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# JOHN AND THE SYNOPTICS

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## THE LOSS OF FAITH IN THE HISTORICITY OF THE GOSPELS

### H.S. REIMARUS (CA 1750) ON JOHN AND THE SYNOPTICS

Until 1700 almost all biblical scholars assumed that one could harmonize the Gospel of John with the Synoptic Gospels, despite its divergences from them. They also believed that a harmony of that kind could form a trustworthy historical account of the last years of Jesus' life. Around 1750, however, Hermann Samuel Reimarus, professor of Oriental languages at Hamburg (1694-1768)<sup>1</sup>, declared: "The four evangelists cannot possibly be harmonized. Their contradictory accounts betray that the Gospels are not based on facts"<sup>2</sup>.

In Reimarus we witness for the first time in history the complete loss of faith in the historicity of the Gospels. It is true that to a certain extent Reimarus had had predecessors in some English deists. Among them we may single out for mention Matthew Tindal, whose chief work *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730) Reimarus knew, Thomas Chubb, whose *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted* (1738) and *Posthumous Works* (1748) Reimarus does not seem to have known, and

1 On Reimarus, see David Friedrich STRAUSS, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus und seine Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, Bonn, 1862, <sup>2</sup>1877, Albert SCHWEITZER, "Hermann Samuel Reimarus", = Chapter 2 in *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, Tübingen, <sup>2</sup>1913, <sup>6</sup>1950, (Siebenstern-Taschenbücher, 77-78), München/Hamburg, 1966, pp 56-68, Gunter GAWLICK, *et al* (eds), *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) ein "bekannter Unbekannter" der Aufklärung in Hamburg*, Göttingen, 1973, Henning GRAF REVENTLOW, *Das Arsenal der Bibelkritik des Reimarus Die Auslegung der Bibel, insbesondere des Alten Testaments, bei den englischen Deisten*, in G GAWLICK, *et al* (eds), *H S Reimarus* (vide supra), pp 44-65, Gunter GAWLICK, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus*, in Martin GRESCHAT (ed), *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte, VIII Die Aufklärung*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Cologne-Mainz, 1983, pp 299-311, Peter STEMMER, *Weissagung und Kritik Eine Studie zur Hermeneutik bei Hermann Samuel Reimarus*, Göttingen, 1983, Else WALRAVENS, *La Bible chez les libres penseurs en Allemagne*, in Yvon BELAVAL and Dominique BOUREL (eds), *Bible de tous les temps, VII Le siècle des Lumières et la Bible*, Paris, 1986, pp 579-590, Paul HOFFMANN, *Die historisch-kritische Osterdiskussion von H S Reimarus bis zu Beginn des 20 Jahrhunderts*, in Paul HOFFMANN (ed), *Zur neutestamentlichen Überlieferung von der Auferstehung Jesu* (Wege der Forschung, 522), Darmstadt, 1988, pp 15-67, Wilhelm SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Die Destruktive Potenz philosophischer Apologetik oder der Verlust des biblischen Kredits bei Hermann Samuel Reimarus*, in Henning Graf REVENTLOW, Walter SPARN and John WOODBRIDGE (eds), *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 41), Wiesbaden, 1988, pp 193-204

2 "Die vier Evangelisten sind unmöglich zu harmoniren, und verrathen, durch ihre widersprechende Erzählung, einen in facto [that is, as far as the facts are concerned] unrichtigen Grund", REIMARUS, *Apologie* (ed G ALEXANDER), II, p 582

Peter Annet, whose *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered* (1744) Reimarus did not use either<sup>3</sup>. But Reimarus was the first to connect his rejection of the historicity of the Gospels with extensive, serious and detailed investigations of the documents concerned. In Reimarus we see how confidence in the general reliability of the Gospels turned into a radical distrust and into an almost total rejection of the Gospels' historical trustworthiness.

