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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REDACTION CRITICISM: FROM INVESTIGATION OF TEXTUAL PREHISTORY BACK TO HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL EXEGESIS?

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I. INTRODUCTION

From "scissors and paste" collectors to individual composers or theologians—thus has been the shift in scholars' perception of the role of the evangelists in the composition of the Synoptic Gospels.[1] Whereas source criticism fragments the Gospels into diverse hypothetical sources and form criticism delves into the oral period behind the text, redaction criticism investigates the theological emphases of the evangelists. Yet, is the transition complete? Has the evangelists' role in composition ever been sufficiently defined, so that vigorous differentiation of redaction from tradition is possible? Or has the notion that such criticism of the text is possible been no more than an illusion? Is it not better to deal with the completed text as it stands rather than to seek to distinguish what is no longer distinguishable with confidence? Did the authors ever intend for their conveyed meanings to be divined by means of an attempt to go back to their sources? Or did they embody their meaning exclusively (and adequately) in the texts they wrote?

These are but some of the important questions involved in recent developments in redaction criticism. This study will examine these developments and offer a tentative evaluation of them. No attempt will be made to survey the history of scholarship in the field.[2] The first section supplies definitions and pre-understandings necessary for entering into the discussions stirring in the discipline. The second section surveys recent developments under four subheadings: (1) methodological uncertainty in redaction criticism of Mark's Gospel; (2) abandonment of redaction criticism and its replacement

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[1] In this article, the term "evangelist" is used as shorthand for one or more of the authors of the Synoptic Gospels in an indiscriminate sense. "Matthew," "Mark," or "Luke" is used when the author of the Gospel associated with that name is meant.

[2] Many excellent overviews of this history are already in existence and their effort need not be duplicated here. See e.g. E. V. McKnight, "Form and Redaction Criticism," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 149–67, esp. 153–61; J. R. Donahue, "Redaction Criticism: Has the Hauptstrasse Become a Sackgasse?" in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (ed. E. V. McKnight and E. S. Malbon; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994) 27–57; and Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 1–39.

by literary criticisms; (3) expansion into composition analysis; and (4) debate over redaction criticism among evangelicals. The third section puts forward tentative evaluations of the discipline and its recent developments.

In the course of this article, I will advocate the cautious adoption of composition criticism as a text-centered approach that represents a welcome return to historical-grammatical interpretation. I will contend that redaction criticism proper, which seeks to separate redaction from tradition, is fundamentally bankrupt. In addition, I will argue that redaction criticism proper and composition criticism should be recognized as two distinct disciplines.

II. DEFINITIONS AND PRE-UNDERSTANDINGS

From the outset, the reader should note that the term "redaction criticism" is frequently used to denote two different sets of activities. The two activities are: (1) "strict editorial criticism" (otherwise labeled as "redaction criticism proper" or simply "redaction criticism" below); and (2) "composition criticism" (used interchangeably with "composition analysis"). Strict editorial criticism and composition criticism differ in their treatment of their subject matter. The former looks for the evangelist's theology in the redactional text after separating out redaction from tradition by means of source and form criticism.[3] The latter locates the patterns and emphases of the evangelists without systematically identifying or separating out redaction from tradition.[4]

Since it differs with composition criticism in seeing its subject matter as restricted to the evangelist's redactional work, strict editorial criticism necessarily requires the separation of redaction from tradition. This necessity creates a further complication: the use of different working criteria to separate out redaction from tradition frequently changes the nature of the work involved.

The range of differences in working criteria is best seen in redaction criticism on Mark. Scholars apply diverse working criteria (and accord those criteria varying weight even when they share similar criteria) to determine what belongs to tradition and redaction respectively. As C. C. Black points out, this divergence in application of working criteria stems from scholars' diverse perspective concerning: (1) "the measure of history in the Gospel of Mark"; (2) "the character of the pre-Markan tradition"; and (3) "the influence of Markan theology upon the Gospel."[5] For instance, the more skeptical one is of the historicity of Mark's account, the more likely one will look for and find pericopes allegedly created by Mark. Conversely,

[3] As Stein observes, "Form criticism 'sets aside' the redaction and concentrates its investigation upon the tradition, whereas *Redaktionsgeschichte* 'sets aside' the tradition and concentrates its investigation upon the redaction" (R. H. Stein, "What is Redaction Criticism?" in *Gospels and Tradition: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991] 34).

[4] Cf. D. A. Carson, "Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 119.

[5] C. C. Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (JSNTSup 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 160–62.

the more one regards Mark's account as historically grounded, the more likely one will restrict one's search for Markan redaction to seams, summaries, and explanatory insertions.[6]

III. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REDACTION CRITICISM

1. *Methodological uncertainty in redaction criticism of Mark's Gospel.* Doubts over the legitimacy of redactional work on Mark follow naturally from the lack of consensus on the proper working criteria to be employed in such a work. While pioneering work in applying redaction criticism to Mark began in 1956 (with W. Marxsen's *Der Evangelist Markus*),[7] the question of proper working criteria was not adequately addressed. Yet many practitioners of Markan redaction criticism carried on without much expressed concern over the methodological difficulties involved in their discipline. The work that attempted to address this problem was R. H. Stein's Th.D. dissertation in 1968.[8] This work was refined and presented in condensed article form in 1971.[9]

Stein is well aware of the additional difficulties involved in the investigation of a Markan redaction history over a Matthean or Lukan one. First, Mark does not state his purpose for writing (as Luke does in Luke 1:1–4). Second, Mark's sources are not available for comparison (as Matthew's and Luke's common source—Mark is [assuming Markan priority]).[10] Third, Mark has "made our task more complicated . . . because he has 'marcanized' the traditions, both oral and written, which were available to him."[11] As a result, Markan vocabulary and style are not by themselves reliable indicators of Markan redaction.

