

THE ORIGINALITY OF ST MATTHEW

A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis, by B. C. Butler, Abbot of Downside. Cambridge at the University Press, 1951; vii and 179 pages, 18s. net.

THERE will scarcely be one scholar, at all abreast of the literary problem of the Synoptic Gospels, who is not keenly interested in the title of Abbot Butler's book: *The Originality of St Matthew*. I suppose the first question to present itself to his mind is, which Matthew does the author mean, the Aramaic or the Greek Matthew, and if the latter, does he mean our Greek Matthew or a former translation like one of those Papias refers to?¹ A glance at the first page of the first chapter leads one to think that he will award the priority to our Greek Matthew. Previously, however, the preface has already warned us of the prominent part the sub-title of the book is to play. As a matter of fact, whoever wants to prove that the Gospel of St Matthew ranked first in the history of the literary development of the Synoptic Gospels, whether he has in mind the Aramaic or a Greek edition of that Gospel, will have to make his stand against the Two-Document hypothesis,² which is still predominant in many scholarly circles. Now one might do so in several ways, more or less directly. Abbot Butler chooses the direct way, I should say the extremely direct way: 'If', as he says himself, 'the outcome of the investigation may be said to contradict the conclusions of the older critics, it will I hope be agreed that this has been the result of a faithful application of their methods' (p. v). This certainly forms the strongest side of the book.

In the first four chapters the 'conjectural source' Q is tested for agreement of Matthew and Luke in non-Marcian material, the arguments alleged for Q are criticized and a great number of passages of the Gospels examined. Of course not every time is the outcome conclusive, but again and again Q is shown to be tending to become more than a simple source of sayings, and continually assuming the features of a complete Gospel, in fact of Matthew (Abbot Butler here means our Matthew, but I am of opinion it would be more accurate to say, of a Gospel very much like our Matthew).

In the second part of his book (chapters v to xi) the Abbot discusses the other pillar of the Two-Document hypothesis, namely the priority of St Mark's Gospel. Leading off with a severe criticism of what he calls 'the Lachmann fallacy',³ he examines further the relation between

¹ For the text of Papias see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccl.*, lib. III, cap. 39 (P.G., XX, 300).

² The theory holds, 'that our First and Third Gospels depend on the Second Gospel and on a conjectural source of which Q has become the usual designation' (p. v).

³ Lachmann held the view that the three Synoptic Gospels are dependent on one common source, oral or written. His followers, however, eliminated the possibility of an oral source, identified the common written source of Matthew and Luke with Mark, but did not take into account this change of situation in their conclusions, and so they introduced the 'fallacy'.

the five great discourses of Matthew and their Marcan parallel-texts and in the next chapter the opinion of Streeter and Burney about Mark's use of Q. 'Miscellaneous passages', 'Doublets in Matthew', 'Inclusio, Formulae and Aramaisms' are the other points of investigation. He comes to the conclusion that Mark is not the first of the Synoptic Gospels, but is dependent on Matthew, and here again our Matthew is meant. According to this conclusion the author builds up in the last chapter his own theory on the origin of St Mark's Gospel.

In both parts of the book several of the points brought to the fore are quite striking and the whole set of stronger and less clinching arguments taken together is conclusive as far as the critique of the Two-Document hypothesis is concerned. I do not, however, agree with the author's other conclusion, namely that our Matthew was known and used by St Mark as well as by St Luke.⁴

There is an old adage, *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* which means, in our case, that if one can allege some texts where Q turns out to be something more than a simple collection of sayings and discourses, and some others where Mark is dependent on an edition of Matthew, the Two-Document hypothesis has been proved wrong; to prove, however, that our Matthew was written before St Mark and St Luke wrote their Gospels and was used by them requires an exhaustive elucidation not only of the agreements but also of the divergences between the Synoptic Gospels. And here the Abbot fails, for there are some questions, the solution of which appears necessary to prove this point, which do not even come up for discussion in his book; and in the cases in which he accepts the originality of our Matthew as at least more probable, his arguments are not convincing. In this review of course I cannot catalogue all the problems he leaves without a solution nor discuss in detail the arguments he gives. For the sake of brevity I shall mainly confine myself to one point which I consider a key-point since it affects the author's reasoning throughout the entire book. This is the fundamental principle of critical method he introduces. He says on page 1: *sources and their relations are not to be multiplied unnecessarily*. The principle may be correct in itself, but the correctness of its application depends for the most part on the way 'unnecessarily' is understood. Now he takes it very strictly, in my opinion—perhaps on account of his reaction to the Two-Document hypothesis—too strictly; for example, when he says; 'A hypothesis which introduces a conjectural document and multiplies, instead of reducing, literary relationships is suspect a

