

More Gospel Trajectories

E Bruce Brooks

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

(22 Dec 2013)

In an earlier note,¹ I tracked developments in successive Gospels in the sequence Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. A difficulty, in terms of my Luke A/B/C theory,² was that the “Luke” stage had to be Luke B or C, given that the earliest Luke (Luke A) *preceded* rather than followed Matthew. To avoid that limitation, I here treat Matthew and Luke together as the second of three Gospel stages. The Trajectories show that the Gospels form a sequence in time, with theological and other developments between one stage and the next. They cannot be regarded as independent, or jointly referred to the late 1c. Each is aware of those preceding, and makes what changes it wishes.

The Davidic Jesus. Mark represents Jesus as teaching in covert terms (Mk 4:2), relying on a Davidic precedent in violating the Sabbath (Mk 2:25-26), arranging (with passwords) for a symbolic Entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-3), purifying the Temple to allow the return of God to Israel (Mk 11:15-17), and dying in despair (Mk 15:34) when his hope of divine intervention is not realized. This is overlaid in Mark with the expectation that Jesus will rule instead at the End Days, not over Israel, but over all mankind (Mk 13:26-27, interpolated).³ The Second Tier Gospels affirm a Davidic *connection* (Mt 1:1-17, Lk 3:23-38), but without a Messianic *agenda*. In Luke A, a follower laments, “we had thought he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21). John attributes the Messianic hope to a misguided populace (Jn 6:15), and Jesus tells Pilate, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). The dissociation is complete.

Judas in Mark 14:10-11 goes to the priests to betray Jesus; they promise to give him money. Matthew dramatizes this with direct quotes and more detail: “What are ye willing to give me?” (Mt 26:15); “And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver” (Mt 26:16). Also more dramatic in Matthew is Jesus’ direct identification of Judas as the betrayer: “Thou hast said” (Mt 26:25). In Mark and Matthew the arresting party is merely “with” Judas, though in Matthew it becomes a “great” multitude (Mt 26:47); as Keith Yoder has observed, in Luke, Judas *leads* it (“went before them,” Lk 22:47), and in John, seemingly bearing in his own arms the torches and weapons (Jn 18:3).⁴ The net effect is to increasingly emphasize the involvement of Judas.⁵

¹Brooks **Gospel Trajectories**.

²Brooks **Acts-Luke**.

³For the lateness of this passage, and all of Mk 13, see Brooks **Time Depth**.

⁴Yoder **Judas** 190.

⁵Heightening the enormity of the betrayal was probably also the reason that Judas, from early in the tradition (Mk 3:19, interpolated), was considered to have been himself one of the Twelve. For the process whereby Judas was intruded into the Twelve, see Brooks **Twelve**.

Pilate. Christians, who in all periods were subject to the power of Rome, preferred to minimize the role of Pilate in the death of Jesus (and emphasize that of the Jews). Pilate even acquired a positive role. In Mark, Pilate prefers to release another, and condemns Jesus only “to satisfy the crowd” (Mk 15:15). In Matthew, Pilate more formally washes his hands of Jesus’ innocent blood. The crowd accept responsibility: “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Mt 25:25). In Luke, Pilate refers Jesus to Herod. The chief priests and scribes accuse Jesus before Herod (Lk 23:10), who sends Jesus back. Pilate insists on Jesus’ innocence (Lk 23:22) before delivering him up “to their will” (Lk 23:25). Pilate in John is warned that he in being disobedient to Caesar. When he seeks to release “their king” the crowd cry, “If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend; every man that maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (Jn 19:19:12). The chief priests echo, “We have no king but Caesar” (Jn 19:15).

Going beyond the Gospels, in the *Paradosis Pilati*, Pilate is summoned to Rome for executing an innocent man. He and prays to Jesus for forgiveness as he is executed. Then comes Jesus’ voice from Heaven, “All generations and families of the Gentiles shall call you blessed, because in your governorship everything was fulfilled which the prophets foretold about me. And you yourself shall appear as my witness at my second coming, when I shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel and those who have not confessed my name.” The executioner cuts off Pilate’s head, and an angel receives it.⁶

God. As Jesus is increasingly divinized,⁷ God increasingly recedes. In the Markan core, Jesus heals by the power of God, but in an early addition to Mark, Jesus already takes God’s place in forgiving sins (Mk 2:5-6, interpolated). Jesus’ supernatural birth in Matthew, and again in Luke B, push God offstage in preference to the divinely begotten Infant Jesus. In John, Jesus’ birth goes back *to the beginning of things*; he is co-existent with God (Jn 1:1). Elsewhere in John, Jesus functionally replaces God: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). And at this point, the Yabneh Rabbis retaliate by expelling Jesus followers from continuing synagogue fellowship. In the process, transforming a mere upstart Jewish sect into a separate religion.⁸

Works Cited

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⁶Elliott **Apocryphal** 211.

⁷Brooks **Divinization**.

⁸For evidence of the expulsion, see Jn 16:2; for the way in which expulsion was managed, and when, see Brooks **Eighteen**.