

Item #37 (Speculation on the Gospels)

This was Entry #43 on my previous website.

The general paradigm of the New Testament as related to the Old is similarity, dissimilarity, definitive fulfillment. That is to say, the New Testament is rooted in its Jewish background, but also fundamentally different by reason of the revelation brought in and through and by Jesus Christ. And this fundamental difference is definitive: there will never be a further stage because a further stage is intrinsically impossible. (This basic truth would seem to put pay to current attempts to revise the moral teaching of the Church in many areas.)

The four Gospels are different as regards the way they look on Christ: Matthew, Mark and Luke look at Him as human; John looks at Him as divine. This is not to say of course that the Synoptics did not believe that Jesus was divine or that John did not believe that Jesus was human. But their preoccupations were different. The Synoptics were preoccupied with Jesus as one who was born, died, was buried and rose, who redeemed man from sin, who established a Church, who chose twelve apostles to give authorized witness to His resurrection: Christology from below. John was preoccupied with Jesus as God's presence among men in fulfillment of the divine presence in the Exodus from Egypt, as one who came down from heaven as Wisdom and thus as Light and Life, as one who opens believers to life with the Father as the Only-Begotten Son who handed on the Spirit at His exaltation on the Cross: Christology from above. In the Synoptics Jesus dies on the cross as man, and resurrection, redemption, Church follow. In John Jesus does not die on the cross primarily (God as God cannot die), but hands on the Spirit as an introduction to eternal life. (See Entry #1, "The Gospel of John", on the present website.)

The four Gospels would seem to be appropriate for the three major patriarchates of the early Church (Antioch, Rome, Alexandria), with Jerusalem also coming into consideration. Matthew seems appropriate for Antioch because it seems to be envisioned as a presentation of the legitimacy of Jesus Christ as over against the Jewish establishment as represented there. Mark seems appropriate for Rome because it seems to be envisioned as a presentation of the legitimacy of Jesus Christ as over against the Roman imperial establishment which exalted the Roman emperors as divine ("sons of god"). Luke seems appropriate for Alexandria because it seems to be envisioned as a presentation of the legitimacy of Jesus Christ as over against the Gentile establishment there. John seems appropriate for Jerusalem because it seems to be envisioned as a presentation of the legitimacy of Jesus Christ as the real divine presence of the Eucharist replacing the symbolic divine presence of the Temple. The polemic in John is directed against the Ἰουδαῖοι. (The exact force of this word is much disputed as regards John's Gospel, of course, and not every

instance of its use in John is to be regarded as meaning “Jews”; “Judaean” also comes into play, depending on the context. The opponents of Jesus in John were not primarily “Jews” but “Judaean” (insofar as they controlled the Temple and its illegitimate high priesthood.) “John” as the author of the Fourth Gospel would seem to be the apostle. The word “apostle” is not used in the Fourth Gospel because “apostle” refers to one who was officially appointed to witness that the earthly Jesus was the same as the risen Jesus, whereas the Fourth Gospel is about Jesus *as divine* and Jesus *as divine* did not die and hence did not rise. The function of the author of the Fourth Gospel is not to be an “apostle” but to be a “witness” (John 19,35) to the blood and water issuing from the side of the dead Christ. The blood symbolizes the unique result of the crucifixion of Jesus as man; the water symbolizes the result of the crucifixion of Jesus as God (that is, His exaltation) in which He did not die but handed on the Spirit to His Mother who symbolizes the Church. She thus receives a new role in the drama of salvation, from being the “Daughter of Sion”, i.e., Jerusalem, to being the new Jerusalem, Rome. With her is John, the one whom Jesus loved because he had faith. Under the cross John receives a new role, from being both the witness to Jesus who prophesied the gift of the Spirit (John 8) and its fulfillment on the cross. He does this so that faith will result (John 19,35), thus fulfilling his role as the faithful disciple. John in his Gospel does not function as one of the Twelve Apostles, who symbolize the witness of Israel to the crucifixion of Jesus as man (that is, His death and resurrection), but as the official witness designated by Jesus to witness in faith to the crucifixion of Jesus as divine (that is, his handing on the Spirit). The death and resurrection result in the founding of the Church “from below”; the giving of the Spirit results in the founding of the Church “from above”. John is both Apostle and Witness, acting in each role as part of a legitimizing factor to indicate that Israel witnesses to the continuity and discontinuity which results in the definitive fulfillment of the old dispensation in the new. In the Synoptics he acts as an Apostle; in John he acts as a Witness so that the readers of his Gospel may believe that Jesus is divine (John 20,31)

Against the four establishments mentioned above, each with its implied legitimacies as regards their religious worship, the four Gospels are solicitous to make sure of tracing the legitimacy of Jesus Christ to His Father, and solicitous to make sure that the first-generation Christians who faced the cultural and religious realities of Pharisaic Judaism, Rome, Hellenism and the Judaean-Sadducean control of the Jerusalem Temple were aware that they were the heirs of this legitimacy, especially as regards worship. This concern for legitimacy has marked Catholic Christian preoccupation with its ordained ministers throughout its history, and is still very much in evidence today. It claims this concern for legitimacy ultimately goes back to God the Father Himself. **(1 January 2012, modified 17 January 2013 and 16 December 2019)**