⁴ According to the Two-Document hypothesis St Mark's Gospel is absolutely first of the written Gospels, which means it had been written before the origin of Matthew, whatsoever form of this Gospel is meant. Hence distinguishing between the Aramaic Matthew and its Greek version(s) one can deny that *absolute* priority of Mark and still assume that Mark was written before *our* Matthew, which may or may not be dependent on it.

priori' (p. 60). Documentary criticism is a matter of historical research, that is research into the facts as they happened in reality. The investigator does not invent the facts, but tries to discover them by means of the data supplied by internal and external evidence. The 'onus probandi' lies on the protagonists of each and every theory and not only upon the supporters of a more complicated suggestion (p. 158) or 'on the theory that substitutes a complicated for a simple scheme of literary relationships' (p. 159); and the correctness of a proposed solution depends on the accuracy of the appraisal of all the data. None of the data may be neglected and no one has the right to set a limit to a solution beforehand. Every statement *a priori* is inadmissible. One must await a tested result. If the data are simple, they will probably lead to a solution showing simple facts; if the data are complicated, they will probably lead to a solution showing complicated facts. Even a supposition beforehand is dangerous, since, as the Abbot himself says: 'It is important to realize that there is nothing so improbable as the actual' (p. 170).

I think it is due to his preference for a simple solution that he denies the Aramaic Matthew any influence in the proper Synoptic problem, whereas according to our author's reconstruction of the facts, St Matthew had already edited the authentic version of his Gospel that is still in our possession, before St Mark and St Luke took pen in hand, and they used this Greek Matthew as St Peter did for his 'instructions' (p. 165ff.). The former translations Papias speaks about would have been oral translations made 'impromptu and as occasion dictates' (p. 166). This seems to me a rather improbable explanation of Papias' text. It is the more amazing because the Abbot himself states more than once that dependence on an Aramaic source would square quite well with the data in St Luke's Gospel (p. 41, 57, 59). As for St Mark, the statement about Matt. xix, 16-30—Mark x, 17-31 is very interesting: 'If it were not for the complication introduced into the general problem of Matthew's relations with Mark, one would in this case be tempted to suppose that one or other had misunderstood an Aramaic record of the words exchanged on the occasion in question' (p. 133). Would not the former translations mentioned by Papias here meet the demands of the data more satisfactorily?

He who is aware of the mind of the author will not wonder that he did not see any other possibility than such alternatives as the following: 'Either then our Lord preached a sermon on this theme, which Matthew has expanded, 'Judaized' (i.e., set back into a Jewish thought-world and made relevant to Palestinian controversies), and so transformed into a quasi-original Christian manifesto; or St Luke has transformed a sermon of the latter type into a shorter one on a more generalized theme' (p. 46f.); 'Did St Mark excerpt from Matthew, or did St Matthew embody the Marcan story in a greater whole?' (p. 72); 'Has Matthew deliberately

“archaized” his list by the arrangement in pairs, or has Mark destroyed Matthew’s delicate indication of the original practice?” (p. 105).

There is still one statement I would refer to; ‘Since it cannot be supposed that Matthew used Luke . . .’ (p. 41). It is by no means my intention to prove that Matthew depends on Luke, but I wonder, whether the datum that Matthew uses once only some characteristic Lucan words, as for example: tetrarch (Matt. xiv, 1, but in xiv, 6, ‘the king’; Luke iii, 19, ix, 7 and Acts xiii, 1; cf. the verb in Luke iii, 1; not in Mark or John); lawyer (Matt. xxii, 35; Luke 6 times; not in Mark or John) and the orthographical form of Jerusalem in Matt. xxiii, 37 (Luke 26 times; Acts 36 times; not in Mark or John)⁵ does not require further investigation? It seems to me at least unjustifiable to reject *a priori* the possibility that the final editor of our Matthew used the parallel-texts of Luke for the revision of his version and was sometimes influenced by them.