Nevertheless, Stein proposes that Markan redaction may be investigated by means of the Markan (1) seams; (2) insertions; (3) summaries; (4) modification of material (detectable when Matthew and Luke appear to follow an older form of the tradition rather than Mark); (5) selection, (6) omission, and (7) arrangement of material; (8) introduction; (9) conclusion; (10) vocabulary; and (11) Christological titles. Of these eleven criteria, Stein highlights the value of investigating (1) seams; (2) insertions; (3) summaries; (4) modification, (5) selection, and (7) arrangement of material; (8) introduction;

[6] Strictly speaking, we should speak of one's perspective on the extent to which Mark's composition was constrained by the tradition preceding him.

[7] Willi Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); ET, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969). For the precursors of this formal beginning and the pioneering work in Matthew and Luke, see the resources cited in n. 2.

[8] R. H. Stein, "The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Marcan *Redaktionsgeschichte*" (Th.D. Dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 1968).

[9] R. H. Stein, "The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Markan Redaction History," *NovT* 13 (1971) 181–98, reprinted as "Ascertaining a Marcan Redaction History," in *Gospels and Traditions: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 49–67. The citations in this article follow the pagination in the *Gospels and Tradition* volume.

[10] Stein, "Ascertaining a Marcan Redaction History" 50.

[11] Ibid. 51.

(10) vocabulary; and (11) Christological titles. On the other hand, he sees little value in speculating about omissions of material (since we do not know what Mark had before him that he chose to omit) or in looking at Mark's conclusion (since Stein believes that the original ending of Mark is missing). He also sees no basis for speculating on the possible creation of pericopes from the hand of the evangelist.[12] Taken together, these recommendations form a coherent set of criteria for carrying out a restricted form of Markan redaction criticism.

Other scholars followed in the same path tread by Stein and proposed other refinements toward obtaining a proper set of criteria for distinguishing tradition and Markan redaction. J. C. Little responded to Stein's proposals in a 1972 dissertation and agreed with Stein on the importance of Mark's arrangement of material. Nevertheless, because Little believed that Mark exercised greater freedom in composing and rewriting tradition in his own style and language, he expressed little confidence in the usefulness of the criteria of seams, insertions, summaries, modifications of material, vocabulary, and Christological titles.[13] In 1973 L. Gaston provided a computer analysis of the Synoptic vocabulary as a tool for distinguishing tradition and redaction. Yet, as Black points out, since Gaston started his list for Mark by combing through "certain passages commonly agreed to be redactional,"[14] his work assumes the redactional nature of those passages without proof and therefore does not verify them.[15] In a 1987 work, E. J. Pryke assumed only Markan seams (which link one pericope with another) as the starting point for determining Markan redaction.[16] Black, however, notes that Pryke likewise relies on previous linguistic studies and presupposes the validity of the form critical assumption that the stories usually circulated in isolation in the oral period.[17] D. B. Peabody's work (also published in 1987) sought to identify recurrent features in Mark.[18] Nevertheless, Peabody essentially abandons the effort to distinguish between redactional features found in the Markan text and those that came from Mark's tradition.[19]

The lack of consensus among theorists is, not surprisingly, mirrored at the practitioners' level. If the criterion for success of a theory is uniform adoption in practice, the various proposals for refining Markan redaction

[12] Ibid. 51–67. For the opposing view that one should see the evangelists as creating new pericopes, see Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* 66.

[13] J. C. Little, "Redaction Criticism and the Gospel of Mark with Special Reference to Mark 4:1–34" (Ph.D Dissertation; Duke University, 1973) iii, 39–50.

[14] Lloyd Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae: Word Statistics of the Synoptic Gospels* (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973) 14.

[15] Black, *The Disciples according to Mark* 193.

[16] E. J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel* (SNTSMS 33; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[17] See Black's critique in *The Disciples according to Mark* 205–12.

[18] D. B. Peabody, *Mark as Composer* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987).

