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## **A Critical Examination of the Synoptic Gospels: It's Relationship with Textual Criticism and Contributions to Contemporary Biblical Studies**

**Joshua Oluwaseyi Adejare**  
**Global Scholars, Faculty of Arts**  
**Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos**  
[joshuamof@gmail.com](mailto:joshuamof@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The Synoptic Gospels is the first section of the New Testament; it contains details about the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. This section also has portions of the fulfillment of the promises declared in the Old Testament. Over the years, scholars have delved into the study of the Synoptic problem and they have attempted to give possible suggestions and solutions to the similarities and differences among the Gospels. The challenge is that not all questions raised about the Synoptic problem have been given satisfactory answers. What is the relationship between the Synoptic problem and Textual criticism and how does Textual criticism help to address or resolve the Synoptic problem? This paper seeks to critically examine the first three Synoptic Gospels extracting the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels with Textual criticism and revealing its impact on biblical studies. The methods adopted by the researcher are text critical method, analytical and conjectural emendations. A very close relationship Textual criticism has with the Synoptic problem is the issue of harmonization. Harmonization could be between or among the Gospels, within a single Gospel, to the Septuagint and to the common phrase or idea apart from any immediate parallel. It was discovered that the Synoptic problems have something to do with Textual criticism. The Synoptic problem influences textual criticism and textual criticism also influences the Synoptic problem. In the aspect of agreement or unification of the Gospel, an individual's textual choice will be determined by the solution to the Synoptic problem. Textual criticism helps one to make the appropriate inquiry in solving the Synoptic problem. Students, religious and biblical scholars globally through the efficient use of textual and biblical tools can explore the Synoptic problem with positive results for personal and universal progress of the Christian faith.

### **Key Words**

Synoptic Gospels, Synoptic problem, Textual criticism, Biblical studies

### **Introduction**

The Gospels is the first section of the New Testament that gives full details about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The words and deeds of Jesus are clearly evident in these Gospels. Wright specifies that the Gospels contain good information which was helpful for the primitive

believer (426). Hurtado reveals that the common attributes of the four Gospels is that they project and proclaim the ministry of Jesus, revealing that Jesus is the Son of God, Messiah and King etc. (2). The purpose of God for humanity is evident in the words, stories, parables and warnings of Jesus Christ. Lillo in his lecture note affirms that the coming to pass of the predictions of the Old Testament, the kingdom of God, its message of salvation and its requirement are the main themes of the Gospels (17).

There have been scholarly contentions among scholars on who wrote first among the Synoptic Gospels. The various presuppositions made by scholars are Oral hypothesis, Fragmentary hypothesis, Ur-Gospel hypothesis, Augustine hypothesis, Griesbach hypothesis, Two-Document hypothesis, Q hypothesis, Four-Document hypothesis. The purpose of these hypotheses is to ascertain the first person to write, to know who copied who and to derive their sources of documentation. It seems that not all questions raised about the Synoptic problem have been given satisfactory answers. This work investigates the account of Matthew, Mark and Luke looking into their similarities, differences, problems, how it relates to textual criticism and possible contributions to the biblical studies of the New Testament by adopting text critical approach, analytical and conjectural emendations.

The Synoptic problem has an impact on textual criticism and vice versa. The Synoptic Gospels and Textual criticism make use of an in-depth comparison, they implore the critical use of questions, and Textual criticism resolves textual issues passages by giving the right approach in solving the Synoptic problem. This paper will examine the Synoptic Gospels, Synoptic problem, theories of the Synoptic Gospels and its relationship with textual criticism and contributions to contemporary biblical studies.

