

Matthew C. Williams. *Two Gospels from One: A Comprehensive Text-Critical Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006. Pp. 256. ISBN 0-8254-3904-X. \$21.99, paper.

1. Matthew C. Williams' *Two Gospels from One: A Comprehensive Text-Critical Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels* promises more than it can deliver, misleads readers with its subtitle, and stymies rather than advances the agendas of text-critical research and gospel criticism. Williams's study not only fails to shed new light on the Synoptic Problem, but also misappropriates (and misapplies) text-critical criteria to problems beyond their purview. The result is a work that amounts to little more than a cataloguing of well-known arguments for Marcan priority, encumbered by repeated attempts to tether a text-critical approach to the Synoptic Problem. Despite the appearance of copious detail, the work is selective in its treatment and founded upon a number of abstractions.

2. The work's subtitle leads readers to expect detailed treatment of all three Synoptic Gospels. In fact, only Matthew and Mark are considered. Nor is every pericope relevant to the Synoptic Problem examined—less than a third of Mark's evidence is taken up (173 verses, or 27%). The exclusion of arguments from "order" or any consideration of Q, both of critical relevance to the Synoptic Problem, further heightens the disparity between the work's claim and its execution. The author acknowledges these limitations, but makes no effort to reconcile them with the subtitle (p. 46-47). On the contrary, the grand claim is carried over into the first chapter heading: "A Proposed Method for Solving the Synoptic Problem."

3. *Two Gospels from One* appears to have been inspired by Peabody, Cope, and McNicol's, *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke* (a work that lays out the case for the Two Gospel Hypothesis). In response, Williams offers a counterargument for Marcan priority using text-critical criteria. Taking his cue from Streeter's linguistic argument for Marcan priority (that Matthew eliminated or toned down difficult phrases in Mark, as well as made stylistic and grammatical improvements to his gospel), Williams proposes to examine whether the kinds of *textual* changes made by scribes to Mark's text are analogous to Matthew's *literary* changes to Mark's gospel. To demonstrate this, would, in Williams' opinion, "constitute evidence, based upon text-critical principles, that Matthew is the later gospel" (p. 46).

4. *Two Gospels from One* is arranged into five parts. Chapter one offers a brief history of the Synoptic Problem, highlights the similarities between textual criticism and source criticism, and proposes the application of text-critical criteria to the Synoptic Problem. The second chapter identifies seven criteria useful for examining the literary relationship between Matthew-Mark and grades them variously as: "most important", "next best," and "of limited value" (p. 61). Chapter three examines the variants of Mark's textual apparatus (in Nestle-Aland) and categorizes them according to the identified criteria. The fourth chapter examines the literary differences between Matthew and Mark, classifying them as was done with Mark's variants. Chapter five offers a brief summary followed by three conclusions: First, "Matthew made the same types of changes to Mark's gospel that Marcan scribes made to Mark's gospel" (p. 214). Second, "text-critical criteria clearly and consistently support Marcan priority and Matthean posteriority" (p. 215). Third, "using the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament and not agreeing with Marcan priority demonstrates inconsistency since the *same* text-critical arguments that were

used to establish the present Nestle-Aland text also establish that Matthew has secondary readings and Mark has original readings” (p. 215).

5. The problem with *Two Gospels from One* is not that Marcan priority is implausible. Marcan priority is more than that; it is compelling—*ceteris paribus*! Neither is it that textual criticism has no contributions to make toward the resolution of the Synoptic Problem. Indeed, the rigorous historical thinking and ingenuity exhibited by those engaged in the text-critical enterprise are precisely the skills and gifts demanded by the problem. (We do well to recall, however, that Griesbach did *not* espouse Marcan priority.) The trouble with *Two Gospels from One* is that the work is essentially an analogical argument founded upon the *already* established conclusions of Marcan prioritists, beset by multiple, misguided *abstractions* from the field of textual criticism.

6. The argument from analogy is not the problem *per se*. Indeed, such arguments are quite useful where evidence is in short supply. The difficulty is that Williams takes the analogy as text-critical *evidence*. Analogies, however, are not evidence. Neither is the fact that textual critics explain scribal changes in ways comparable to Marcan prioritists indicative of anything other than that they share common assumptions about the causes of literary/textual changes. Williams’ argument, therefore, is circular.

7. But the greatest liability of *Two Gospels from One* lies in the author’s uncritical use of Nestle-Aland. Williams’ assumption, that “the *same* text-critical arguments used to establish the present Nestle-Aland text also establish that Matthew has secondary readings and Mark has original readings” (p. 215), is a gross oversimplification and overlooks the fact that the *Novum Testamentum Graece* originated as a consensus text based on the editions of Weiss, Westcott and Hort, and Weymouth. Williams’ use of the *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* is equally uncritical since he gives no attention to how a synopsis constructed on the *basis* of Marcan priority might predetermine his conclusions *for* Marcan priority. Most egregious, however, are Williams’ multiple text-critical abstractions. Williams’ sole reliance on variants from Mark’s textual apparatus for his understanding of scribal activity is divorced from actual scribal habits as they occur in individual MSS, some of which controvert widely held assumptions about scribal activity. Moreover, hardly any attention is given to the many ways scribal activity *differs* from the putative editorial activity of the evangelists, some of which may advise against this analogical experiment. Finally, there is something naïve about the employment of text-critical criteria—themselves symptomatic of a *problem* (i.e., the original text is still in question), as a proposed *solution* to the Synoptic Problem.

8. In short, this study adopts a circular methodology, mistakes analogy for evidence, and neglects significant categories of evidence—hardly the recipe for a persuasive presentation.

Juan Hernández Jr.
Bethel University