Several times Abbot Butler appeals to Matthew’s superiority in the matter of rhythm, style, the context of individual passages, as well as the mutual arrangement and connection of several passages. The author admits: ‘. . . it is . . . quite true that we need not suppose that Mark is dependent on a source just because he ‘spoils’ ‘the simplicity, the presumably primitive form, of one of his own stories’ (p. 127). I believe we need, in addition to positive proofs of dependence of one on the other, conclusive arguments, or at least very strong extenuating circumstances before assuming that the better text is the original one, which has been spoilt by the dependent author, for it is more probable that the dependent author has smoothed away the shortcomings of his source than the opposite. On this account the author’s reasoning is not convincing. Is Matt. x, 17–22 really better in its context (the instruction before the first mission of the Apostles; cf. Matt. x, 5f.) than Mark xiii, 9–13? (for Mark xiii, 9 cp. Acts ix, 2, xxii, 30; II Cor. xi, 24) (p. 80). Would Mark have changed the singular ‘parable’ of Matt. xxi, 33 into plural (Mark xii, 1), because he noticed Matthew had in fact more parables, although he had in mind to borrow only one? (p. 101). Why does Matthew have (according to the Greek) in xviii, 6 ‘it is expedient’ as in v, 29f., but in xviii, 8f. ‘it is better’ as Mark in ix, 42, 43, 45, 47, if Matt. xviii, 8f. is a cross-reference of Matt. v, 29f.? (p. 298f.). If Abbot Butler exonerates Matthew from patchwork, does he think it is at all possible that the other Synoptists patched together their texts, as for example he suggests has been done by Luke in xi, 37–xii, 1 dependent on Matthew xxiii, 25f., 23, 6f., 27, 4, 29–31, 34–6, 13 (for Luke xii, 1 see Matt. xvi 6, 12; cp. Mark viii, 15) (p. 53); and in xii, 2–12 dependent on Matt. x, 26–33, xii, 32, x, 19f. (p. 54); by Mark in xiii, 33–7 dependent

⁵ For more examples cf. Hawkins’ list of ‘Words and phrases characteristic of St Luke’s Gospel’; (John C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae*, Oxford, 1919, 2, pp. 35–51).

on Matthew xxv, 13, 14, 15b, 16, xxiv, 45, 42f., xxv, 6, xxiv, 50 (cf. xxv, 6, 5), xxv, 32 (p. 82ff.), and in iv, 21-5 dependent on Matt. v, 15, x, 26, xiii, 9, vii, 2, vi, 33, xiii, 12 (p. 89)? Is it not strange that Luke has so often used either both parts of the Matthaean doublets or just the other part that he found in the Matthaean context he was actually following?

Finally I will emphasize that these remarks do not detract anything from my estimation of the author's decisive refutation of the Two-Document hypothesis. And this has a not merely negative value, since it remains true that a distinction between Q and the Matthaean tradition⁶ is baseless and that Mark turns out to have known the Matthaean tradition. Abbot Butler substitutes, however, our Matthew for the Matthaean tradition and by so doing he tries to prove too much, which causes serious damage to his own argument.

Concerning Matthew's doublets he says: '... he (Matthew) is, in fact, employing, in some of them, a device for cross-reference, the custom of using footnotes not being found in antiquity' (p. 138). I believe that if the author of our Greek Matthew had proceeded in accordance with present-day custom, we should have read on the front page of his book: 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ, adapted from Matthew's Aramaic text by N N', and probably even, 'second (or third) revised (and enlarged?) edition'.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Guide Biblique by Dom Paul Passelecq. Pp. 75. *La Lecture Chrétienne de le Bible*. Third edition by Dom Celestin Charlier. Pp. xv, 348. (Editions de Maredsous, 1950). Prices not stated.

If only we had more books like this in English! We may bewail Catholic apathy to the Bible in England, and try to encourage the faithful to read the Bible more, but the fact is that they are going to remain largely apathetic unless we can supply them with a good and reliable guide who can show them the way through what must be, for a stranger, very bewildering country without bewildering them further, who can point out the sights, and who can above all speak their own idiom. The *Guide Biblique* is just this, with its three-page synopsis of Hebrew history, its short but clear analysis of the contents and the literary forms of the

⁶ By Matthaean tradition I understand some stage in the literary process from the Aramaic Matthew to our Greek Matthew.