### **1. The Synoptic Gospels**

An intensive and extensive study of the Synoptic Gospels gives a whole idea of the humanity, personality and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In trying to explain the Synoptic Gospels, Ali and Lillo illustrates that a person can be well examined if it is done from different perspectives (1). The *Life Application Study Bible* states that the author Matthew the Levi wrote to project Christ as the “Messiah, Eternal King and Saviour” the consistent reference of the predictions of the Old Testament which is a reality in the New Testament makes this book to easily combine

the two sections of the Bible (1530). A position holds that Matthew was written after the fall of Jerusalem and those that are far from Jerusalem at A.D 70; it is suggested to be written prior to A.D 80 (Brown 3). While some scholars are of the opinion that Matthew's Gospel was written before A.D 70, other posits that the Gospel was written within A.D 80. The testimony of the primitive church fathers places its date before A.D 50 (Green 39). The Gospel of Matthew was probably written in Palestine following the words of Eusebius that Matthew initially wrote in the language of his people (Marshall ix). Barclay declares that Matthew a Jew wrote to the non Gentiles for the main purpose of persuading them that Jesus is the Messiah because the predictions and foretelling in the Old Testament have been a reality in the life of Jesus (5). One of the major concepts in the Gospel of Matthew is the Kingdom of God. Stephen and Jackie point out that whosoever will be in highest position in the Kingdom of God must be very humble (53). The spoken words of Jesus can be seen in his actions (Bock 27). Martins write that "The sayings of Jesus should not be ignored since it provides a virtual commentary on Jesus' teachings in His Gospel as understood in the Pre-Bornkamm era" (58). The five divisions of the contents of Matthew show his intention for writing the Gospel (Hayford 1287).

The Gospel of Mark when compared to Matthew and Luke is primitive and concise (Stott 89). Harrisvillie explains that the form the Gospel of Mark takes is not a biography but a sermon, the documented words of Peter's message (14). John Mark who had a cousin called Barnabas is known to be the author of the Gospel of Mark (Cole 23). According to Oden, the root of the messages of Mark was from Apostle Peter (80). Hurtado making reference to *Mann's Anchor Bible Commentary on Mark* is of the view that Mark was written within two periods in Rome and Palestine around A.D 55 and A.D 65 respectively (47). In Hurtado Bible Commentary, the date given by some scholars concerning the Gospel of Mark is between A.D 67 – 70 although some believe that the book was written after A.D 70 (7). The fact that Mark had to analyze the way of life and practices of the Jews shows that his audience was non-Jews (English 22). Mark wrote to the non-Jewish people. He understands both Aramaic and Greek. It is believed that he used some Aramaic documents and wrote down in Greek (Plummer xxxii). Tradition upholds that the person who began the gathering of the believers in Alexandria at Egypt was John Mark. He documented the Gospel because those who were with Jesus in His life and ministry did no longer exist and he desired to project the peculiar one who is Jesus the Messiah (ASB 1430).

Mark presents Jesus to be the Suffering Servant, Son of Man, Son of God and Messiah (Ibok 5). Among the three Gospels, the Gospel of Mark is believed to have some textual issues; and there is a debate whether both the beginning and ending of the book might have worn out or destroyed (Croy 14).

Luke is distinctive from the other Gospels because it has a part two in form of Acts (Wenham and Steve 227). Geldenhuys assures that the author of the Gospel of Luke does not claim to have seen and experienced directly the ministry of Jesus but he was at every point with close relationship with one or two of the disciples of Jesus (15). Apostle Paul referred Luke as a special medical practitioner, as a colleague in ministry and as a close companion in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4: 11 respectively (19). Blomberg indicates in his book *Making Sense of the New Testament* that the names of the authors of the Gospels cannot be found in their books but they are clearly stated in the manuscripts of the New Testament that existed (24). The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles have been attributed to Luke the medical doctor from the period of the church fathers. This position has also been supported by some scriptures such as Philemon 24, Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11, Acts 16, 10-17, 20: 5-15, 21: 1-18, 27:1-28:16. Luke is also well known to be a partner of Paul in his missionary journey (Evan 1). Some scholars have proposed that the Gospel of Luke should have been written before Paul came out of the prison putting the date to AD 62-63. Some placed it to be at the latest date of AD 80 (Jeffrey 6). Jensen in his diagram fixes Rome to be the probably place of writing of this Gospels (20). Luke has the vision to reach out to the Gentiles that surround Jerusalem and those that are far from Jerusalem. This focus is evidence in the two books he authored (Wilcock 17). Apart from Theophilus, McCain gives other audience of this book such as a person whose name is in Greek who also does not live within Israel (140). The reason for writing Luke was not only for the gathering of the saints but also for mission purpose (Marshall 35). Bock in his Book *A Theology of Luke and Acts* reinstates that Luke wrote to Theophilus to reaffirm the mighty acts of God in their dispensation (29). These features are unique in this Gospel, the link of Jesus to Adam, the song of the angel which contains its message, the ambition and vision of the seventy, the story of the Good Samaritan, the contact of Zacchaeus and Jesus and lastly, the parable of the lost coin and lost man (Burton 6).

