

our own understanding of Scripture, and to apply it more readily in our preaching and teaching ministry today.

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Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem

John Wenham

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1991, 319pp,
pb. £9.95

RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre explique que les trois évangiles dépendent d'un fonds commun de tradition orale, mais que Matthieu fut écrit en premier et Luc en dernier. Il plaide également en faveur de leurs auteurs traditionnels et les situe très tôt dans le 1^{er} siècle, datant Matthieu de 42, Marc de 45, et Luc de 55. Il se fonde sur des possibilités, qu'on ne peut pas toutes considérer comme probables. Ceci est particulièrement vrai de l'antériorité de Matthieu, en faveur de laquelle ses arguments ne sont pas assez développés. Néanmoins, il démontre que certaines hypothèses critiques reposent sur des données fragiles ou douteuses, et demandent à être réévaluées. C'est un travail impressionnant qui mérite une étude soignée des spécialistes.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Verfasser stellt die These auf, daß alle drei Evangelien aus einem gemeinsamen mündlich überlieferten Quellenmaterial stammen, wobei Matthäus zuerst und Lukas zuletzt geschrieben wurden.

Er argumentiert auch für die Glaubwürdigkeit der altkirchlichen Tradition bezüglich der Verfasserschaft und für eine Frühdatierung — Matthäus um 42 n.Chr., Markus um 45 n.Chr. und Lukas um 55 n.Chr. Seine These basiert auf Wahrscheinlichkeiten, von denen nicht alle überzeugend sind. Dies gilt besonders für die von ihm postulierte sehr frühe Datierung des Matthäus, was jedoch nicht ausreichend belegt wird. Er weist allerdings nach, daß einige kritische Thesen unsicher belegt sind und einer Überprüfung bedürfen. Dies ist ein beeindruckendes Werk, das wissenschaftliche Aufmerksamkeit verdient.

John Wenham is known to thousands of theological students for his textbook *The Elements of New Testament Greek*. Readers of his new book will find that they need to have read its predecessor in order to cope with the Greek quotations and synoptic tables liberally spread through its pages. Yet it is simply and clearly written with an attractive English style, and numerous summaries make the argument crystal clear. Wenham expresses his dissatisfaction with much that has been written on the origins of the synoptic Gospels (and he has read a great deal

about them), and argues for a theory that can only be pronounced radical. His book falls into three parts.

First, he discusses the interrelationships of the Gospels and argues that all three depend on a common fund of oral material as their basis; Matthew, however, was written first, and was known to Mark, and both of them were known to Luke who came last. This conclusion depends on arguing that Luke is dependent on Mark and not *vice versa*, that much of Luke and Mark (52 pericopes) have a common origin, and that Luke keeps to the sense of Mark in these passages (but not in others where they are approximately parallel but differ). From this it follows that Luke probably kept to the sense of his other sources, but the differences in sense between Luke and Matthew in much of the so-called Q material make it unlikely that Luke was dependent on Q (still less on Matthew, *pace* M. D. Goulder). Finally, it is argued that Matthew composed a Gospel in Hebrew and that Mark had knowledge of Matthew.

Second, Wenham discusses the external evidence for the composition of the Gospels and argues for the validity of the traditional ascriptions; he also argues that Peter went to Rome about 12 years after the crucifixion.

Thirdly, he discusses how the Gospels were composed, arguing for their basic dependence on oral tradition, and then considers their dates: Matthew c. AD 42; Mark c. AD 45; and Luke c. AD 55 (2 Cor. 8:18 being a reference to the Gospel). Wenham refers only briefly to a further interesting hypothesis that Luke was one of the Seventy and in fact the unnamed disciples who walked to Emmaus (see 'The Identity of Luke', *Evangelical Quarterly* 63, Jan. 1991, 3-44).