The question I want to deal with in this short paper is: how did Reimarus come to his innovative position, which was to prove of overwhelming and lasting significance up to the present day? I shall argue three things. Firstly, that in Reimarus' rejection of the historical reliability of the Gospels, the discrepancies between the Gospels played a considerable role, especially the divergencies between John and the Synoptics. Secondly, that ultimately, for Reimarus to reach his radical conclusions, the discrepancies between the Gospels were not the crucial factor, the cardinal point being his view that the Gospels were *anyhow* a deliberate misrepresentation of Jesus' person and work. Thirdly and finally, I shall argue that, in its turn, Reimarus' view of the Gospels as deceitful misrepresentation of Jesus' person, work and teaching was nothing but a logical consequence of his philosophical starting point: Reimarus, too, was a deist. As a deist, he rejected all revelation. But this forced him to assume that the revelation alleged to be contained in the Gospels was nothing but human fabrication. Of this purely human character of the Gospels, then, the discrepancies between the Gospels were taken by Reimarus to be the effect, the illustration and the confirmation.

One preliminary remark has still to be made here. The following will not be based on the excerpts from Reimarus known as the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, published by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing from 1774 to 1778, but on the full text of Reimarus' "Apology or Defence for the Rational Worshippers of God" (*Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*). Reimarus wrote a first version of this work in the years 1744-1750, a second recension in 1750-1760 and a third and definitive recension in 1760-1768, but he kept his work on this gigantic project a secret and did not proceed to publish it. He felt that the time was not yet ripe for the publication of this work and rightly feared the repercussions if he should become known as its author. He did not even speak about it except with some close friends. The first edition of the

3. See GRAF REVENTLOW, *Das Arsenal* (see n. 1), p. 59, note 12: "Reimarus benutzte nicht nur Toland, Shaftesbury und Collins, sondern auch Woolston, Tindal und Morgan. (...). Auf der anderen Seite scheint er P. Annet, *The Resurrection of Jesus Considered*, 1744, nicht gekannt zu haben, denn dessen Annahme, Jesus sei nur scheintot gewesen, ehe er sich den Jüngern als Auferstandener zeigte, hätte er sich in seinem Arsenal nicht entgegen lassen".

final version appeared only in 1972<sup>4</sup>. The book runs to more than sixteen hundred printed pages. In it, Reimarus argues that the adherents of a purely "rational religion" should be tolerated by the civil authorities, since rational religion (in German, "die vernünftige Religion"<sup>5</sup>) is the only well-founded and valid religion, in contradistinction to any so-called revealed religion, such as the religions of the Bible and of Christianity. In Reimarus' view, reason should replace revelation and natural religion should replace Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

In Reimarus' radical rejection of revelation, the differences between the Gospels, among other arguments, played an important, although not a decisive role. But let us look first at the view Reimarus had of the literary relationships between the Gospels.

Reimarus' view of the interrelationships between the Gospels was not revolutionary. He held that the Gospels were composed in the canonical order Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and that each later evangelist had known all his predecessors, that is, Mark had known Matthew, Luke had known Matthew and Mark, and John had known the three Synoptics<sup>7</sup>. With regard to the relationship between John and the Synoptics Reimarus held that John had intended to correct and improve on his three predecessors. In his own words: "John, as the latest evangelist, found something to criticize in all others"<sup>8</sup>.

Reimarus' view of the literary relationships between the Gospels was neither new, nor based on fresh research. Reimarus simply borrowed it from John Mills' "Prolegomena" of the year 1707<sup>9</sup>. But exactly the same view can be found in many other writers on the Gospels, both in

4. Hermann Samuel REIMARUS, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Ver ehrer Gottes*, I-II (ed. Gerhard ALEXANDER), Frankfurt am Main, 1972.

5. The expression occurs on, e.g., pp. 56, 60 and 63 of vol. I of ALEXANDER's edition.

6. Charles H. TALBERT, in REIMARUS, *Fragments* (ed. Charles H. TALBERT, translated by Ralph S. FRASER), Philadelphia, 1970; = London, 1971, reprinted Chico, 1985, pp. 10-11.

7. For Reimarus' views of the interrelationships between the four Gospels, see his *Apologie*, II, pp. 530-531, 533 and 539.