The information above gives a brief historical background of the three Synoptic Gospels. The understanding of this is very important in order to get the full picture and purpose of the books individually and holistically. While Matthew is a direct disciple of Jesus Christ, Mark and Luke were followers of Apostles, Peter and Paul respectively and while Matthew who was a Jew wrote to his own people who were Jews, Mark and Luke seem to have the same audiences who were Gentiles. The date of these Gospels appears to be close to each other but scholars have argued on who wrote first and last depending on their perspectives. It is therefore imperative to know and address the similarities, differences and problems of these Gospels.

## 2. The Synoptic Problem

Palmer puts down that the major roots of the life and ministry of Jesus can be derived from the complete Gospels (1). Also, Carson and Douglas postulate that Griesbach selected the word 'Synoptic' because of the massive resemblance of the Gospels (77). Tenny discloses that the word 'Synoptic' is derived from the Greek word *synoptikos* meaning seeing or viewing the whole together. This pertains to Matthew, Mark and Luke because their composition of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are similar. This leads to the synoptic problem which states:

What is the reason for the concord of statements among the Gospels if they are completely autonomous from each other? How can they be real and authentic if they copied from each other or from a well-known source? Are these Gospels really inspired or compilation of presupposition and assumptions? (320). The verses of Matthew Mark and Luke in all are 1068, 661 and 1149 respectively. The Synoptic Gospels have things in common in terms of oral expression, pattern of arrangement, their source and scriptural reference. Some explanations have been given for the reason of their familiarity. Some maintains that it is the Holy Spirit that has inspired the authors that is why they have things in common. Other suggests that the cause of their familiarity is because they all concern the past account of the statement and action of Jesus. Some establishes that the cause of their familiarity is as a result of the characteristics of that period of words been normally discharged by the mouth. None of these reasons seems to give an appropriate solution to the Synoptic problem. (Green, McKnight and Marshall 785)

Blomberg in his book *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, indicts that the attempt to harmonize the scriptures was made prior to the third century by a Syrian, Tatian, which was also called Diatessaron. Some fathers such as Augustine and Calvin wrote during

their time to accord the Gospels. The early fathers were of the opinion that all the Gospels were written in their arraigned form, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There arose critical and non-biblical scholars in the enlightenment era who criticized the form, arrangement, contents and miracles etc. in the Gospels. While some scholars attempted to accord the traditional and rationalist views of the Gospels, some scholars like Strauss rejected and came up with their positions stating that the miracles and acts of Jesus as ordinary stories. Baur a scholar tried to divide the New Testament into three using Paul and Peter as example, they are a Conservative Christianity that is Jewish, a Gentile Liberal Law Free Christianity and the third is a combination of the two. Many other scholars emerged who disregarded the traditional established view of the church fathers about the Gospels and they produced doctrines of a Jesus who was not divine but an ordinary man. The Synoptic problem became a serious concern to scholars. Blomberg says it is a problem of their “literary interrelationship”. Different positions that existed on the Synoptic problem were: Matthew was a main source for Mark and Luke depended on him; Mark wrote last becoming a condensation of Matthew and Luke; Mark wrote first while the Matthew and Luke copied from him; Matthew and Luke also had another source; Luke depended on Matthew and Mark (87-89).