[19] Peabody recognizes that the tradition before Mark already possessed recurrent features that blend in with recurrent features from the hand of Mark in our current text. By giving up the task of distinguishing which features are distinctly from Mark and which are from the tradition, Peabody essentially abandons redaction critical work. Cf. Black's assessment in *The Disciples according to Mark* 212–18.

have doubtlessly failed.[20] The result of this lack of consensus is that Markan redaction-critical studies (1) have yielded vastly divergent results; and (2) are subjugated by the thematic criterion.[21] Black complains that the appeal to Markan themes "tacitly short-circuits the necessity in each investigator's research, of differentiating tradition from redaction: the need is no longer apparent since it is assumed that the material in the Second Gospel which conveys 'the characteristic theme(s)' is, *by definition*, redactional."[22] The end result is that scholars end up finding what they set out to find, that is, the characteristic themes (that they brought to the task of redaction) influence their use of the redaction-critical tools and mold the exegetical outcomes.[23] Predictably, they come up with vastly divergent results.[24]

2. *Abandonment of redaction criticism and replacement by literary criticisms*. Strict editorial redaction (which continues to sort out redaction from tradition and locates the unique theology of the evangelist only in the redactional material) is in decline not only in redactional work on Mark but also in the Gospels in general (with the exception of the study of Q).[25] The abandonment of redaction criticism and its replacement by a multiplicity of literary criticisms stems in part from the perceived methodological problems associated with applying redaction criticism to Mark. It is also related to the larger trend away from author-centered interpretation and the loss of interest in discovering the history behind the text. Instead, the focus of these new "criticisms" is on the ostensible text and the reader. History is considered at best irrelevant, if not inherently irrecoverable. One important reason for this trend is agnosticism on the question of sources, so that the methods that gain currency are those that "focus on the final gospel text irrespective of the problem of sources."[26] Indeed, some literary critics have gone so far as to declare the "death" of redaction criticism.[27]

3. *Expansion into composition analysis*. Closely related to the movement to abandon redaction criticism and replace it with literary criticisms

[20] Peabody himself points out the lack of consensus on the redactional text of Mark as the rationale for his own work (Peabody, *Mark as Composer* 14). See also Black's overall assessment of the work on refining criteria for Markan redaction criticism in Black, *The Disciples according to Mark* 218–22.

[21] Black, *The Disciples according to Mark* 171.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid. 180.

[24] See ibid. chaps. 3–6, esp. 6.

[25] Cf. F. Neirynck "Literary Criticism: Old and New," in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (ed. C. Focant; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993) 12–13; Donahue, "Redaction Criticism" 34; W. R. Telford, *Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press) 78–82; and Stein, "Introduction," in *Gospels and Tradition* 15. On the thriving work on Q, see Neirynck, "Literary Criticism" 29.

[26] F. Neirynck, "Literary Criticism" 13; cf. Donahue, "Redaction Criticism" 42–48; Telford, *Mark* 82. Telford gives three factors for the decline of traditio-historical method (redaction criticism being included): (1) "The advent of new methods and approaches"; (2) "The criticisms under criticism"; and (3) "The pre-history of the text in doubt" (*The Synoptic Gospels* 492–93).

[27] See further Neirynck's discussion in "Literary Criticism" 12.

is the alternative response of expanding the method into composition analysis. In practice, this involves adopting other methods in conjunction with redaction criticism, so that it becomes one method among many. The essential difference between proponents of abandoning redaction criticism and advocates of composition analysis is that they differ over whether redaction criticism retains some value if expanded to accommodate other methods that are now considered more fruitful. One proponent of composition analysis has even claimed that one stream of redaction criticism has always been compositional in its orientation and that this stream was the progenitor of the newer criticisms.[28]

What fruit, then, has composition analysis yielded thus far in the search for the theology of the evangelists? It appears to be too soon to tell. The literature that falls under the category of composition analysis is abundant and multifarious. For instance, Scott proposes a chiastic structure to the entire Gospel of Mark.[29] By comparison, Fay makes a more modest proposal of a chiastic structure in Mark 4:1–34.[30] In addition, Edwards claims that the key to the interpretation of Markan "sandwiches" lies in the middle, "sandwiched," story.[31] These three are but a small sample of the various proposals of chiasmus and "sandwich" patterns that cover sections or even entire books. As Telford notes, however, none of these proposals has received wide

[28] Donahue, "Redaction Criticism" 27–36. Specifically, Donahue claims that "redaction criticism was understood differently in Germany and in the United States. . . . In Germany it was primarily a *historical* discipline where the focus was on origin and settings of traditions, on the conditions of their development and on the historical circumstances that best explained their final editing. . . . In the United States, redaction criticism developed primarily as an exercise in *literary* criticism, where the emphasis was on the final product as a unitary composition with concern for the overarching themes and motifs and for the structure of the whole and of the individual parts" (ibid. 34). The scholarly works he lists came out mainly in the 1970s and 80s, and the higher proportion of such works in the U.S. may reflect the later development of the discipline there than in Germany. Note also that Neirynck attributes the "reorientation of Markan studies from redaction criticism to 'literary criticism'" in the 1970s to the work of Norman Perrin and Perrin's introduction of Neirynck's own work at the University of Chicago (Neirynck, "Literary Criticism" 35–36). Neirynck is referring to his work on the homogeneity of Mark's language and composition, which was later published as *Duality in Mark* (rev. ed.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988).

[29] M. P. Scott, "Chiastic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel" *BTB* 15 (1985) 17–26. Scott's proposed chiastic pairs are sometimes so incongruous that it is difficult to accept his chiastic proposal (e.g. "C [2:7] Who can forgive sins" and "C' [14:61] Are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed God?"; "E [3:33] Who is my mother . . . ?" and "E' [12:37] How is Christ David's Son?"; ibid. 18).

