Zbyněk Garský

Das Wirken Jesu in Galiläa bei Johannes: Eine strukturelle Analyse der Intertextualität des vierten Evangeliums mit den Synoptikern

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In this monograph (originally a dissertation under Jörg Frey), Zbyněk Garský revives the early twentieth-century hypothesis that the author of John not only knew the Synoptic Gospels well but allegorically rewrote them. Garský performs a detailed intertextual reading of John and the Synoptic Gospels to elucidate the allegorical meaning of the former in light of the latter. As the author admits, intertextuality alone allows a broad if not boundless range of intertexts. To counter this, Garský imposes two limiting criteria. In John, he limits his study to scenes that take place in Galilee: the wedding at Cana, the healing of the royal official’s son, the block of Galilee material in 6:1–7:10, and the final resurrection appearance. In the Synoptic Gospels, Garský uses denotative text analysis (drawing on the linguistic work of Ziegler and Altmann) and geometric semantic analysis (using the work of D. Widdows) to identify Synoptic pre-texts that are most closely associated with the Johannine passages.

The introduction begins with a status quaestionis of John’s connection to the Synoptics that takes up a mere seven pages (1–7), introducing developments and competing theories in Johannine studies only to dismiss them. This foreshadows the general lack of critical engagement with scholarship proposing alternative understandings of how the Fourth Gospel was composed. While doing so tends to streamline Das Wirken Jesu so that Garský can focus on his own analysis, it may leave scholars more versed in
competing theories wondering how the author would answer challenges from other areas of Johannine studies. Garský then turns to the methodological dilemma posed by similarities between John and the Synoptics, ruling out shared oral tradition and source-critical explanations. Instead, he points to intertextuality and allegory as solutions. That is, in view of John’s internal problems (the well-noted aporias) and contradictions with the Synoptic story of Jesus, the key is not in looking for narrative craft within the Gospel (synchronic readings) or diachronic theories of the Gospel’s development. Instead, Garský applies Origen’s template of a spiritual reading of John as an allegorical reinterpretation of the Synoptic Gospels. Garský goes further by suggesting that it is possible to detect the intentio intertextualitatis of the Fourth Evangelist through the use of newly developed analytical techniques.

Chapter 2 lays these techniques out in detail. On the one hand, it is preferable that intertextuality be signaled in the text. On the other, John does not cite nor even allude to the Synoptic pre-texts in most cases but contains many echoes of them in the form of characters, themes, and structures. The fundamentals of the structural analysis that Garský wishes to apply to John and the Synoptics follow. This methodological discussion will likely be the most difficult for readers coming to Das Wirken Jesu from other fields of Johannine/biblical studies: although John 2:1–12 is used throughout to illustrate Garský’s points, the scholarship with which he interacts comes from linguistic- and text-analytical fields with a strong mathematical basis. The point of this section is first to develop a mathematical way of determining which words/figures belong to the core of the text and then to employ a metric of association between words or passages. Although some may question how well John’s passages are associated with various Synoptic passages—in the case of John 2:1–12, Matthew’s (0.98 out of 1) and Luke’s (0.96) association to the Markan pre-text are notably higher than John’s (0.42, 127)—Garský can at least claim that the Synoptic passages he chooses are the most closely associated ones at a verbal level.

In chapter 3 Garský describes his assumptions about the text to justify his hypothesis that John was composed as an intertext of the Synoptic Gospels. This is perhaps Garský’s most problematic chapter because he wants his hypothesis to work at the level of composition, not merely as a byproduct of independent traditions telling the same story. Garský takes John’s genre as Gospel, one that is essentially fictional (broadly defined). Evident as early as the Bodmer papyri, the paratext of the title “Gospel according to John” places John in dialogue with other Gospels. In order for this to work at the level of authorship, the title “Gospel” would have to be attached to all of the Gospels at the time of John’s composition. No evidence is put forward for this (85). There is a dramatic increase in difficulty moving from an argument about how a text can be read (or, in fact, was read) to one about how a text was meant to be read. More critical engagement with scholarship on
allegorical compositional techniques in the first century, along with the appeal to Origen as a third-century reader, would perhaps have strengthened Garský’s argument.

Chapter 4 develops a detailed intertextual analysis of the four Galilee sections in John. The analysis of each scene follows the same outline: an introduction followed by a definition of the most relevant Synoptic pre-texts; a comparison of the Johannine sequencing with the Synoptic arrangement; a detailed analysis of the interplay between text and pre-text; and an examination of the implications of the preceding analysis for an allegorical reading of John. Each section is followed by helpful synopses of the Greek texts that highlight core vocabulary that John shares with the Synoptic pre-texts.