8. "Johannes, als der Späteste, hatte noch an allen was auszusetzen", *Apologie* (ed. ALEXANDER), II, p. 533. John Mills had already characterized the Gospel of John as "caeterorum trium supplementum"; see Joannes MILLIUS (and Ludolfus KÜSTERUS, ed.), *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, Amsterdam, 1710, "Prolegomena", paragraph 182. That John wanted to correct or to supplement the Synoptic Gospels is of course an ancient theory, at least as old as Clement of Alexandria; see Werner Georg KÜMMEL, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Heidelberg, <sup>17</sup>1973, pp. 197-198, and especially Helmut MERKEL, *Die Widersprüche zwischen den Evangelien* (WUNT, 36), Tübingen, 1971, p. 66. Merkel observes that the "Ergänzungshypothese" was used by Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius and Augustine (*De consensu evangelistarum* IV 11-20).

9. *Novum Testamentum. Cum lectionibus variantibus* [...] (ed. Joannes MILLIUS), Oxford, 1707. For Reimarus' reference to Mills, see *Apologie*, ed. ALEXANDER, II, p. 528. Mills dated the Synoptics to the years A.D. 61-64 and the Gospel of John to the year A.D. 97.

the 17th and 16th centuries, among them two influential Biblical scholars, the Lutheran Martin Chemnitz (1593) and the Arminian Hugo Grotius (1641)<sup>10</sup>. The theory at issue was generally regarded as the one advocated by Augustine. This traditional attribution to Augustine deserves some closer attention and will be the subject of the Appendix at the end of this contribution.

## I

Reimarus deals with the discrepancies between the Gospels in two different sections of his work. The first time he goes into the problem is when he argues that the historicity of Jesus' bodily resurrection breaks down on the differences and contradictions between the accounts of the resurrection given in the Gospels<sup>11</sup>. The second time Reimarus makes an issue of the discrepancies between the Gospels is in his "Critical History of the Canon of the New Testament"<sup>12</sup>.

Let us turn first to Reimarus' discussion of the narratives of Jesus' resurrection. Between these narratives there are, according to Reimarus, at least ten differences and, moreover, a great number of flagrant contradictions. The differences are so serious that any harmonization is bound to remain utterly unconvincing. In Reimarus' view, the "Art of our harmonists" ("die Kunst unsrer Harmonisten") is unable to reconcile the four witnesses in such a way as to make their testimony sound trustworthy<sup>13</sup>. The differences between the resurrection narratives discussed by Reimarus include the following.

1. In John there is only one woman who goes to the tomb, namely Mary Magdalene. In the Synoptics she is accompanied by one, or two, or four other women.
2. In John, Mary Magdalene does not come to the tomb only once (as in the Synoptics), but twice, and it is only at her second visit that she sees the angels sitting in the tomb.
3. John relates (20,3-9) that Peter and another disciple visited the tomb

10 See the Appendix below

11 *Apologie*, Second Part The New Testament, Book III, Chapter 3 "Beweis der Auferstehung Jesu aus der Apostel Zeugnis", ed ALEXANDER, II, pp 188-271 This section corresponds to the Wolfenbüttele Fragment "Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte" published by G E LESSING in *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur Aus den Schätzen der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttele*, Vierter Beytrag, Braunschweig 1777, pp 437-494, but the text published by Lessing represents the second, not the third and final recension of the *Apologie* Reimarus argues that the apostolic doctrine of the Church as handed down by the apostles, the so-called "apostolic system", is without base, since it depends on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection The historicity of Jesus' resurrection, however, cannot be maintained in view of the contradictions between the accounts of this event in the Gospels

12 This is an Appendix to the *Apologie*, in Alexander's edition, vol II, pp 521-543

13 Ed ALEXANDER, II, pp 213-214

and found it empty, the Synoptics, however, make no mention whatsoever of this episode

4 According to John, the angels in the tomb said nothing to Mary but the words "Why are you weeping?" According to the Synoptics, however, the angel, or the angels, were much more communicative, testifying *inter alia* that Jesus had risen

5 The words the risen Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene according to John are entirely different from the words Jesus spoke to her according to Matthew

6 John's account of the appearances of the risen Lord to the disciples, namely twice in Jerusalem and once in Galilee, is incompatible with the appearance stories in the Synoptics

Apart from these and some further *differences* between the resurrection stories in the Gospels, there are also a great number of glaring, irreconcilable *contradictions* between them Reimarus discusses them at great length and with merciless precision These contradictions include the following ones

