

Abstract

For the better part of the last century, the scholarly examination of the compositional and developmental history of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts has commenced primarily along redaction-critical lines. While such an approach has yielded several important conclusions and observations, one fundamental analytical category has been surprisingly overlooked – that is, the phenomenon of memory. This category is referred to as “fundamental” for the simple reason that the Synoptic Gospels and Acts were not written at the exact time in which their described events occurred, but were rather written after the fact (some 40 years in the case of Mark, the earliest of these four documents). Due to the starkness of this temporal reality, one can hardly ignore the fact that the Synoptics and Acts were written in relation to the memory of the past as it was preserved within the communities that produced these texts. What is most shocking about redaction-criticism, as well as numerous other approaches to Christian origins, is the reality that the issue of memory has all but been ignored within their theoretical and methodological orientations. Indeed, rather than engaging the concept of memory as an analytical category, redaction critics have made certain assumptions about the function and capability of memory, assumptions that contradict the conclusions reached by contemporary social-scientists. In response to this theoretical shortcoming the present study will examine the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (with reference to Paul and Q) from the sociological perspective of collective memory theory. It will be our intention to re-envision the compositional and developmental history of these texts in light of this interdisciplinary model. Rather than evaluating each text in its entirety, the present study will instead focus upon one aspect of the tradition – the memory of the apostle Peter. Our analysis will commence chronologically as we look not only at what was thought about Peter during his life time (as seen in Paul and Q), but also at the various ways that the Markan, Matthean, and Lucan communities came to remember the apostle. We will conclude this analysis by specifically noting four ways that collective memory theory enables us to move beyond the conclusions of redaction-criticism and better equip us to re-imagine the emergence of the Synoptics and Acts.