

Introduction

This book is a revised version of my 2011 dissertation, which was directed by Amy-Jill Levine at Vanderbilt. In Spring 2007, I was searching for a dissertation topic while I was serving as a teaching assistant for Professor Levine's introductory New Testament course in the divinity school. We spent one week on the Gospel of John, and so I read Moody Smith's *John among the Gospels*.¹ I had done quite a bit of work on the Synoptic problem, but I had never worked on John and the Synoptics, so I did not realize how contested the field was. The next week we happened to read the extracanonical *Protevangelium of James*, and I noticed several places where it had to be dependent on the canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke—even though the *Protevangelium* appears to be a self-standing narrative. I began wondering whether John might relate to the Synoptics in similarly subtle ways.²

Strictly for the sake of argument, I asked how someone might make a case for John's use of the Synoptics. I picked the Gospel of Matthew because, on the one hand, I had recently taken a course on it with Professor Levine and, on the other hand, Matthew is generally considered the least likely of John's sources. I began reading Matthew

1. D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels* (2d ed.; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

2. I later discovered that Smith had asked similarly whether John ought to be considered the first apocryphal gospel: D. Moody Smith, "The Problem of John and the Synoptics in Light of the Relation between Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. Adelbert Denaux (BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 147–62.

in Greek on one day and then reading John in Greek on the next day. I did this for several weeks until I had gotten through both gospels approximately ten times. I was compiling a long list of parallels, and I was becoming convinced that Matthew's gospel had to be one of John's sources. When I engaged earlier scholars, I found that we had isolated many of the same parallels; there were also a few that I had missed as well as a few places where I had something new to say. I took my preliminary conclusions to my *Doktormutter* A.-J., and right away she noted how ironic it would be for me to write about John's dependence on one of the Synoptics, given that she had written her dissertation at Duke University under Moody Smith, who maintained Johannine independence. At the same time, she gladly supported my inquiry and patiently guided the project to completion.

That project has culminated in the publication of this book, which consists of five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 sketches the history of research on John's relation to the Synoptics from the second century to the present day. In the patristic era, key figures include Tatian, who constructed one gospel harmony out of the four eventually canonical gospels; Origen, who emphasized that John simply cannot be harmonized with the Synoptics and that the attempt to do so is dizzying; and Augustine, who insisted that the four separate gospels can be interpreted harmoniously, free of any contradiction. In the twentieth century, Hans Windisch upheld the older belief that John was dependent on all three Synoptics, but Windisch offered a newer interpretation that John intended his gospel to replace them.³ Before Windisch's hypothesis could take hold, Percival Gardner-Smith shifted the consensus to the view that John's synoptic parallels arise via independent oral tradition;⁴ in effect, John could not have wanted to replace the Synoptics, because he had never read them. Debates between literary dependence and oral tradition have continued, and currently there is no firm consensus. Even though scholars

3. Hans Windisch, *Johannes und die Synoptiker: wollte der vierte Evangelist die Älteren Evangelien ergänzen oder ersetzen?* (UNT 12; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1926).

4. Percival Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938; repr. 2011).

increasingly consider John dependent on one or more of the Synoptics, Matthew remains the Fourth Gospel's least likely written source. I intend to show that John's use of Matthew is far likelier than previous scholarship has realized.

Chapter 2 explains my methodology and hermeneutic. John did not use Matthew in the same way, or to the same extent, that Matthew used Mark. In other words, there are far fewer parallels, and John's parallels show very little verbatim agreement. Therefore, many scholars still follow Gardner-Smith in attributing John's synoptic material to oral tradition. To claim literary dependence rather than oral tradition, I employ Helmut Koester's minimalist criterion that a subsequent text must reveal knowledge of redactional work found in the source text.⁵ If the Gospel of John reflects knowledge of the redacted Gospel of Matthew, then Windisch's question resurfaces and deserves an answer: Did John want to supplement or to supplant Matthew? On the analogy of extracanonical gospels, I argue that John intended his gospel to be read alongside Matthew's, not instead of it.

I then take up three case studies in successive chapters. Chapter 3 pertains to ecclesial authority. According to Matthew, Jesus gives the disciples the rabbinic authority to "bind and loose," that is, to discriminate between prohibited and permitted practices. According to John, Jesus gives the disciples the authority to forgive sins and to refuse forgiveness. The sayings evince striking grammatical and syntactic similarities, and at least since the third century these logia have been interpreted in light of one another. Since a single word in Aramaic (ܫܠܘܢ) and in Greek (λύω) can signify both *loosen* and *forgive*, many scholars consider these sayings independent, orally transmitted variants that mean the same thing. I reassess the semantic arguments for oral tradition, and I conclude instead that the sayings mean very different things and yet John's logion must depend on Matthew's. Matthew wanted the disciples to determine what counts as sin, to convict sin, and then to forgive penitent sinners. To guard against

5. Helmut Koester, "Written Gospel or Oral Tradition?" *JBL* 113, no. 2 (1994): 293–97.

laxity in the church, John re-inscribed the disciples' right to withhold forgiveness.

Chapter 4 concerns proofs from prophecy, specifically that Jesus' riding a donkey into Jerusalem at the beginning of passion week fulfills Zechariah's oracle about Israel's king coming on a donkey. The species of an ass and the enactment of Zechariah's prophecy are widely claimed as traditional elements, and so scholars predominantly assume that Matthew and John merely made explicit what was already implicit in Mark and Luke. I show that this argument tacitly and unfairly harmonizes the four gospels. John's Matthean material turn out to be more idiosyncratic than is typically acknowledged. Many scholars also assert that Matthew and John, as well as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, could have independently adopted the Zechariah quotation from a *testimonium*, an early Christian collection of messianic Old Testament prophecies. However, upon closer examination, there is no evidence for a first- or second-century *testimonium* containing Zechariah's prophecy. Neither does John's quotation derive from any extant text of Zechariah. Instead, as Edwin Freed argued fifty years ago, John's wording can be explained entirely by Matthew's narrative of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.⁶ John intentionally corrects and supplements Matthew by depicting Jesus atop only one donkey (Matthew has Jesus simultaneously riding two donkeys) and by explaining why no one could understand the prophetic significance of Jesus' actions at the time.

Chapter 5 concerns the inclusion or exclusion of Samaritans from the church. According to Matthew, Jesus commands the disciples not to evangelize in any Samaritan city. According to John, Jesus spends two days in a Samaritan city, where the Samaritans confess him to be the Savior of the world. In this case, I argue somewhat counterintuitively that the Fourth Gospel differs so much that John must be intentionally reversing Matthew's prohibition. The key link between John and Matthew is a metaphorical evangelistic saying about fields being ready for harvest, which allows John's Samaritan narrative to harmonize with,

6. Edwin D. Freed, "The Entry into Jerusalem in the Gospel of John," *JBL* 80, no. 4 (1961): 329–38.

and to reinterpret, Matthew's mission discourse. When read together, Jesus was not trying to exclude the Samaritans when he forbade the disciples from preaching to them. On the contrary, Jesus himself was already in Samaria revealing himself to the Samaritans. Chapter 6 concludes the book by summarizing my findings regarding John's use of Matthew in the light of the perennial question of John's relation to the Synoptics.