1 According to John Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus treated the dead body of Jesus with myrrh and aloes, wrapped it with the spices in strips of linen cloth and buried it on Friday before sunset Now according to Mark and Luke, some women witnessed this burial of Jesus Nevertheless Mark and Luke relate that on Sunday morning these same women went to the tomb, bringing spices, in order to anoint Jesus Here Mark and Luke are in flat contradiction with John

2 John says that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene while she was standing at the tomb (20,10), but Matthew claims that this happened after she had hurried away from the tomb and was on her way to the disciples Matthew and John, who were both disciples of Jesus and were both supposed to have been eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, clearly disagree with regard to the place where Mary saw Jesus

In his "Critical History of the Canon of the New Testament" Reimarus points to a number of further discrepancies between the Gospels, especially between John and the Synoptics He mentions, *inter alia*

1 the nature of Jesus' discourses, in John they reveal John's own "mysterious" theological style Moreover, Jesus' words as recorded by one evangelist are often different from what Jesus is reported to have said on the same occasion by other evangelists<sup>14</sup>

2 the chronological place of the account of the feeding of the five thousand (Jn 6,1-15, Mt 14,13-21, Lk 9,10-17, Mk 6,30-44), this place is not the same in all the Gospels<sup>15</sup>

14 *Apologie* (ed ALEXANDER), II, p 541

15 *Apologie* (ed ALEXANDER), II, p 541

3. the position of the purification of the temple; it takes place at the beginning of Jesus' public activity in John, but at the end in the Synoptics<sup>16</sup>.

In Reimarus' opinion, then, the numerous differences and contradictions between the Gospels prove that the Gospels are nothing but purely human products. As accounts of Jesus' activity and teaching they are irreconcilable and unreliable. They cannot serve as the basis for a reconstruction of Jesus' deeds and words.

## II

Now all of the differences between the Gospels discussed by Reimarus had been known to students of the Bible for centuries. Until 1700, however, they had not seemed to show that John could not be reconciled with the Synoptics. Nor had they shown that one could not reconstruct a trustworthy historical account of Jesus' career. Why then did Reimarus reach these conclusions?

The reason is that Reimarus regarded the Gospels not only as merely human fabrications, devoid of any divine inspiration, but also as the products of pious fraud. In Reimarus' view, the Gospels reflect the deliberate efforts of the evangelists to reshape the image of Jesus. The historical Jesus had only wished to free the land of Israel in a political sense. When his mission failed and he himself was killed, the disciples were afraid to lose the comfortable and prestigious positions they had held during Jesus' lifetime. They decided, therefore, to preach Jesus henceforth as a spiritual, suffering, heavenly Redeemer, who was to come back from heaven in the future to found the eternal kingdom of God. In short, the disciples devised a new Christian theology, which Reimarus designates as "the new system" or "the apostolic system" ("das apostolische System"), to be distinguished from the pure, primarily moral teaching of Jesus. This deceitful new apostolic system was the starting-point from which the evangelists remodeled the teaching of Jesus and wrote their Gospels. The evangelists' accounts of Jesus' deeds, words and discourses do not follow historical reality; reality was adapted to the new apostolic system<sup>17</sup>. As a result, the Gospels portray Jesus in a fundamentally inaccurate way.

Moreover, thirty to sixty years after Jesus' death, when the evangelists put their minds to write down their Gospels, they had entirely lost sight of each other. Consequently, they were unable to co-ordinate their work. Hence the differences and contradictions between the Gospels.

16. *Apologie* (ed. ALEXANDER), II, p. 541.

17. "Folglich haben sich ... ihre Nachrichten von seinen [Jesus'] Reden nicht nach der Wirklichkeit der factorum, sondern die erzählten facta und Reden nach ihrem neuen System richten müssen. Daher ist alles das, was dahin schlägt, in ihrer Geschichte verdächtig", *Apologie* (ed. ALEXANDER), II, p. 541.



The irreconcilable discrepancies between the four Gospels are proof of their untrustworthiness.

