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HCSB: Harmony of the Gospels

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Nick Norelli
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
New Jersey

In his 2006 debate with William Lane Craig at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, Bart Ehrman said:

I tell my students that the reason we don't notice there's so many differences in the Gospels is because we read the Gospels vertically, from top to bottom. You start at the top of Mark, you read through to the bottom, you start at the top of Matthew, read it through the bottom, sounds a lot like Mark, then you read Luke top to bottom, sounds a lot like Matthew and Mark, read John, a little bit different, sounds about the same. The reason is because we're reading them vertically. The way to see differences in the Gospels is to read them horizontally. Read one story in Matthew, then the same story in Mark, and compare your two stories and see what you come up with.¹

Steven L. Cox and Kendell H. Easley have provided the reader with exactly the means to take Ehrman's advice without having to have four Bibles spread out in front of them. They've given us the opportunity to read the Gospels horizontally and see what we come up with, whatever that may be. The bottom line is that this *Harmony of the Gospels* is a tool of convenience and one that will make any student's study easier.

The editors describe this work as a “*twenty-first century update [to the] preeminent Baptist harmony*” (v) entitled *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ Based on the Broadus Harmony in the Revised Version*, produced by A. T. Robertson in 1922. They have followed the same pericope numbering system as that set forth in Robertson's work, but they claim that “*this is the only Gospel harmony to include notes in the format now familiar in a variety of study Bibles.*” (v) However, this volume contains much more than the setting of pericopae side-by-side in order to show the similarities and differences, and a few helpful notes; this volume also contains five

¹ Debate Transcript, 11. Available online at <http://www.freewebs.com/deityofchrist/resurrection-debate-transcript.pdf>

introductory articles and another thirty (!) articles dealing with issues in Gospel harmonization from some evangelical heavy hitters (e.g., Stanley Porter, Darrel L. Bock, Gary Habermas, et al.).

The editors note in the preface that they have respected the work of all the contributors and have left their disagreements intact, and make no claims for a consensus among all of the essayists and study note providers. I've come to really appreciate this while working through the various essays because I believe it is in keeping with the spirit of a harmony such as this. Dale Ellenburg describes this volume as a "*parallel harmony*" (3) in his introductory article "Is Harmonization Honest?" (1-4) In other words, this isn't a harmony in the spirit of Tatian's *Diatessaron* where the various pericopae are conflated to produce one homogeneous story, but rather it allows readers to see the agreements and disagreements between the various Gospel authors.

I'd also mention that this harmony doesn't really compete with my recently acquired *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* in that this serves a different purpose. This volume actually serves the purpose that I thought my *Synopsis* would, which is that it can be used in conjunction with an introductory text on the four Gospels. It is also set apart from the *Synopsis* in its articles. So while I'll be using the *Synopsis* when comparing the Greek texts to see who drew from who and in what ways they used their sources, I'll use this for the more day-to-day studying. If I had to pick between the two for teaching a Bible study, then I'd probably use this volume without hesitation. While I'm not in love with the translation, it has a more user-friendly format and is definitely more accessible to the layperson.

Other features include an eight-page select bibliography, as well as eight pages of color maps. Whether or not you agree with the essays or notes, this is a valuable tool for Gospel studies and I'd wholeheartedly recommend this to any student. I can't at this time see any room for improvement upon the present work, so I'd suggest that you take Ehrman's advice and read the stories side-by-side; see what you come up with.