[30] G. Fay, "Introduction to Incomprehension: The Literary Structure of Mark 4:1–34," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 65–81. I find his distinction between "parable material" (for "B 4:2b–9" and "B' 4:26–32") and "parabolic method" (for "C 4:10–13" and "C' 4:21–25") somewhat arbitrary.

[31] J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989) 193–216. His proposed sandwiches are 3:20–35 (20–21—22–30—31–35); 4:1–20 (1–9—10–13—14–20); 5:21–43 (21–24—25–34—35–43); 6:7–30 (7–13—14–29—30); 11:12–20 (12–14—15–19—20–21); 14:1–11 (1–2—3–9—10–11); 14:17–31 (17–21—22–26—27–31); 14:53–72 (53–54—55–65—66–72); 15:40–16:8 (15:40–41—42–46—15:47–16:8). Despite Edwards's proposed explanations, I find that only a few of these sandwiches might plausibly provide their central theological point in the middle story (e.g. the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple in 11:12–21). It seems that while the sandwich technique may sometimes work the way Edwards

acceptance.[32] At the same time, many studies examine the Gospels as entire compositions for the patterns and emphases of the evangelists without proposing extravagant chiastic or "sandwich" patterns. Such work is frequently accepted as part of standard redaction criticism.[33]

4. *Debate over redaction criticism among evangelicals.* In the 1970s and 80s, many evangelical scholars began to adopt mild or moderate forms of redaction criticism. The major controversy that erupted from the publication of R. Gundry's commentary on Matthew, however, brought the issue into the limelight.[34] The spectrum of evangelical responses to redaction criticism can be classified into three general categories: (1) total repudiation; (2) qualified acceptance; and (3) ready adoption.[35] It appears that Gundry falls within category 3, even accepting the assumption that Matthew composed material *de novo* apart from historical reality.[36]

What, then, are the major issues involved in the debate over how evangelicals should regard redaction criticism? The essays of D. A. Carson and G. Osborne on the relation of the evangelical to redaction criticism provide a convenient entry point into the discussion.[37] Major issues discussed by Carson and Osborne include (1) whether skeptical views of the truthfulness of Scripture are inextricably tied to the method; (2) whether one should

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proposes, the pattern of a sandwiched theological key is not inherent to Mark's technique. Note also that Edwards's list differs from Stein's list of Markan sandwiches at three points (see *The Synoptic Problem* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 255 n. 25). Edwards includes Mark 4:1–20 and 15:47–16:8 but omits 15:6–32 (listed by Stein as possible).

[32] See W. R. Telford, "Mark and the Historical-Critical Method" 495–96.

[33] Osborne discusses four compositional considerations that find considerable acceptance: (1) arrangement of material; (2) intertextual connections between pericopes; (3) plot; and (4) setting and style (see G. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* [ed. J. Green, S. Knight, and I. H. Marshall; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992] 666–67).

[34] R. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theology Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

[35] Cf. the similar categorization of S. Smith, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism," *Churchman* 107/2 (1993) 130.

[36] See further Christianity Today Institute, "Redaction Criticism: Is It Worth the Risk?," *Christianity Today* 29/15 (18 Oct 1985) 1-I to 10-I. Gundry holds that "comparison with the other gospels, especially with Mark and Luke, and examination of Matthew's style and theology show that he materially altered and embellished historical traditions and that he did so deliberately and often" (Gundry, *Matthew* 639). For instance, Luke's story of the offering of two turtle doves in the temple becomes the slaughter of the infants in Matthew, and the visit of the shepherds in Luke becomes the adoration of the magi in Matthew. As Smith notes, a minority of evangelical scholars argues that the doctrine of inerrancy rules out all forms of redaction criticism while another minority (e.g. Gundry) argues that the Holy Spirit's inspiration included guidance to the evangelists to compose new material ("The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism" 130). Those interested in the controversy may refer to the March 1983 issue (26/1) of *JETS*.

[37] D. A. Carson, "Redaction Criticism" 119–42; and Grant Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *JETS* 19 (1976) 73–85; "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*," *JETS* 21 (1978) 117–30; "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology," *JETS* 22 (1979) 305–22; "Round Four: The Redaction Debate Continues," *JETS* 28 (1985) 399–410. See also Christianity Today Institute, "Redaction Criticism."

employ criteria to determine the authenticity or inauthenticity of portions of Scripture; (3) the relative usefulness of the method for discovering particular patterns and emphases in the Gospels; and (4) implications for inerrancy.