Wenham's book contains so much detailed argument that a proper exposition of his case and a reasoned reply to it is not possible in the restricted space available here. I cannot altogether avoid the impression that a good deal of the case is based on possibilities, some of which seem to me to be less than probable. To some extent he has produced a case which is unfalsifiable; thus if Luke used both Mark and oral tradition covering the same ground, then there is no way of telling whether or not he is actually dependent on Mark at any specific point. Further, on this hypothesis, the argument that Luke does not alter the sense of Mark somewhat loses weight, since Wenham seems to want to say that Luke was primarily dependent on oral tradition (Jerusalem catechesis) and only secondarily on Mark. Wenham leaves it vague whether Mark used Hebrew Matthew or Greek Matthew. On the whole he prefers the latter view, and argues that there was an

oral Greek tradition which was sufficiently well established to account for the fairly similar wording used by the translator of Matthew and by Mark. But here we find a problem. This sees an extraordinarily complex theory with redundant elements to explain a phenomenon which is more simply explained by Matthew's use of Mark. Here, then, is the problem: how do we choose between the two hypotheses? The Marcan hypothesis can be defended by a detailed examination of the text, such as various commentators have undertaken; the Wenham hypothesis needs an equally detailed defence to show that it is superior. But in the nature of things this book does not provide it, and I do not think that it has given even sufficient evidence to show that there are passages where it works better than its rival. In other words, much of what Wenham offers is a statement of possibilities that are not necessarily more plausible than other, rival possibilities.

There are also places where he offers hypotheses that seem quite unlikely. Where is the evidence that 'the former treatise' of Acts 1:1 refers more naturally to a previous work than to the preceding part of a two-volume work? And how can one translate Irenaeus the way Wenham (following Chapman) does on p. 241? How does 'writing a gospel' differ from 'handing down in writing' the things preached by Peter?

It is important to observe, however, that Wenham's book presents several hypotheses which are to some extent independent of one another, and therefore if some of them are dubious, it does not follow that the others automatically lapse also. At the same time, it shows that some generally accepted critical hypotheses rest on shaky evidence and need to be reassessed. All in all, it is an impressive work which deserves careful scholarly attention.

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Let Justice Roll Down. The Old Testament, Ethics and the Christian Life

Bruce C. Birch

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre tente de rendre l'Ancien Testament plus accessible à l'Eglise d'aujourd'hui, en tant que source d'inspiration morale. Comme introduction générale, il est excellent, bien que sa méthode, fondée sur la 'critique canonique' de Brevard

Childs, présente des inconvénients. La seconde partie du livre, réservée aux questions éthiques, est excellente, en dépit de sa brièveté.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Buch wird versucht, das AT als Quelle der Ethik für die heutige Kirche zugänglicher zu machen. Als allgemeine Einführung ist dieses Buch hervorragend geeignet, allerdings ist die auf der 'kanonischen Kritik' von Brevard Childs basierende Methodik des Verfassers problematisch. Der Schwerpunkt des zweiten Teiles liegt auf der Ethik und ist trotz seiner Kürze ausgezeichnet.

This book is written with the laudable intention of attempting to make the OT more available as a moral resource for the Church today. As a general introduction to the state of current scholarship on almost the whole range of OT literature, and a stimulus to a more thorough application of the richness of the sweep of the Bible to our context today, it is nothing short of excellent – Birch writes clearly and is extremely easy to read, which cannot be said of many OT scholars! There are several drawbacks to his work, but these will become apparent as we proceed.

In the Introduction, the author makes it clear that he is not attempting to write a book on OT ethics (despite the impression which may have been given by the title), but is writing from an avowedly pastoral standpoint, with the sole purpose of opening up the OT for Christians.

'Part One' of the book is then devoted to a statement of Birch's method, which is basically derived from Childs' 'Canonical' approach to the OT viz irrespective of the history of tradition, it is the final text which is authoritative for the Church, and so it is the final, canonical text which should be the focus of our studies. While this may seem attractive at first sight (especially when compared to the atomising excesses of previous generations), 'Canonical Criticism' has been rightly criticised at length elsewhere, and ultimately amounts to a less than satisfactory doctrine of scripture for the evangelical. This is clearly demonstrated in Birch's own words: 'Authority is not a property inherent in the Bible itself ... it is a recognition of the Christian community over the centuries of experience that the scripture is a source of empowerment for its moral life in the world.' (p.34) Birch stands in line with the current desire of critical orthodoxy to reclaim the Bible as a source of life for the Church (understandably!), and while, of course, we all welcome such a trend, the rationale and desirability of such a move is never adequately grounded. Even in his work on reclaiming the ethical material in OT narrative, which comes as