Needless to say that, even if Reimarus' theory concerning the fraud committed by the apostles and evangelists has to be dismissed as utterly unfounded, the theory remains of great historical significance and value: it introduces the notion of *Gemeindebildung*, that is, the idea that, both in form and contents, the Gospels owe much to the creative answers the early Church gave to the questions with which she was faced after Jesus' death<sup>18</sup>. In passing it should be noticed that the seeds of Reimarus' sharp distinction between the historical Jesus, a respectable teacher of rational religion and sound morals, on the one hand and the writers of the New Testament, driven by a corrupt, irrational theology, on the other, had been sown by a number of English deists, among them Thomas Woolston and Matthew Tindal (and Thomas Chubb)<sup>19</sup>.

From the structure of Reimarus' argumentation it is clear that the discrepancies among the Gospels did not themselves lead him to his radically sceptical view of the Gospels as historical sources. Rather, it was the other way around: it was his and others' *a priori* scepticism about the trustworthiness of the Gospels, regarded as products of the deceitful "new apostolic system", that made the well-known discrepancies suddenly seem irreconcilable. Reimarus regarded and treated the divergences between the Gospels as support and evidence for his preconceived view that the Gospels were the result of deceit and deception. Starting from this latter theory, he decided that the divergencies, which until then had always seemed to allow of harmonization, were irreconcilable. From then on harmonizing the Gospels was pointless — at least in Reimarus' opinion, which he kept secret.

18 Another great merit of Reimarus is of course that he drew attention to the importance of the eschatological element in Jesus' teaching, an element that had been neglected for centuries. It is especially through this revaluation of the eschatological component in the teaching of Jesus that Reimarus, via the works of David Friedrich Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann, has had a lasting influence on New Testament scholarship.

19 On the English deists as forerunners of the views Reimarus presented in his *Apologie*, as well as of the German Enlightenment in general, see Henning Graf REVENTLOW, *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 30), Göttingen, 1980, English translation *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (trans. John BOWDEN), Philadelphia, 1985. Cf. Werner Georg KUMMEL, *Das Neue Testament Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme*, Freiburg/München, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1970, p. 106. "Die Bedeutung des Reimarus liegt darin, dass die geschichtliche Aufgabe der Scheidung zwischen der Verkündigung des geschichtlichen Jesus und der Predigt der Urgemeinde nun für weite Kreise unausweichlich gemacht wurde".

## III

Why did Reimarus assume *a priori* that the Gospels were untrustworthy and could not provide the basis for a reliable harmonistic reconstruction of Jesus' life and teaching? The reason is that Reimarus was a deist. In his case this meant that he accepted the existence of God, God's providence laid down in the laws of nature, the eternity of the soul, and the obligation for man to live a morally pure life consisting in correct behaviour towards God and men. He also held that there was salvation for the soul in an eternal life to come. But he rejected all revelation and all supernatural intervention in the history of mankind. The only religion that was acceptable to him was what he called "rational religion" (German: "die vernünftige Religion"<sup>20</sup>). Measured by rational criteria, then, the religions of the Old and New Testaments were unacceptable, since they were based on miracles and other supernatural interventions in the history of man. Traditionally, the truth of the Christian religion depended on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. As a deist, however, Reimarus rejected divine interventions in the form of such miracles as the resurrection of Jesus. In consequence, he had to denounce the Gospels as misrepresentations of historical reality. In them, Jesus' activity and words had been deformed and distorted. Reimarus interpreted the Gospels, therefore, as purely human fabrications, reflecting the corrupt "new apostolic system" of the apostles and evangelists.

My initial question was: what made the well-known discrepancies between the Gospels, that had never formed an insurmountable problem for those who had wished to harmonize the Gospels, suddenly seem irreconcilable, and why did they suddenly seem to destroy the historicity of the Gospels? The answer is, because Reimarus made these discrepancies function within the framework of two concentric theories. The all-embracing and primordial theory was the deistic rejection of all revelation and divine intervention in history. Within this macro-theory there was the derived theory according to which the Gospels cannot be trustworthy since they relate all sorts of supernatural intervention in history. The obvious distortion of historical reality was due to the purely human, all too human origin of the Gospels. Within the framework of these two concentric theories the discrepancies between the Gospels now came to function as evidence that these works were indeed the products of human work and human deceit. That is why the discrepancies now became an insuperable difficulty for the harmonization of the Gospels. As long as harmonists had wanted the divergences between these four books to be reconcilable, they had succeeded in

20. Cf. note 5.

reconciling them. Now that Reimarus no longer wanted them to be reconcilable, they *were* irreconcilable.