Both Carson and Osborne agree that the skeptical views of radical critics are not intrinsic to the method of redaction criticism. They also agree that since the evangelists often appear to convey Jesus' meaning without reproducing his exact wording (as seen e.g. from variation in wording among Gospel accounts of the same speech), an adequate definition of inerrancy must encompass not only Jesus' *ipsissima verba*, but also his *ipsissima vox*.[38] On the other hand, Carson and Osborne disagree on the relative usefulness of redaction criticism for discovering patterns and emphases in the Gospels (Osborne sees more value).[39] Moreover, Carson warns against using the criteria of redaction criticism to establish authenticity or inauthenticity, since these criteria presuppose critical scholarship's tenets on how the tradition developed. Osborne, however, has advocated a restricted use of criteria to defend the authenticity of certain sayings.[40]

IV. EVALUATION OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REDACTION CRITICISM

1. *Methodological uncertainty in redaction criticism of Mark's Gospel.* In my opinion, the working criteria set out by Stein hold significant promise for detecting patterns and emphases in canonical Mark. Since redaction critics have generally not followed Stein's recommendations, their failure does not falsify Stein's criteria. When Black measured the success (or lack thereof) of Markan redaction on the basis of the twelve canons laid down by Stein, he found that the representatives of the three major types of redaction critics (conservative, moderate, and liberal) each followed only some of Stein's canons.[41] For instance, Meye, Best, and Weeden all frequently use the criterion of (4) modification of material (as discerned through comparison with Matthew and Luke); (7) arrangement of material; (9) conclusion; and (10) vocabulary and style. However, they all neglect (1) seams; (3) summaries; (8) introduction; and (11) Christological titles. Instead of condemning these criteria prematurely, one should consider the possibility that the divergent starting points of various redaction critics have kept them from following a balanced and comprehensive application of criteria such as Stein proposes.[42]

[38] E.g. Carson, "Redaction Criticism" 138 and Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission" 83–85.

[39] E.g. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission" 85 in comparison with Carson, "Redaction Criticism" 140.

[40] See Osborne, "The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*." Note also R. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity" and "'Authentic' or 'Authoritative' Sayings: What is the Difference?" in *Gospels and Tradition* 153–87 and 147–52.

[41] Black, *The Disciples according to Mark* 38 and chap. 6. Cf. his comments on p. 180, which seem to agree with my assessment.

[42] Cf. Best's critique of Black's conclusions in E. Best, "Review of *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate*," *JTS* 41 (1990) 602–7.

On the other hand, I do think that Black's critique of redaction criticism on Mark is basically on target, in that Stein's criteria are incapable of salvaging that discipline. Since we have no access to Mark's sources, we cannot reconstruct Mark's redaction and the traditions that constitute his source.[43]

I would contend further that we likewise cannot reconstruct Matthew's or Luke's redaction and sources. The fact that Mark's Gospel was not Matthew's or Luke's only source (even if one accepts that they depended on Mark's Gospel in some way) precludes confident reconstruction. Even if we knew for certain that a redactor used a source for one part of his work, apparent dependence in another part of his work may or may not reflect similar actual dependence. Thus, an apparent parallel between Matthew and Mark may be a case of Matthean dependence on Mark *or* Matthean dependence on another source or oral tradition that is similar to what is found in Mark. Only when the account appears in a section where a succession of accounts are closely parallel in both order and language is there reason to posit possible dependence and modification in a specific case.[44] Yet even then, we cannot assume dependence and intentional modification with confidence. Moreover, even assuming dependence and intentional modification, we can know "what" is different about the two accounts, but "why" is at best a more or less plausible suggestion (unless Matthew states his reasons for changing his source, which he never does).

This limitation of knowing "what" but not "why" leads to an important caveat. It is not so much the distinctive theology of the evangelist, but the verifiable datum of the perceivable emphases of the evangelist that is discoverable. First, we have a limited corpus and thus the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke probably do not fully represent the theologies of their respective authors. Second, the composition of a coherent narrative involves many complex considerations that may determine the highlighting of certain elements and the relative de-emphasizing of others, perhaps in the service of an overarching emphasis. Hence, some emphases (or de-emphases) may or may not reflect the relative importance of certain theological ideas in the author's full belief system.[45] Third, the jump from describing what is emphasized to speculating over the theological framework behind the author's

[43] This contention crumbles only if we possess knowledge of the specific nature and content of Mark's sources as well as Mark's style and theology as distinct from his sources. Form criticism's purported knowledge of the nature and content of the oral traditions behind Mark's composition, however, is based on speculation.

[44] The argument from order is vital, since some sayings were probably memorized and passed down in almost invariable form during the oral period. If the oral tradition on a particular saying is fixed, close verbal agreement in Matthew, Mark, and Luke may simply reflect common dependence on that fixed tradition and not literary dependence between those Gospels. Conversely, minor verbal variations in Matthew or Luke may reflect minor variations in the tradition each evangelist received and not an intentional modification of Mark. The reason for caution is this: even if one accepts the Two or Four-Source hypothesis as the most plausible general explanation of the Synoptic Problem, this general solution cannot be applied with confidence to each specific case of Synoptic similarity.

[45] This distinction holds for any theological literature that is occasional in nature. Only a full-fledged tome on systematic theology stands clearly as an exception.

expressed emphasis is a foray into the interpretation of mind acts—unless the author reveals his thinking, only a mind reader should venture into the enterprise. Fourth, with any given emphasis in the Gospels, we cannot be certain whether it is the evangelist's own peculiar emphasis, that of a particular source, or that of the oral tradition. Thus, making the inference from a perceivable emphasis in a text to a distinctive theology of the author is a hazardous leap of logic.

