

Insights from the Gospels: Synoptics and John

Introduction

The rationale for this article is to distinguish the Synoptic Gospels from the Gospel of John, clarify what the Synoptic Gospels are, and to expound briefly on the Gospel of John, which belongs to a class of its own.

The paper brings to light the historical-critical tools employed in the study of the Gospels, with particular attention to the impact of the early Church Fathers on the formulation and promulgation of these historical-critical tools.

Readers must take into serious consideration the gospel messages of these Evangelists, whose words have been canonized as authoritative for Christendom to reflect what is contained therein, helping to fulfill God's mission.

Major Themes of Prime Interest

Origin, Meaning of the Word Synoptic and the Synoptic Problem

The word synoptic is an Anglicized version of the Greek word *synopsis*, which means seeing together or seeing collectively. Johann Jakob Griesbach, a German biblical textual critic, was the first person to name the first three books of the New Testament, the Synoptic Gospels. The unmatched level of relatedness between Matthew, Mark, and Luke concerning structure, content, and tone in their touch of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, make the word more applicable to

them than any other book(s) of the New Testament; thus, these three books (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are best known as the Synoptic Gospels in the theological circus.

The primary historical-critical tools used for the study of the Synoptic Gospels are form criticism, source criticism, and redaction criticism. The Synoptic Problem is the full range of disagreements and puzzling differences that characterizes the first gospels. There are combinations of agreements and disagreements that extend to the larger structure of the gospels.

The Gospel of John Paripasu the Synoptic Gospels

The Gospel of John, the other hand, is best referred to as the fourth gospel. Its writer is noted to be officially unknown by some biblical scholars, unlike the Synoptic Gospels. However, its textual content and genre constitute the Johannine thought and style of presentation. Together with the Synoptic Gospels, they form a corpus of *Fourfold Gospel*. Carson and Moo (2005) assert that the title “According to John” became popular during the spread of the four canonical gospels as the fourfold gospel.

Evidence of the Church Fathers in support of the Gospel of John

Theophilus of Antioch (c. A. D. 181), Tatian (student of Justin Martyr), Claudius Apollinaris (bishop of Hierapolis), and Athenagoras were noted to have first and foremost quoted from the fourth gospel as authoritative source and ascribed its authorship to John the Apostle (the son of Zebedee, the beloved apostle, whose brother was James), until other church fathers such as Polycarp and Papias (as evidenced in the testimonies of Irenaeus and Eusebius, historian of the early church).

The so-called *Alogoi* (witness ones, a substantive adjective employed by the orthodox Christians to indicate those who rejected the entirety of the fourth gospel), a name accorded to them by Epiphanius and Irenaeus, were the only people who were noted to have denied Johannine authorship of the fourth gospel.

Sharp Contrasts between the Synoptics and John in the New Testament

While the synoptic gospels outline Jesus' ministry by general geographic sequence, that is His ministry in Galilee, withdrawal to the north (with Peter's confession heralding that and as transitional epitome), ministry in Judea and Perea, while Jesus was en route to Jerusalem (quite silent in Luke), and final ministry in Jerusalem. John discloses very little of that narration.

The synoptic gospels emphasize on the healing ministry of Jesus, his exorcisms, and parabolic teachings. John, on the other hand, has no record of Jesus' exorcisms and parables (as found in the synoptic gospels), though he presents several significant healings of Jesus' ministry. Moreover, remarkable events such as the sending out of the twelve apostles by Jesus, the transfiguration of Jesus, the Olivet chat or discourse, as well as the Last Supper event, are absent from John, and vividly clear as traits of the synoptic gospels.

The first three gospels relay a sense of intense, continuous fire action with more teachings (*extraneous materials*), quite in contrast to the fourth gospel, which is of more meditative tone, portraying Jesus in brief parables or pithy sayings.

The structure of John offers a prologue or appendix between which is the two central sections 1:19-12:50 and 13:1-20:31. Under the influence of two or three influential scholars, these are now frequently designated, respectively, the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory, or the Book of Signs and the Book of the Passion.

There have been external and internal evidence on the authorship of John. From external sources, Theophilus, Tatian, Claudius Apollinaris, and Athenagoras, unambiguously quote from the fourth gospel as an authoritative source alluding to Polycarp and Papias' information. From the internal sources, the author was noted to be a Jew of Palestine, an eyewitness, an apostle, and emphatically named the apostle John.