Reimarus' understanding of the Gospels did not primarily stem from a close investigation of the differences between these four books. It was the other way around: the stimulus came from Reimarus' philosophical ideas<sup>21</sup>. The detailed observations were not the starting-point, but only the illustration of, the confirmation of, and the supporting evidence for, ideas already conceived by way of speculation.

The case is typical: a transformation in one's understanding — for good, as in this case, or for ill — may well rest in part on detailed philological observations. But they are not its cause. The real impulse came from outside, from a grand speculative theory, borrowed from the English deists. This was the theory that divine intervention in history was an unacceptable idea and that, as a consequence, there was an absolute contradiction between the life and doctrine of the historical Jesus, who represented the highest imaginable morality and rational religion, and the portrayal of him as a divine, superhuman, heavenly Saviour by his apostles and the authors of the Gospels.

## APPENDIX

### AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF THE INTERRELATIONS OF THE GOSPELS IN *DE CONSENSU EVANGELISTARUM*

Reimarus held that the evangelist Mark knew the Gospel of Matthew, that Luke knew both Matthew and Mark, and that John knew the three Synoptic Gospels. This theory, which Reimarus borrowed from John Mills<sup>22</sup>, was widely accepted in the 16th and 17th centuries. Among the adherents of this theory we mention Johann Bugenhagen

21. That this is the structure of Reimarus' criticism of the resurrection stories has already been observed by G.E. Lessing in his preface to the Wolfenbüttel Fragment "Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger" (1778). See G.E. LESSING, *Werke* (ed. H.G. GÖPFERT), VII (ed. H. GÖBEL), München, 1976, pp. 493-494. Lessing wrote: "(Reimarus) schliesst so: 'die ganze Religion ist falsch, die man auf die Auferstehung gründen will; folglich kann es auch mit der Auferstehung seine Richtigkeit nicht haben, und die Geschichte derselben wird Spuren ihrer Erdichtung tragen, deren sie auch wirklich trägt'". I am indebted to my student Mr. G.H. van Kooten (Delft) for bringing this important passage in Lessing to my attention.

22. Joannes MILLIUS (and Ludolfus KÜSTERUS, ed.), *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, Amsterdam, 1710 (= Rotterdam, 1710; Leipzig, 1723; Amsterdam, 1746), "Prolegomena", paragraphs 107-110, 116 and 182.

(1554)<sup>23</sup>, Paul Krell (Paulus Crellius, 1566)<sup>24</sup>, Martin Chemnitz (1593)<sup>25</sup>, Hugo Grotius (1641)<sup>26</sup>, and Florentius de Bruin (1690)<sup>27</sup>.

Both in former centuries and in our days the theory at issue has been regarded as the one adhered to by Augustine. In the 16th century the theory was attributed to Augustine by, for instance, Martin Chemnitz<sup>28</sup>. Recently, we find the same attribution to Augustine, at least as far as the theory concerns the relationships between the three Synoptics, in such authoritative writers on the subject as A. Gonzaga da Fonseca<sup>29</sup>, Arthur Bellinzoni<sup>30</sup>, and Adelbert Denaux<sup>31</sup>. The attribution to Augustine is also found in introductions to the New Testament<sup>32</sup>. Recently, W.R. Farmer too claimed that it was Augustine's view in Book I of his *De consensu evangelistarum* "that each succeeding evangelist made use of the work of his predecessor(s)", obviously meaning that according to Augustine Mark used his only predecessor Matthew, that Luke used both Matthew and Mark and that John used the three Synoptics<sup>33</sup>.

