scientific theology was born, not because people were committed to the Bible, but because they sought reasons to avoid obligation to its teachings.” (p.19) She points out that the majority of leaders were not theologians but philosophers. Linnemann identifies Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as the one whose “dubious reinterpretation of Eusebius” (p.27) laid the ideological foundation upon which the Synoptic literary dependence hypotheses was built. She points out that Historical Critical New Testament scholars established the views of literary dependence following the same path tread by Old Testament scholars who established the Graf-Wellhausen source theories (a particularly influential, yet an increasingly questionable theory of the historical development of the Old Testament). Both are a product of intuition/ conjecture, beginning with a “...striking absence of proof.” (p.22) Only later were biased assertions and judgements brought to bear on the theses. Linnemann writes, “...students were never told that the two-source theory resulted from no thorough investigation of the biblical data, but rather is a transitional phase in the course of a discussion.” (p.25) She then recounts the varied explanations of literary dependence as it developed from its questionable source, namely, Lessing.

In chapter two, Linnemann critically reviews the history of the presuppositions and method of academic pedagogy. She draws attention to widely used Georg Strecker and Udo Schnelle’s introduction to New Testament exegesis. Strecker and Schnelle ignore the possibility that the Gospels arose independently; instead they presuppose literary dependence and Marcan priority, and support their view by “distorting” the observations of philologist Karl Lachmann, who wrote that Matthew and Luke did not imitate Mark, but that they arose out of evangelical tradition. She then identifies other scholars in Strecker and Schnelle’s text who further perpetuated the Two-Source Hypothesis based on presuppositions, circular arguments and “outright distortions” (p.53).

Part two quantitatively compares the Synoptics and investigates their vocabularies to determine if any literary dependence really exists. Linnemann clearly emphasizes that,

“Literary dependence can only be proven or disproven from the actual wording; one must restrict study to the linguistic data.” (p.70) Agreement in the content of the Synoptics may not be sequestered as evidence for literary dependence. “Similarity in content is, however, no proof of literary dependence, for it could just as easily be due to historical rather than literary factors.”(p.149) Linnemann summarizes her findings,

...material shared by Matthew and Mark comprises 55.46 percent of Matthew; material shared by Luke and Mark comprises 42.91 percent of Luke... 50.43 percent of the three Synoptic Gospels follow a similar narrative sequence, 75.65 percent of the sequence in Matthew and Mark is similar, and 70.43 percent of the sequence in Mark and Luke is similar... extent of parallelism between Matthew and Mark at 46.5 percent, and between Mark and Luke at 36.17 percent... quantitative cross-sectional Synoptic investigation showed that only 22.17 percent of the words... are parallel in all three Synoptics are totally identical. In Matthew and Mark... 40.99 percent; in Luke and Mark...34.29 percent... similarities in vocabulary,... come to 0.22 percent of Mark... 2.3 percent for Mark and Matthew, and 0.97 percent for Mark and Luke. (p. 149-150)

She admits to some cases of literal agreement but discounts them as “rare” (p.150). She sharply concludes the summary of part two, “...not only the two-source theory but also the Griesbach hypothesis, with their underlying assertion of literary dependence among the three Synoptic Gospels, are both finished when the Synoptic data has been sifted. No room remains for free-floating hypotheses.” (p.152) The Griesbach hypothesis theorizes that Matthew wrote first and was in turn used by Luke, with Mark writing his Gospel last making use of both Matthew and Luke.

Linnemann bases her explanation of the independent origin of the Gospels on the analysis of the mechanics of “linguistic

fixation” (p.158-165) as it is governed by the effectual “forgotten factor”, memory (p.182-191). She identifies that Wolfgang Schadewaldt already promulgated these thoughts. Linnemann states that the direct independent historical deposit of the Gospels by eyewitnesses has its significance in the multiple and not single shared testimony of the Evangelists to Christ Jesus (p.195-196).

Has Linnemann successfully dismantled the edifice of literary dependence? She has unarguably achieved a plausible case for literary independence, but she has not eliminated the real possibility of degrees of literary dependence working in tandem with oral tradition. Oral tradition, not in the Historical Critical sense, but meaning that the disciples and Evangelists did repeatedly verbalize standardized historical eyewitness accounts to the communities before actually depositing these accounts in an orderly manner directly in writing (e.g. Luke 24:19-24). John W. Wenham puts forth a view similar to this in his, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem*.<sup>5</sup> It is also highly likely the individual Gospel writers had access to whichever Gospel(s), if any, was written prior to the writing of their own. It is inconceivable to think that the communities of believers did not actively circulate material written for common edification. The apostle Paul, we read, requested that his epistle to the Colossians be read in the Laodicean church and the letter sent to Laodicea be read in Colossae (Colossians 4:16).

Linnemann did commendably well to point out, as others have done, the circular arguments and biased conjectures by which literary dependence hypotheses developed. Linnemann discerningly states, “The mode of thinking of twentieth-century theologians is imposed on the New Testament.” (p.51) Linnemann’s quantitative comparison of the Synoptics is impressive and useful. Though, her selection of shared material, parallels and pericopies is at times questionable. It is unfortunate that she did not scientifically define the accepted threshold of agreement percentage necessary to determine, without a doubt,

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<sup>5</sup> John W. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 319 pp.

dependence. By what methods and standards is this determined? She does not satisfactorily address this crucial point.

Linnemann correctly identified the importance of the “forgotten factor” of memory. This, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is indeed central to the formation of the Gospels. Linnemann correctly stated that, “Reliable historical tradition does exist” (p.187), in the testimony of the church fathers. This is an important reminder since their testimony has been prejudicially discounted as being “unscientific”. It is unfortunate that Linnemann interacts almost exclusively with German scholarship. Part three lacked clarity in nomenclature, which in turn directly affected the strength of her argumentation for literary independence, though not its plausibility. It seems that Linnemann and the reader must continually keep in mind that her statement, “We are dealing here with a methodologically new starting point...” (p.71), is equally pertinent to all parts of her book.

Linnemann is adamant in her arguments and blunt in her reproofs. She is right to draw attention to the need for re-examination of, specifically, the Two-Source Hypothesis. Her arguments are, in the end, graciously seasoned with scripture and exhortation, which demonstrates her love for the Gospel, its divine inspiration, inerrancy and its historical veracity. There is, therefore, good reason Linnemann’s writings should continue to occupy a guarded place in the realm of our knowledge of Source Theory. Pastors, divinity students and academics alike will find and continue to find this book usefully thought provoking in their studies and work.

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