Only in cases of significant modifications in sections where Matthew, Mark, and Luke are otherwise in close parallel both in order and language do we have probable grounds for perceiving a unique Markan, Matthean, or Lukan emphasis (especially when two Gospels agree against the third one). Even then, that possible emphasis must be confirmed by seeing if the rest of that particular Gospel shows the same emphasis. In addition, even in this case, we again do not know "why," but can only detect the "what"; and we cannot be certain whether the two agreeing Gospels or the dissenting one is more in line with the oral tradition behind them (i.e. the particular Matthean, Markan, or Lukan emphasis detected may actually be the emphasis of the tradition).

Precisely at the point of the limits of our knowledge, composition criticism thrives where redaction criticism fails. Since composition criticism looks at perceivable patterns and emphases in the existing text without needing to differentiate redaction from tradition or to divine the author's unexpressed motivations in the use and modification of (hypothetically reconstructed) sources, it stays within the confines of verifiable, scientific study of extant evidence. Specifically, it points to the evidence in the text and observes that such and such a pattern or emphasis is present.

2. *Evaluation of the abandonment of redaction criticism and its replacement by literary criticisms.* In my view, the increasing appreciation that each Gospel is a unity in terms of language, style, theology, and composition is correct and salutary. This underlying motif behind the abandonment of redaction criticism and the experiment with various forms of literary criticism is thus fundamentally sound. Furthermore, the renewed focus on the interpretation of the Gospels as unique, holistic compositions represents a form of return to the pre-critical exegesis of the final form of the text. This focus on the text is a welcome development for those who see the author's intent as embodied in the communicated text (rather than in the psychological processes of the author or the prehistory of the text).[46] On the other hand, many forms of literary criticism, especially forms of reader response criticism (under which I would group liberationist, feminist, Marxist, and various ideological interpretations),[47] appear to be exercises in manipulating and

[46] For a nuanced assessment of literary approaches to the Scriptures, see Tremper Longman, III, "Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (ed. M. Silva; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 95–192.

[47] Cf. the same classification of these ideological interpretations by R. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 20.

politicizing texts.[48] Moreover, because of their ahistorical nature, proper caution needs to be exercised in the adoption of any literary criticism. It is one thing to acknowledge that a literary method is incapable of adjudicating on historical matters; it is another thing to read the texts as mere fictional stories that have no correspondence to historical reality.

3. *Evaluation of expansion into composition analysis.* Many who expand redaction criticism into composition analysis and adopt other methods alongside redaction criticism are trying to maintain a healthy balance between a continued historical interest and an appreciation of the literary and theological achievements of the evangelists.[49] I would contend, however, that the ready identification of composition criticism with redaction criticism blurs necessary distinctions and creates unnecessary methodological tensions.

The presupposition (i.e. the possibility of differentiating redaction from tradition) and goal (finding the unique theology of the evangelist as separate from the theology of the tradition) are not retained in composition analysis. The goal, instead, has become the identification of the patterns and emphases found in the Gospels as holistic unities, without any attempt to distinguish between tradition and redaction. While both redaction criticism and composition criticism seek the theology of the evangelists, there is a fundamental difference in perspective over the extent and nature of their redactional work. Composition criticism's focus on the Gospels as wholes and search for patterns and emphases without discrimination presupposes a Gospel that has been so thoroughly reshaped by the evangelist that the final product reflects the literary and theological accomplishment of an individual.[50] Two interrelated issues concerning product and author are involved: composition criticism (1) conceives of the Gospels as unified narratives with a single coherent story, perspective, and theology in qualitatively different ways than redaction criticism and (2) presupposes a qualitatively different level of mastery of material in the evangelists' composition of their Gospels.

Besides abandoning part of the goal of redaction criticism (i.e. the differentiation of redaction from tradition), the search for the theology of the evangelist in the entire composition often represents a qualitatively different goal of criticism. While critics of redaction criticism proper rightly point out that "summary passages, seams, insertions or modifications of pericopae are an inadequate base for developing a full picture of Mark's style and theology,"[51] it must be remembered that redaction criticism was never designed

[48] See chap. 4, "Undoing the Reader: Contextuality and Ideology," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

[49] Cf. Telford's assessment in *Mark* 80. See also F. Neirynck's response to the criticism of literary critics in "Literary Criticism" 13.

[50] Cf. Telford, *Mark* 80–81.

[51] Telford, "Pre-Markan Tradition," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) II.707.

to yield such a picture.[52] As Stein observes, "[e]ven though redaction criticism treats the Gospels holistically, rather than atomistically as in form criticism, it does not seek the whole theology of the evangelists but rather that which is unique to them."[53] It seems, then, that many composition critics are pursuing a different goal: a full picture of Mark's style and theology as expressed in the whole canonical Gospel.