The attribution of the theory in question to Augustine, however, seems to be based on a longstanding misinterpretation of Augustine's words on the subject. If his *De consensu evangelistarum* contains any passage at all dealing with the literary interdependence of the Gospels, it is I,ii,4. I am doubtful whether even in *this* passage Augustine intends to make a literary-critical statement on the interrelations of the Gospels. But if he makes any statement of that kind it is here. In this

23. Johann BUGENHAGEN, *Idea ac diathesis* (1554/1558), used by Paulus CRELLIUS, *Monotessaron historiae evangelicae*, Wittenberg, 1566.

24. Paulus CRELLIUS, *Monotessaron historiae evangelicae*, Wittenberg, 1566.

25. Martinus CHEMNITZ, *Harmonia evangelica*, <sup>1</sup>1593; Frankfurt/Hamburg, <sup>2</sup>1652, "Prolegomena", cap. 1, p. 3: "Et manifestius hoc inde colligitur, cum, juxta Epiphaniai et Augustini sententiam, inter evangelistas illi, qui post alios scripserunt, priorum scripta et viderint et legerint".

26. Hugo GROTIUS, *Annotationes in libros Evangeliorum*, Amsterdam, 1641; see the annotations on Mt 26,6; Mk 1,23; Lk 1,1.

27. Florentius DE BRUIN, *To kata tessaras euaggelion* [Greek] of *Overeenstemminge der Evangelien*, Dordrecht, 1690.

28. See n. 25 above.

29. Aloysius GONZAGA DA FONSECA, *Quaestio synoptica*, Rome, <sup>3</sup>1952, pp. 105-106.

30. Arthur J. BELLINZONI, JR. (ed.), *The Two-Source Hypothesis. A Critical Appraisal*, Macon GA, 1985, p. 4: "St. Augustine (354-430) believed that Matthew was the earliest gospel, that Mark depended on Matthew, and that Luke depended on both Matthew and Mark".

31. In his otherwise excellent synopsis of the Gospels in Dutch: Adelbert DENAUX and Marc VERVENNE, *Synopsis van de eerste drie evangeliën*, Louvain/Turnhout, 1986, p. XXXXVIII.

32. See, for instance, A.F.J. KLUN, *De wordingsgeschiedenis van het Nieuwe Testament*, Utrecht/Antwerpen, <sup>1</sup>1965, <sup>4</sup>1974, p. 26.

33. W.R. FARMER, *The Two-Gospel Hypothesis. The Statement of the Hypothesis*, in David L. DUNGAN (ed.), *The Interrelations of the Gospels* (BETL, 95), Louvain, 1990, pp. 125-156, see p. 129.

passage, then, Augustine does not say that each later evangelist knew all his predecessors (in the plural). What he says is that each later evangelist knew the Gospel of his direct predecessor (in the singular). It may be serviceable to quote Augustine's own words:

... et quamvis singuli suum quendam narrandi ordinem tenuisse videantur, non tamen unusquisque eorum velut alterius praecedentis ignarus voluisse scribere repperitur vel ignorata praetermisisse, quae scripsisse alius invenitur<sup>34</sup>.

... and although each of the evangelists may appear to have kept a certain order of narration proper to himself, yet each individual evangelist proves to have chosen to write not in ignorance of the other writer, that is, his predecessor. And if any evangelist leaves out material included in another evangelist, he cannot be said to have done so out of ignorance.

Just before saying this Augustine has pointed out that the evangelists were believed to have written their books in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Since in the passage just quoted he states that each evangelist knew "the other one, namely the one preceding him", Augustine must mean that Matthew was known to Mark, Mark to Luke and Luke to John. Naturally, Augustine believed that each evangelist had also had other sources to draw on for his knowledge about Jesus, namely, the Holy Ghost and, in the case of Matthew and John, their own experience as eyewitnesses of Jesus' public activity, in the case of Mark and Luke, oral tradition. Ultimately, however, the four evangelists all had exactly the same amount of knowledge about Jesus. But each of them had only written what he thought useful for his public or what he recalled under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. According to Augustine this explained why one evangelist tells a tale which the others pass over in silence. That the Holy Ghost guided their recollections also explained why the evangelists offer a different chronology<sup>35</sup>. Because the Holy Ghost brought the event to the recollection of one evangelist earlier in his writing than to another evangelist, one placed the event earlier and the other later than historical chronology would have demanded. But the differences between the Gospels must not be ascribed to the lack of knowledge in any of the evangelists, for each evangelist had precisely as much information on Jesus as any other evangelist: *that* is the essence of Augustine's statement quoted above. But if this statement implies that the evangelists were dependent