The Synoptic problem investigates the similarities and differences in style, sequence and component of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). The similarities in the Synoptic Gospels are as follows:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17
2	22:22-23	12:18-27	20:27-40
3	24:4-8	13:5-8	21:8-11

The similarities in the Synoptic Gospels also exist in sequence.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	16:13-20:34	8:27-10:52	9:18-51/18:15-43
2	12:46-13:58	3:31-6:6a	8:19-56

There are also similarities in the Synoptic Gospels in Parenthetical Material

		Mathew	Mark	Luke
1	“Let the reader understand”	24:15	13:14	-
2	“He then said to the paralytic”	9:6	2:10	5:24
3	“For He said...”	-	5:8	8:29

There is also similarity in Bible quotations in the Synoptic Gospel: some direct quotations in the Old Testament are also repeated in the New Testament (Green, McKnight and Marshall 784-5).

Baxter gives the similar materials found within the Gospels.

**Materials found in three Gospels:** The healing of the leper by Jesus, the healing of Jairus’ daughter by Jesus, the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, the rich young leader with similarities and dissimilarities among the Gospels Matthew 8: 2-4, 9:18-26. The three Gospels has some chronological event of Jesus in the same pattern such as revealing the starting of the ministry of Jesus at Galilee and His presence in Jerusalem at His time of death.

**Materials found in two Gospels:** Matthew and Mark- story of the Syro-phoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30), Mark and Luke- the story of the widow mite (Mark 12: 41-44, Luke 21: 1-4), Matthew and Luke- the story of the centurion slave (Matthew 8:8-10, Luke 7:6-8).

**Material found in only one Gospel:** There are some details (stories or information) that are peculiar to a specific Gospel. Examples are the story of Jesus healing the deaf Mark 7:32-36, the account of Jesus abiding with Martha and Mary in Luke, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke (Luke 10:38-42, 29-37), the account of the coin in the mouth of the fish in Matthew, the parable of the workers in the garden (Matthew 17:24-27; 20:1-16) (11-14) etc.

The differences in each Gospel are peculiar to it and the concord in each Gospel can be found in other Gospels. McCain tabulates the differences in Matthew, Mark and Luke are 42%, 7%, 59% and the concord are 58%, 93%, 41% respectively (106). Ali and Lillo enumerates that the differences arises among the Gospels because the reason each authors writes as placed in their heart by God is unique; Jesus also addressed and related with people from different places and tribes while the similarities is as a result of the authors had Jesus’ past pattern of His words and deeds, they have common and similar short or long passages and the stories in these Gospels are almost the same (8).



The similarities of the Gospels points to the fact that the public figure known as the Lord Jesus Christ has contained in the Gospels is not fictitious or framed as indicated by some liberal scholars. It is real that the Son of God came in the form of a man for the redemption of the whole world. The possible difference could also indicate the background, personality, audience and perspective from which the authors of the Gospels wrote.

### **Theories of the Synoptic Gospels**

Blomberg establishes that because God inspired the writers of the Bible and the entire Gospels written spoke about the life and ministry of Jesus, some individuals in time past believed that there is no literary connection amid the Synoptic Gospels. This position is not upheld by some critical thinkers in this dispensation. Certain level of parallelism exists among the Synoptic Gospels. There are 661 verses in Mark. Also 500 verses equally appear in Matthew and Luke has 350. Matthew and Mark have 235 similar verses which are absent in Luke. Because these similar corresponding words in the Gospels appear with the teachings and works of Jesus, it is generally presumed that one of them must have copied from the other or they must have had a common source for their information. Reoccurring examples of similar translations show that they must have depended on each other for their literary details. There is also a concord in the additional information amid the synoptic. There are also patterns of events with no sequential order of the similar corresponding words among the Gospels (97).

Many theories have existed in history to explain the similarities and differences between the Gospels. Some of the theories of the Synoptic Gospels by Green, McKnight and Marshall are

**Oral Hypothesis:** Some scholars like J. G. Von Herder and G.K.L Gieseler believed that the Oral tradition created by the disciples was fully adopted by the Gospel writers.