In addition to different conceptions of the nature of the Gospels' composition and the goal of criticism, there is a dissimilarity in method. The following analysis of the distinctive elements of composition criticism showcases this divergence:

> It takes due account of the evangelist's traditional material as well as the changes he has made to his sources. It recognizes his compositional activity in composing both from tradition and *de novo*. It pays particular attention to the structure of the Gospel, seeking to identify its constituent units and to determine how they are arranged and what significance they have in their literary context. It examines the author's compositional techniques, looking for evidence of linear and concentric ("sandwich") patterning (e.g., triadism—the grouping of units in sequences of three, or montage—the juxtaposition of units to suggest meaning by association or chiasmus, inclusio or intercalation . . .). [It also looks] for recurrent themes or motifs or other such factors which give coherence to the Markan text (prospective and retrospective devices, narrative interlockings, thematic cross-references, topographical and geographical settings, etc.).[54]

From the description above, it is obvious that various strands of the newer "literary criticisms" are employed to identify the evangelist's compositional patterns and emphases. Even if one were to grant that the goal of locating the evangelist's theology remains similar, the method of arriving at it is undeniably different.

It appears, then, that redaction criticism and composition criticism diverge significantly in both theory and practice. Hence, any purported continuity between them must not obscure the radical decline of redaction criticism as originally conceived (i.e. strict editorial criticism). Furthermore, composition analysis should be recognized as radically distinct from redaction criticism proper. The stakes involved are not merely the protection of proper terminology and a clear conception of the nature and goals of a dis-

[52] Note Stein's delineation of the questions asked by redaction critics: "(1) *What unique theological views does the Evangelist present that are foreign to his sources? Redaktionsgeschichte* is not primarily concerned with any unique literary style or arrangement that an Evangelist may have used. It seeks rather the unique theological views of the Evangelist. . . . (2) *What unusual theological emphasis or emphases does the Evangelist place upon the sources he received?* . . . (3) *What theological purpose or purposes does the Evangelist have in writing his Gospel?* (4) *What is the Sitz im Leben out of which the Evangelist writes his Gospel?*" ("What is Redaction Criticism?" 31–32; cf. 34). Cf. J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 9, 13, 14–15, 16–17 on this limited role of redaction criticism. Note also that Stein is now "more pessimistic about reconstructing the hypothetical purpose and *Sitz im Leben* of the Evangelist than I was when I wrote 'What is Redaktiongeschichte?'" (Stein, "Introduction," 18).

[53] Stein, "Introduction" 18.

[54] Ibid. 88–89.

cipline. Lack of consistent terminology and clear conceptions of the distinct nature and goals of each discipline endanger the proper exercise of both redaction criticism and composition criticism. Since composition criticism is primarily a synchronic method (i.e. it focuses on the final text rather than its prehistory), practitioners must beware of methodological confusion that leads them to make historical judgments based on their compositional work. Since redaction criticism is primarily a diachronic method—focusing on the differentiation of redaction from tradition and interpreting the redaction as separate from the tradition[55]—practitioners must beware of methodological confusion that leads them to make judgments about the evangelist's full theology (since he presumably agrees with the tradition that he includes in his Gospel).[56]

The following analogy may help illustrate the difference in method. If someone were given an article to analyze and critique, he would read it very attentively and try to determine how the author went about writing his piece. He would want to get an idea about how the author has communicated his thoughts and what kind of perspective the article manifests as part of your interpretation of the author's intent as expressed in the text. Composition criticism essentially stays on this level of analysis. It does not have the ability to adjudicate whether the author used any sources or how he had used them. Comparison with other articles of a similar nature may serve only to highlight the distinctive features of a particular article (e.g. the differences may jump out more readily and bring certain patterns and emphases into sharper focus).

If, on the other hand, someone were given an assignment to compare an article and its purported source and to determine how the article's author has used his source and what kind of unique perspective he has communicated in his adaptation, the method used above is at best part of what is necessary to complete the task. The two documents would need to be compared closely and places of possible dependence be separated out. Then one might attempt to identify any possible patterns of emphasis or de-emphasis by comparing the relative place of the apparently common material within their respective contexts (i.e. the source material in its own context and the adapted material in its own context). Without this work, redaction criticism has not taken place. Indeed, judgments about probable historical dependence cannot be made apart from this work.

4. *Evaluation of the debate over redaction criticism among evangelicals*. In my judgment, composition criticism fits more readily into an evangelical framework than redaction criticism. Redaction criticism depends in part on

[55] Cf. Telford, "Mark and the Historical-Critical Method" 493.

[56] One may doubt this assumption only if: (i) the evangelist was not competent enough to ferret out any elements of tradition he disagreed with (if any); (ii) the evangelist was not a rational thinker and intentionally put contradictory elements into his composition; or (iii) the evangelist was engaging in a subtle polemic against the tradition by including the tradition is such a way that his opposing or revisionist views are intertwined with it. In other words, the underlying assumption of doubters is that the evangelist was either (i) incompetent; (ii) irrational; or (iii) disingenuous.

two questionable assumptions of critical scholarship: (1) the possibility of reconstructing the tradition of the oral period and (2) the possibility of identifying literary dependence and the motivations behind modifications of sources (in the absence of footnotes). If one doubts the possibility of reconstructing the form of the tradition during the oral period or the possibility of identifying literary dependence and motivations for modification of sources with confidence, redaction criticism becomes exceeding difficult, if not impossible. As Carson observes, "Even if you have a source you know is a source, and you can see the changes, how do you weigh the importance of those changes? It is still subjective. Too much concentration on that question can lead you away, rather than toward, the text as a finished product."[57] On the other hand, if one restricts one's judgment to the observable patterns and emphases of the evangelists in the completed text, one need only note these patterns and emphases and ascertain their meaning in the context of each Gospel. Since the primary task of the Christian exegete is to elucidate the text of the Scriptures as we have it, composition analysis keeps the exegete focused on the historical-grammatical exegesis of the canonical Gospels rather than on the speculations of redaction criticism.

