

THE PROBLEM OF SYNOPTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF A METHODOLOGY FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MATTHEAN COMMUNITY

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Problem. The problem faced in this study was to discover a method of obtaining data concerning the Matthean community in a way that does not presuppose a solution to the problem of Synoptic relationships. To find such a methodology has become desirable because of the recent re-opening of the question of Synoptic relationships.

Method. By comparing the Synoptic Gospels it is possible to detect patterns of differences between them. Particularly helpful is the material unique to the Gospel of Matthew. This was examined to discover the characteristic emphases of the Gospel. Further investigation showed that the sequences of events were closely parallel between Matthew and Mark, even down to the sequencing of small details. This allowed the comparison of parallel pericopae without having to make a decision as to which was dependent on the other. Particular attention was given to the degree of relatedness of parallel pericopae before they were utilized. If a strong pattern of difference exists, then data concerning the Matthean community can be derived from this pattern of differences without necessarily deciding upon a particular solution to the problem of Synoptic relationships.

Results. The Matthean community was found to have a clear self-definition. It had moved beyond the racial and religious boundaries of Judaism, but was still in acrimonious debate with it. The community was in all likelihood a prosperous city community. It included such functionaries as scribes and prophets. While the community rejected the oral law, it strongly affirmed the validity of OT law. It appears to have observed the Sabbath and the distinction between clean and unclean foods. It is suggested that the purpose of the Gospel was to meet community needs.

An unexpected result was the emergence of evidence that the relationship between Matthew and Mark was based on an underlying common oral tradition.

Conclusion. It is possible to develop a methodology for investigating the Matthean community without having to adopt one or other of the proposed solutions to the problem of Synoptic relationships.