**Fragmentary Hypothesis:** F. Schleiermacher was of the opinion that the similarities within the Gospels are as a result of the sayings and actions of Jesus which the disciples documented which is an extract of the Gospels.

**Ur-Gospel Hypothesis:** The ancient and real Gospel also known as Ur-Gospel formulated by G. E Lessing and J.G. Eichhorn propounded that the gospel written in Aramaic was revised into Greek and used by the Gospel writers which accounted for their similarities.

**Augustine Hypothesis:** Augustine, one of the early church fathers, affirms that Matthew must have written first. Mark used Matthew and Luke must have copied from Mark.



**The Griesbach Hypothesis:** H. Owen was the one who formed this hypothesis attributing Matthew to be the first Gospel established. Matthew was considered the main source of Luke and of Mark, Luke was the source of Mark. Through the efforts of W. R. Farmer, J. B Orchard and H. H. Stoldt, this hypothesis led to the existence of the Two Documents Hypothesis. The strengths of the Griesbach hypothesis are

The tradition of the church is in concord with this hypothesis; the concord of the Gospels can easily be elaborated; it expounds the superfluity of Mark hypothesis and it gives no provision for the Q hypothesis.

The Griesbach hypothesis also has some weaknesses, which includes:

The existence of a clash between Griesbach hypothesis and the traditions of the church. Mark easily expounds some concord within the Gospels and the Two –Document Hypothesis can expound the superfluity of Mark.

**The Two-Document Hypothesis:** This hypothesis states that while Mark wrote first, the other two Gospels copied from Mark. This hypothesis also made provision for another source called Q which the two Gospel writers also copied from. The features of this two document hypothesis are that Mark being the shortest Gospel the Greek is not as smooth as the other Gospel. The theology proceeding from Mark is easy to comprehend in some cases. The Matthew –Luke concord contrary to Mark seems to be small. The priority of Mark easily expatiates some literary concord. The redactional finding of the Gospel proceeds from the Markan priority.

**The Q Hypothesis:** The word Q originates from the Germany words *Quelle* which connotes Source. This hypothesis suggests that Matthew and Luke copied from the same source that was different to Mark in other words, following the two-document hypothesis, Matthew and Luke took their source which is not found in Mark from a common source called Q. Other issues discussed under this hypothesis that show the independence of Matthew and Luke are: The two Gospel writers did not know each other that is, Luke did not copy from Matthew; Luke appears in a different form in the Q material; In some occasions Luke’s use of the Q materials are not fully adequate; The order and wordings of Matthew to Luke concord does not negate Mark; There are materials in Matthew, which are absent in Mark and Luke. Other debates by scholars about the wordings, orders and form (written or oral) of the Q source have been made.

**The Four-Document Hypothesis:** This hypothesis states that Matthew and Luke copied Mark and Q. While Matthew and Luke had an independent source called M and L respectively.

In response to the Matthew-Luke concord negating Mark, some scholars have suggested some reasons such as overlapping traditions between the Q and Mark materials, textual alteration and imbrications of oral tradition (785-91).

### Arguments for Markan Priority

Blomberg states the following points in support of the view that Mark wrote first while Matthew and Luke copied from Mark:

**Clarity:** In some instances, the information given by Mark is more clear and detailed than his counterparts. Examples are “after sunset” (Mark 1:32, Matthew 8:16), the “green grass” (Mark 6:39, Matthew 14:19, Luke 9:14) and “three hundred denarii” (Mark 14:5, Matthew 26:9).

