



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2013.05.09*

**Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 2012. \$39. ISBN: 9780802867483.**

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Mark Goodacre (hereafter G.) has successfully demonstrated the subtitle of his latest book (*The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics*), and his labors will no doubt become an authoritative treatment of the subject. But despite the fact that the book is worthy of much praise, it is of greater benefit to G. himself and his critical readers to spend the majority of this review posing critiques and queries about some of his arguments.

First a brief summary of the book's main contents. In Chapter 1 ("First Impressions"), G. sets the stage for what follows. He opts for using "familiarity" rather than "dependence" when describing the *Thomas*/Synoptic relationship, given some undesired baggage associated with the term "dependence" (e.g., "familiarity," he claims, does not prejudice "the extent of their [Synoptic] influence" [p. 7]). He also attempts to dismantle typical arguments for Thomasine independence from the Synoptics: most notably the supposed similarity between *Thomas* and Q. In Chapter 2 ("Verbatim Agreement"), G. looks at the Oxyrhynchus fragments of *Thomas* and claims to identify three key points of "direct contact" (p. 31). In Chapter 3 ("Diagnostic Shards"), G. searches for "distinctive, redactional features from the Synoptic Gospels" (p. 49), and claims to find several. In Chapter 4 ("Matthean Redaction in *Thomas*"), G. continues in the same line of thought and identifies three Matthean fingerprints: "kingdom of the heavens" (pp. 67–69), the use of "mouth" in *Thomas* 14.5 (pp. 70–71), and certain traits in *Thomas*'s Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (pp. 73–80). In Chapter 5 ("Lukan Redaction in *Thomas*"), G. does the same with Luke 8:17 ("nothing hidden that will not be made manifest") in P.Oxy 654.29–31, Luke 4:24 ("no prophet is accepted in his home country") in P.Oxy. 1.36–41, and the interior monologue of Luke 12:17 (Parable of the Rich Fool) in *Thom.* 63. In Chapter 6 ("A Special Case: *Thomas* 79 and Luke"), G. argues that *Thom.* 79 has strung together two uniquely Lukan passages: Luke 11:27–28 ("blesses are the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked") and 23:29 ("they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed'"). In Chapter 7 ("The Missing Middle in *Thomas*"), G. makes perhaps his most original contribution to the debate by observing that many of *Thomas*'s parallels with the Synoptics seem to lack the "middle" portion of the synoptic pericope. G. argues that these passages with missing

middles presuppose the very material that *Thomas* has failed to provide his reader. In Chapter 8 (“Orality, Literacy, and *Thomas*”), G. critiques the view that *Thomas* has “a fundamentally oral disposition” (p. 153). He grants that the somewhat random order of sayings in *Thomas* may suggest that the author was “accessing the Synoptic materials from his memory” (p. 151), but, nonetheless, G. argues that the verbatim links between *Thomas* and the Synoptics suppose a direct “source consultation” (p. 150). In Chapter 9 (“Dating *Thomas* and the Gospels”), G. dates all of the Synoptics post-70 and claims to find echoes of the destruction of the temple in *Thom.* 71 and the Bar Kokhba revolt in *Thom.* 68. Thus, he dates *Thomas* to the 140s. In Chapter 10 (“Secrecy, Authority, and Legitimation”), G. goes a step further and considers “how” and “why” *Thomas* used the Synoptics. His suggestion is that *Thomas* adopted the Synoptics as “an authenticating device” (p. 172) which served the purpose of “allaying the impact” of *Thomas*’s “striking new sayings” (p. 181).

As mentioned above, the cumulative force of G.’s 10 chapters make a strong case for *Thomas*’s use of the Synoptics. But, at least for this reviewer, some questions remained. Here are four.

(1) In Chapter 1, it is not apparent that G.’s decision to use “familiarity” over “dependence” actually clarifies the argument. One reason is that G. continues to use “independence” when talking about the views of Koester, Patterson, and DeConick, which he opposes. One naturally thinks of “dependence” as its corollary. Another reason is that G. frequently claims to identify “direct contact between the texts” (p. 32; cf. pp. 37, 122), which sounds a lot like “dependence.” Further, G. initially rejects using “dependence” on the grounds that the term assumes too much, but it seems instead that “familiarity” assumes more still. For G., “familiarity” covers both “direct contact” as well as general “inconcinnity” due to *Thomas*’s use of oral tradition (e.g., p. 126). Of course there is nothing implausible with the scenario of *Thomas* being familiar with the Gospels in both written and oral form. But some readers may take G.’s “familiarity” as a methodological sleight of hand, whereby G. counts as positive evidence for his argument not only verbatim links between *Thomas* and the Synoptics, but also more subtle “allusions.”