The section on John 2:1–12 (along with 3:29, understood as an analeptic reference to John 2) establishes Garský’s methodological template for the remaining sections. The principal Synoptic pre-texts concern the question about fasting (Mark 2:18–22 and par.) and secondarily the accusation that Jesus is a drunkard (Luke 7:33–34 // Matt 11:18–19). Garský then traces similarities in each set of passages, such as Jesus as the bridegroom, the prediction of a future time for fasting matched to Jesus’ hour (John 2:4), and the new wine symbolizing both Jesus’ message and a move away from purity concerns. Importantly, Garský does not claim that the compatibility of Synoptic pre-texts precludes other (pagan and Jewish) pre-texts from functioning. Nor does Garský claim that the Synoptic pre-texts are necessary to read John smoothly, only that reading John as an allegorical reinterpretation of these pre-texts leads to a richer understanding of the Johannine passage. Few would argue this point.

The section on John 4:43–45 finds Synoptic pre-texts in the rejection at Nazareth (Mark 6:1–6a and par.). The healing of the royal official’s son (John 4:46–54) is paired with the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matt 8:5–13 // Luke 7:1–10). As Garský points out, Jesus’ testimony that a prophet has no honor in his homeland (John 4:44) has been interpreted to refer to Judea at least since Origen, in contrast to the Synoptic Galilee. However, in light of the Synoptic Gospels Garský reads John 4:44 (cf. Mark 6:4) as anticipating the trouble Jesus will have in Galilee, while the question about Jesus’ family in 6:42 reinforces this understanding by reminding the informed reader of Mark 6:3 during Jesus’ rejection in Galilee. Although problems still exist, Garský gives a reading of this material worthy of consideration.

John 6:1–7:10 marks John’s high point for intertextual links to the Synoptics and the longest section set in Galilee. Both the multiplication of the loaves and walking on water are paired with their Synoptic counterparts (including doublets). The bread from heaven discourse (John 6:22–59) is paired with both the discussion of food with the Pharisees (Mark 7:1–15 // Matt 15:1–11) and the demand for a sign (Mark 8:11–13; Matt 16:1–4;
Luke 11:29). The reaction of Jesus’ disciples (John 6:60–71) is linked to three texts: a Synoptic reaction scene (Mark 7:17–23 and par.), the discussion of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mark 8:14–21 and par.), and Peter’s confession followed by the first passion prediction (Mark 8:27–9:1 and par.). Finally, the scene with Jesus’ brothers (John 7:1–10) is connected to Jesus stealthily passing through Galilee (Mark 9:30) and departing to Judea (Mark 10:1 and par.). Garský brings some interesting readings of John 6 to light that underline connections to Galilee material in the Synoptic pre-texts. If one quibble may be put forward, Garský includes an extra chart in this section summarizing the most important Synoptic pre-texts (231), undoubtedly wishing to highlight similarities in order. Raymond Brown gives a quite similar although simplified table in his commentary (The Gospel according to John (I–XII) [AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 238), a commentary that Garský cites in the same section (198 n. 275). Yet here Garský acknowledges neither Brown’s similar comparison nor his arguments against John’s use of Mark.

Finally John 21 is examined, viewed as an epilogue to the Gospel rather than an appendix or an addendum. Most of the chapter is linked to the call of the disciples, especially as it is portrayed in Luke 5. Garský argues persuasively that this material has been displaced after the resurrection in John to conclude the Gospel with themes of succession and final eschatology, themes that would be strengthened by allusions to the Synoptic Gospels. Augustine’s Tractates on John is cited at length in support of this reading. It is unfortunate that Garský did not have greater room to draw in more historic readings of John, since they occasionally support his positions. This section also has the best chance of convincing diachronic Johannine scholars, since they may be more willing to acknowledge that the author of John 21 was familiar with the Synoptics. Unfortunately, these scholars are all but ignored.

A brief concluding chapter follows on the subject of intertextual irony. Garský emphasizes again that a sympathetic reader of John does not require knowledge of the Synoptics to appreciate the Fourth Gospel and to understand many of its themes. However, one who has also read the Synoptics will acquire an additional layer of understanding of John in many places. As a well-noted example outside of the Galilee material (305), the doubt cast on Jesus’ messianic claims in John 7:42 because the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem gains a level of intertextual irony through the nativity scenes in Matthew and Luke. Intertextual irony is subtle, and no one case is able to prove that it was intentionally constructed. Garský’s work seeks to compound the evidence to the point that an intertextual reading of John is inescapable.

Despite some criticisms, Das Wirken Jesu is an interesting, thought-provoking contribution to Johannine studies. In large part it seems to be aimed at scholars who are
already sympathetic to the author’s thesis rather than trying to convince readers who may be challenged by it. However, it takes significant steps toward establishing nonsubjective measures of intertextuality that merit further development and demonstrates that they can be applied to important questions in Johannine scholarship.