**Style:** While the style and grammar of Matthew and Luke is smooth and straight forward that of Mark is uneven and uniform. **Narration:** Awkward and confusing incident ignored by Matthew and Luke are well narrated by Mark i.e. error in referring to Abiathar the high priest (Mark 2:26, Matthew 12:4, Luke 6:4); Jesus “could” work few miracles in Nazareth (Mark 6:5, Matthew 13:58, Luke 4:24). **Form:** Marks narration is in full details despite the fact that his Gospel is short. Mark is 71 times longer out of the 92 pages he has in common with Luke. Matthew is longer 63 out of the 104 passages in common compared with Matthew. **Reproduced:** Less than 10 percent of Mark’s details were not produced in Matthew and Luke. **Agreement:** In terms of passages, the order of succession and type of words spoken in the same pattern and time, the two evangelists followed Mark. Matthew and Mark often concur against Luke, Luke and Mark often concurs against Matthew. **Aramaic words:** The highest Aramaic word preserved in Greek transliteration is found in Mark, *Boanerges* (3:17), *talithakoum* (5:41), *Corban* (7:11), *ephphatha* (7:34) and *Abba* (14:36). **Omission:** Mark was aware about the other details in Matthew and Luke, so he decided to omit them.

The arguments against or weakness of Markan priority are as follows:

In few cases Matthew and Luke concur against Mark; A handsome number of Mark is omitted in Luke (which is Mark 6:45-8:26); if Mark wrote last, the changes in the Gospel will be minimized; modern liberal scholars initiated the Markan priority to delete Christ’s divine nature

and works of which they did not accomplish it; the church fathers fully support Matthean priority (99-101). Wallace assumes that when talking of the four Gospels, Mark wrote first (2).

Black gives an explanation in support of the Matthean hypothesis or Griesbach hypothesis which is also known as the Two Gospel Hypothesis. He explains that the disciples of Jesus were led to put down all the things their master said and did which was imperative in their dispensation. The Gospel of Matthew was the first to be written and was a fundamental sacred book for all churches and Gospel literatures within and beyond the time of its composition. The contents of the lecture are: Matthew's missionary conversation (Luke 9:3-5= Mark 6:8-11). Matthew's conversation on the community (Luke 9:46-48=Mark 9:33-37). Matthews parable conversation, with some Markan additions (Luke 8:4-18=Mark 4:1-25). Matthew's main eschatological conversation (Luke 21:5-36=Mark 13:1-37). The fig tree parable (Mark 11:20-26 = Matt 21:19-22=Luke 13:6-9). Example of Peter's personal inclusions (Mark 7:19). Black enumerates that Griesbach asserts that Mark was depending on Matthew and Luke when looking from the zigzag angle. Mark wrote in a casual and conventional way which revealed the reason and focus of his writing. Black insinuates that Mark was not intended to be a gospel on its own but to stand as an intermediary between Matthew and Luke (44-62).

Among the various forms of hypothesis or theories listed above the Griesbach or Matthean hypothesis which is also known as the two Gospel hypotheses or theory, the two documents and four document hypothesis appears to be commonly accepted by contemporary students and scholars. Some still stick to the former that Matthew wrote first and the order of the Gospels as it appears in the Bible and approved by the church fathers is the authentic form but from the enlightenment dispensation, the latter views are most likely to be supported by many scholars. The debate or arguments about the arrangement of the Synoptic Gospels and the strength and weaknesses derived from these theories does not in any way devalue the Bible or renders the efficacy of God's word null and void but it gives the readers, Bible students and scholars a better way or approach of studying the Bible for a good understanding of the God's word. It also helps to get the right interpretation and application of the Word of God. It is interesting to discover that Matthew among the three Gospels is only the direct disciple of Jesus and must have documented it just as he witnessed it. How would a non –direct disciple of Jesus be regarded as the first to

write his Gospel before a direct disciple of Jesus? However, this is not impossible since the other authors were followers of the direct disciples of Jesus, there could be a transfer of knowledge, ideas and wisdom. Since the date of their publishing are not far from each other, it is not impossible that they had access to each other's documents.