(2) In Chapter 2, none of G.’s “verbatim agreements” are that compelling when it comes to establishing “direct contact” between *Thomas* and the Synoptics (p. 31). G.’s argument essentially boils down to this: it is implausible that a thirteen word agreement in P.Oxy 1.1–4 with Matt 7:5//Luke 6:42, a “striking and unusual expression” (p. 35) in P.Oxy 654.15–16 and Luke 17:21, and an eight word agreement in P.Oxy 654.25–26 with Matt 19:30/Mark 10:31 could be ascribed to knowledge of oral tradition. But this is problematic for two reasons. First, I doubt this issue can be settled by simply pointing to what is commonly “characteristic of direct contact between texts” (p. 32). We have to look at the specific case at hand. And in each of these three texts we have quite memorable sayings, the “punchlines” in fact. Second, G. does not address an interesting parallel to his discussion at this point: debates about the form(s) of media that best account for a similar usage of NT documents in Patristic writers. It is, of course, debated if Ignatius of Antioch was familiar with written Gospels and/or oral traditions, and the evidence is often inconclusive. Is the situation that different for *Thomas*? A quick search of each of G.’s three examples in the online *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* yields numerous texts with the exact same “verbatim agreement” that G. finds so striking in *Thomas*. Is it also necessary to posit “direct contact” with written texts to explain these agreements? That seems doubtful.

(3) Chapters 3, 4, and 5, which focus largely on identifying Matthean and Lukan redaction in *Thomas*, demonstrate G.'s expertise in the Synoptic Problem. Many of his points are convincing, but sometimes the logic of his position is perhaps too embedded in certain redaction-critical assumptions. For example, G. on occasion claims that it is a "simpler argument" (e.g., p. 86) to suppose that *Thomas*'s agreements with the Synoptics are due to direct editorializing of the synoptic version, rather than knowledge of some independent written or oral tradition. But Occam's Razor may not always be the best guide, especially when it shoulders the majority of the weight of an argument. Moreover, G. is methodologically inconsistent at this point, because he frequently claims that we should not expect *Thomas* to share with the Synoptics the kind of close agreement that we find among the Synoptics themselves. Thus, he admits the Synoptic Problem is not a great parallel to the Synoptic-*Thomas* Problem. But in chapters 3, 4, and 5 G. often appeals to lessons learned from Synoptic interrelationships and redaction criticism. Can he have it both ways?

(4) G.'s argument about "the missing middle" will probably become his most distinctive contribution to the discussion. But the argument is somewhat less persuasive than G. lets on. He introduces the topic by saying that *Thomas*'s "missing middles" leave sayings "unintelligible" to anyone not familiar with the Synoptics (p. 109). But "unintelligibility" is not what G. demonstrates. He does demonstrate that *Thomas*'s shortened forms lack style, are less rhetorically persuasive, and the like. But these sayings are still "intelligible," and, in fact, G. never again mentions "unintelligibility":

- Concerning *Thom.* 63, Luke "provides a much better antecedent" (p. 112).
- *Thom.* 100 features "inconcinnity" and is "clumsy" (p. 114).
- *Thom.* 26 "lacks the narrative logic" (p. 116), and produces "a less coherent" version (p. 117).
- *Thom.* 89 generates "an inconcinnity" (p. 119).
- *Thom.* 36 "generates a minor inconcinnity" (p. 120) and "is significantly less memorable" (p. 121).

Of course, "inconcinnity" and "unintelligibility" are very different things. G. convincingly rejects "the form-critical fallacy of equating greater simplicity with greater primitiveness" (p. 117), but if all he can show is "inconcinnity," it is no more probable, on the face of it, that "greater simplicity" can be equated with later redaction.

In all, G. has given us a well-reasoned and persuasive discussion of *Thomas*'s relationship to the Synoptics. There may be some weak points in his armor, but it will be difficult even then for his opponents to overtake him. This book is a must read for any serious critic of the *Gospel of Thomas*, and a lively one at that.