34. AUGUSTINUS, *De consensu evangelistarum* I, ii, 4, ed. F. Wehrich (CSEL, 43), Vienna/Leipzig, 1904, p. 4.

35. M.H. DE LANG, *Jean Gerson's Harmony of the Gospels (1420)*, in *Nederlands Archief voor kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 71 (1991) 35-47.

on one another, then it says that Mark was dependent on Matthew, Luke on Mark, and John on Luke.

The passage of Augustine under consideration is generally taken to mean that each evangelist knew *all* his predecessors. This, however, seems to be a misinterpretation. It occurs for instance in Heinrich Vogel's discussion of the passage in his monograph on Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum*<sup>36</sup>. As far as I am aware, the passage is left out of consideration by David Peabody in his lengthy article of 1983 on Augustine's view of the relationships between the Gospels<sup>37</sup>. But this article misrepresents Augustine's view of the interrelations of the Gospels anyhow<sup>38</sup>.

A modern scholar who interpreted Augustine correctly is Adolf Jülicher in his Introduction to the New Testament of 1894<sup>39</sup>. Jülicher rightly states that, in contradistinction to protestant orthodoxy, Augustine saw no problem in assuming "eine Benutzung des älteren Evangeliums durch das nächstfolgende, also des Mt durch Mc, des Mc durch Lc". Among the more recent critics who have interpreted Augustine

36 Heinrich Joseph VOGELS, *St Augustins Schrift de consensu evangelistarum* (Biblische Studien, XIII,5), Freiburg im Breisgau, 1908. On pp 82-83 Vogels translates "dass keiner von ihnen hat schreiben wollen, ohne vorher von der Arbeit des Vorgangers (singular, my italics, H J de J) Kenntnis genommen zu haben oder ohne sie beachtet zu haben". But subsequently he paraphrases "dass die späteren Evangelisten ihre Vorgänger (plural, my italics) gekannt und auch nicht unberücksichtigt gelassen haben".

37 Possibly because the passage at issue contradicts the Neo-Griesbachian hypothesis to which Peabody adheres. See David PEABODY, *Augustine and the Augustinian Hypothesis: A Reexamination of Augustine's Thought in De consensu evangelistarum*, in W R FARMER (ed.), *New Synoptic Studies*, Macon GA, 1983, pp 37-64. This article does not seem to me to do justice to Augustine's intentions.

38 Peabody argues that it was Augustine's opinion in *De consensu evangelistarum* IV that Mark was dependent upon both Matthew and Luke. This theory is repeated by Farmer in the article quoted in note 33 above. Peabody's view, however, is based on a misinterpretation of IV,x,11. Here Augustine does not mean to say that Mark followed Luke in the sense that the former used the latter, but simply that Mark has more in common with Matthew and Luke than with John. In IV,x,11 Augustine does not suggest that Mark is dependent upon Luke, but that the way Mark's Gospel depicts Christ as an earthly, human person resembles the way in which Matthew and Luke portray him, in contradistinction to John. See Helmut MERKEL, *Die Überlieferung der alten Kirche über das Verhältnis der evangelien*, in David L DUNGAN (ed.), *Interrelationships* (see note 33 above), pp 566-590, especially pp 586-589. Christopher Tuckett has rightly pointed out that after I,ii,4 Augustine is no longer concerned about the relationships between the evangelists as authors. See Christopher M TUCKETT, *Response to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis*, in D L DUNGAN (ed.), *Interrelationships* (see note 33 above), pp 47-76, especially p 51, note 15.

39 Adolf JÜLICHER, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Freiburg i B and Leipzig, 1 and 2 1894, p 211.

correctly, is Walter Schmithals, who rightly states that according to Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* I, ii, 4, "jeder Evangelist in Kenntnis seines Vorgängers geschrieben (habe)"<sup>40</sup>.

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40. Walter SCHMITHALS, art. *Evangelien*, in *TRE X* (1982), pp. 570-626; see p. 575, § 2.6.



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