### **3. It's Relationship with Textual Criticism and Contributions to Contemporary Biblical Studies.**

Textual criticism is also referred to as lower criticism (McCain and Keener 47). In recent time, scholars have indicated that there is an important connection that textual criticism and Synoptic problem has (Kilpatrick 82). Some of these arte stated below

- 1. The Development of Textual Criticism has led to the final documentation of the Synoptic Gospels and the Entire Bible in a durable and Book form:** As revealed in this article "*The Significance of New Testament Manuscripts Textual Variants and Its Impact on Religious Experience*" From the very early centuries, the process of documentation was progressive that is, the writing materials that were prevalent were initially papyrus, parchments or vellum, then scrolls and codex (Adejare 87-8). Ladd proclaims that first important Greek New Testament Bible to be printed was that of Erasmus around 1516 (59). Ever since then, there have been a production and reproduction (that is updating of the Bible) by established biblical scholars as they gained access to better manuscripts of the Bible which were close to the original.
- 2. The Synoptic Gospels and Textual criticism make use of an In-depth Comparison:** Fee specifically defines Textual criticism "as the science that compares all known manuscripts of a given work in an effort to trace the history of variation within the text so as to discover its original form"(127). The numerous comparison among the available manuscripts helps to find the one that is closest to the real manuscripts. Similarly, for scholars to get to a logical conclusion among the Synoptic Gospels such as who wrote first and who copied who, there must have been an in-depth comparison of the Gospels. Textual criticism could be an effective tool in addressing the Synoptic problem. Strobel quotes Metzger that a good comparison of the current New Testament with that of the primitive shows that the New Testament is good and very valid (70).

- 3. They Implore the Critical use of Questions:** In order to understand the real motive of the author in any given passage or text certain questions are asked. Olushola gives examples of those questions such as “What did the original text mean to the author? What were the words used in writing the text? In which environment did he write? Who were his audience? What was his objective of writing? What was the goal of his message in the text?”(Chap 7). In the same vein, in solving the Synoptic problems, certain questions are also asked such as what is the reason for the concord of statements among the Gospels if they are completely autonomous from each other? How can they be real and authentic if they copied from each other or from a well known source? Are these Gospels really inspired or compilation of presupposition and assumptions? (Tenny 320). Other critical questions asked are “if it is plausible that the Gospel of Mark used by Matthew differed from the Mark used by Luke then, which is the original Mark? And if it is plausible that our present Mark differed from both Matthew’s Mark and Luke’s Mark, then do we not have three plausible originals?” (Epp73). This connotes that textual criticism which is a science helps to address some certain issues or passages in the New Testament such as the Synoptic Gospels.
- 4. Textual Criticism Resolves Textual Issues Passages:** There are three major passages among others in the New Testament with obvious textual issue; the Gospel of Mark is among them. Distinguished biblical scholars through the tools of textual criticism have been able to give some justifiable reasons for the abrupt ending of Mark 16. Nggada and Adejare in their article *A Critical Analysis of the Long Ending of Mark and Its Placement in Contemporary Scholarship* discussed on the five types of the ending of Mark and commented that issues of the ending of Mark does not devalue the power in the Word of God. Although there are many scholars who support the short ending of Mark such as Prof. Daniel B. Wallace and Prof. J.K Elliot, there are also some other scholars examples are Prof. Maurice A. Robinson and Prof. David Allan Black that supports the long ending (Black vii). Preus includes that the textual principle that “the reading that fits the author’s style or vocabulary is to be preferred over the reading that includes words or grammar which is rarely or never uses” supports the short ending over the long ending (66). Adejare notes in his article *The Impact of New Testament Textual Issues Passages to Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* that scholars have done a great work to examine

passages with textual issues using textual tools and these scholars have come out with possible and workable emendations (Tambiyi and DanfulaniCh 29).

- 5. Harmonization:** A very close relationship textual criticism has with the Synoptic problem is the issue of harmonization. At times, it could be tedious to make decision with the involvement of Synoptic parallel. However, from the documentation of Fee, harmonization can be categorized into four which are “Harmonization could be between or among the Gospels, within a single Gospel, to the Septuagint and to the common phrase or idea apart from any immediate parallel.” In most cases the relationships between the Synoptic are difficult to differentiate but with a close and efficient study, the right decision can be arrived at (175).