Furthermore, all students of the Gospels, whether evangelical or otherwise, should give careful thought to the implications of the evangelist's frequent conveyance of Jesus' *ipsissima vox* rather than his *ipsissima verba*.[58] This phenomenon stems in part from the evangelists' mastery over the material they used. At the same time, the evangelists' mastery of their material need not entail historical inaccuracy or historically baseless creations by them. Thus, presuppositions about the degree to which historical accuracy must be based on verbatim reports (*ipsissima verba*) rather than dynamic equivalent translation (*ipsissima vox*) needs to be exposed and examined critically.

Moreover, the death knell that this phenomenon represents to redaction criticism proper should be acknowledged. Even when all three Gospels agree on the wording of a saying of Jesus, we cannot be confident that the parallel agreement in wording goes directly back to Jesus' *ipsissima verba*, a common oral tradition, or literary dependence on Mark. For example, the wording may have been fixed when the traditions were translated into Greek (probably in Jerusalem in the early months after Jesus' resurrec-

[57] Christianity Today Institute, "Redaction Criticism" 7–I. See further Carson's demonstration of his point through Matt 5:17–20 and Matt 19:16–21 with its parallels in Carson, "Redaction Criticism" 128–37.

[58] Kantzer provides a helpful reflection on this point: "If inspiration demands that the Gospels always give us the exact words of Jesus, we would find ourselves in serious trouble. But clearly this is not the case. The Gospels tell us what Jesus said, but they may tell it in his exact words translated very literally into Greek, or they may tell only part of what he said, or they may summarize what he said in wholly different words that still convey the truth of what Jesus really said. The point is that the biblical authors always tell the truth. If they say Jesus said something, he really did say it, whether or not we have the exact words he used" (K. S. Kantzer, "Redaction Criticism: Handle with Care," *Christianity Today* 29/15 (18 Oct 1985) 11–I).

tion)[59] or sometime later during the oral period, or Matthew and Luke may have copied Mark's wording. Systematic differentiation of redaction from tradition is thus precluded.

Furthermore, evangelicals should wrestle more consistently with the implications that arise from having two distinct phases of divine inspiration involved in the Gospel materials. The first phase involves the historical acts and speeches from Jesus himself. The second phase comes in the evangelists' selective reports and interpretations of the first phase of inspiration.[60] The first phase is inaccessible except as filtered through the second phase. Thus, evangelical interpreters of Holy Scripture would do well to focus on the final form of the canonical Gospels.

In addition, evangelicals should heed Carson's warning about the dangers of using the criteria of redaction criticism for determining the authenticity or inauthenticity of portions of the Gospel text.[61] If the preceding evaluation of the bankruptcy of redaction criticism is substantially correct, this discipline is inherently incapable of yielding such judgments. Hence, we should not adopt the view that those criteria can either prove or disprove the historicity or truthfulness of any portion of Scripture. On the other hand, evangelical scholars may sometimes choose to enter into discussions about authenticity or inauthenticity for apologetic purposes. For the purpose of doing an *internal critique* of an opposing system, one may choose to adopt the assumptions of critical scholars for the sake of argument. In view of the inherent bankruptcy of the discipline, the prospect of demonstrating the internal inconsistencies of critical scholars' conclusions and the probability of alternative construals (even on their own assumptions) is very high.[62]

V. CONCLUSION

We have surveyed the scene of recent developments in redaction criticism and found that two distinct disciplines are now commonly labeled as redaction criticism. On the one hand, we found that redaction criticism proper, which seeks to vigorously differentiate redaction from tradition, is fundamentally bankrupt. On the other hand, composition criticism's distinct purpose of discovering the patterns and emphases of the evangelists,

[59] Note the presence of Greek-speaking Jewish believers in the earliest days of the church (Acts 6:1) and the likely need for translation of the traditions about Jesus even then.

[60] This second phase of divine inspiration ensures that the evangelists' selective report and interpretation is historically and theologically inerrant and achieves the divine purpose for the inscripturation of their particular Gospels.

[61] "Authentic" usually labels traditions that reflect Jesus' situation (the first *Sitz im Leben*). "Inauthentic" labels traditions that reflect the church's situation (the second *Sitz im Leben*) and often carries the connotation of distortion or novel creation.

[62] Thus I see evangelical proposals for using the criteria of redaction criticism for establishing the authenticity of certain portions of the Gospels (e.g. by Osborne and Stein) as valid only in the restricted task of doing an internal critique of the conclusions of critical scholarship.

as manifested in the Gospel texts as completed wholes, is both methodologically sound and fruitful. Indeed, when adopted with caution and critical awareness of the nature and goals of the discipline (as distinct from redaction criticism), composition analysis becomes, in practice, a welcome return to a grammatical-historical interpretation that seeks to ascertain authorial intent from the meaning expressed through the written language of the evangelists in the Gospel texts.