Papias' Noteworthy Remarks

The evidence of Papias similarly depends on secondary sources. Papias makes no distinction between elders and apostles. He designates John as the elder because he is being grouped with the elders just mentioned, that is, with the apostles. He rather makes a distinction between first-generation witnesses than between apostles and elders of the next generation.

Although John, the son of Zebedee, was a Galilean, by the time he wrote, he had not only lived for years in Judea but in the great metropolitan center of Ephesus. Identifying the apostle as the author meant he was a Jew of Palestine, an eyewitness, an apostle, and the apostle John.

John used sources his fellow evangelist like Luke certainly did. He followed the same, not different course, of the evangelists. One of the features of John's gospel on which virtually all sides now agree is that stylistically it is cut from one cloth. John omits many things that are characteristics of the Synoptic: narrative parables, the account of the transfiguration, the record of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and many of Jesus' pithy sayings. Conversely, John includes a fair bit of material, of which the synoptic makes no mention. John reports of Jesus' ministry in the south in Judea and Samaria than in Galilee, while the focus of the synoptic is the opposite. John's date for the passion, for instance, is not easily squared with that of the synoptic. Very

impressive are the many places where John and the synoptic represent an interlocking tradition, that is, where they mutually reinforce each other without betraying overt literary dependence.

John stresses the functional subordination of Jesus to his Father more strongly. John adds stereoscopic depth to the picture we might gain of Jesus and his ministry, death, and resurrection. John's presentation of who Jesus lies at the heart of all that is distinctive in this gospel- Son of God. He emphasizes Jesus as the one who reveals the Father.

Further Affirmations to John's Authorship of the Fourth Gospel

The relationship between the beloved disciple and the fourth evangelist is misunderstood. Besides, it does not assert its author's name. Dates in the second century are now pretty well ruled out by manuscript discoveries. But apart from this limitation, none of the arguments is entirely convincing, and almost any dates between about 55 and 95 are possible. John 21:23 suggests it was probably nearer the end of that period than the beginning.

The date for John between A.D. 80 and A.D. 85 is advanced for these reasons: There is no convincing pressure to place John rather later on it, namely, the relatively late date at which it is cited by the early fathers. Although the arguments form theological trajectories are, as we have seen, rather weak, yet if any weight is to be given to them at all, at several points, John's gospel uses language that is on its way towards the less restricted language of Ignatius. Although the fall of the temple may not have had as much impact in the Diaspora as in Palestinian Judaism, yet it is hard to believe that if the fourth gospel was written after A.D. 70 that was immediately after 70 when the reverberations around the empire in both Jewish and Christian circles were still felt. If the Johannine Epistles are concerned in part to combat an incipient form of Gnosticism, predicted in part on a Gnostic misunderstanding of the fourth gospel, then some time must be allowed

between the publication of the gospel and the publication of the epistles of John. That tends to rule out a date in the nineties.

No destination is specified by the fourth gospel itself. Inferences are largely controlled by conclusions drawn in the areas of authorship and purpose. The wealth of suggestions that various scholars have offered as to the background of the fourth gospel has an important bearing on how we view John's ostensible setting, the Palestine of Jesus' day, and how we understand his message. From the end of the nineteenth century until about the 1960s, the history of religious movement tied John's gospel to the Hellenistic world.

John's gospel is not only evangelistic in its purpose but aims in particular about evangelizing Diaspora Jews and Jewish proselytes. John adds stereotypic depth to the picture we might gain of Jesus and his ministry, death, and resurrection. John's presentation of who Jesus lies at the heart of all that is distinctive in this gospel. All the movement of John's plot is toward the cross and resurrection. John's distinctive emphasis on eschatology is bound up with his use of the "hour" theme. There are numerous strands that are unique on the Holy Spirit in John's gospel to the synoptic emphasis though the teachings have important similarities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As a matter of fact, it remains indisputable that on the narrations of the Evangelists as witnessed in the first four books of the New Testament are hitched the very destinies of all creatures, as well as historically significant worldly events. The reader is entreated thus, to pay closer attention to the Gospel messages as enshrined the New Testament canon; for in them are humanity's errors exposed and rectified by the Master of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ; the only begotten of the Father,

in whose name alone all creation can be saved, and through whom alone all are assured of life eternal when these temporal systems of things are plunged down in utter destruction.

References

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