In suggesting solution to these problems, Tenny states “Each Gospel however was shaped to its own purpose and audience, so that the variation in wording reflected the differences of interest and environment,” Matthew wrote to the Christians who were Jews, Mark wrote to the non-Jews and Luke wrote to the Greeks (321). The Synoptic problems have something to do with textual criticism and these scholars gave an important note on it. The Synoptic problem influences textual criticism and textual criticism also influences the Synoptic problem. In the aspect of agreement or unification of the Gospel, an individual’s textual choice will be determined by the solution to Synoptic problem. Textual criticism helps one to make the appropriate inquiry in solving the Synoptic problem. The acceptable reading as the autograph is one that elaborates better the subsistence of the others (Green, McKnight and Marshall 830).

In the quest to bring solution to the problems of the Synoptic Gospels, scholars in the past have come up with various theories. Zahn emphatically mentions that “up to this present time, no one of the investigation of the Synoptic problem can be said to have produced results which have been generally accepted (418).” Nggada and Adejare in their article *The Relationship between Old and New Testament Textual Criticism and Its Impact to Biblical Scholarship* depicts that one of the great impact of Old and New Testament textual criticism is the extraction and recovery of great ideas of primitive scholars (51). While some of these theories have been accepted there are other scholars that have rejected them coming up with their own theories with the quest of solving the Synoptic problem and other issues in the Bible. However, in our contemporary age, studies are still on-going with the aim of giving a permanent or better hypothesis or approach to these problems. As Adejare notes in his article that the various versions of the Bible is a

blessings to the Christian faith (31), in the same vein, the advantage and impact of exploring the relationship between the Synoptic problem and textual criticism is that learned Christians and biblical scholars are consistently embarking on studies of both the Bible and biblical literatures and this has gone a long way in building and strengthening their Christian faith. More so, the inspirations, observations and revelations derived from the study of the Bible goes a long way in transforming the lives of the individual and the believers as these insight and revelations are been shared among the brethren either orally or as published material. These inspirations also can also lead to the propounding of useful theories that will contribute greatly to the contemporary biblical scholarships. Biblical students and scholars are thereby encouraged to continue to delve into the study of God's word particularly of critical issues of the Synoptic Gospels and other sensitive passages and not be afraid of sharing their insights which paradventure could answer the unanswered questions in the hearts of the believers or readers of this contemporary and coming age.

## **Conclusion**

This research inputs that a critical study of the Synoptic Gospels has unveiled that Matthew, Mark and Luke has similarities and differences although each book was written for a particular purpose and audience. The various theories that have risen in time past as regards to these Gospels are Oral Hypothesis, Fragmentary Hypothesis, Ur-Gospel Hypothesis, Augustine Hypothesis, the Griesbach Hypothesis (also known as the Two-Gospel hypothesis), The Two-Document Hypothesis, The Q Hypothesis, The Four-Document Hypothesis. Among these hypotheses, in our contemporary world, there are some scholars who still highly uphold the Griesbach hypothesis. From the enlightenment age, many scholars till date supports the two document and four document hypothesis this is because it seems to answer some or most of their questions as regards the Synoptic problem.

This paper states the close relationship between the Synoptic problem and textual criticism. A sticking relationship is that the ending of Mark 16 which constitutes the short (1-8) and long (9-20) ending is a major passage with textual issues which source criticism cannot address but textual studies does. These common features between these two can help or give insight in addressing the Synoptic problem arriving at a positive result although it is a herculean task. Since not all questions that have been raised about the Synoptic problem has a satisfactory answer,



through the effective study of God's word with the appropriate use of textual and other biblical tools with the help of the Holy Spirit, new theories and discoveries can be arrived at that will completely address other questions that arise from the Synoptic problem. These theories or discoveries will not only impact positively the lives of the believers and the Christian faith as a whole but it will also be of great relevance to our contemporary biblical studies.

Biblical students and scholars are thereby encouraged to persist in their effort in the study and research of not only Synoptic problem but also in other related biblical issues as their ideas and discoveries will go a long way with the help of God in proffering solutions to some necessary biblical questions thereby contributing greatly to advancement of biblical studies in our contemporary age.

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