

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (old series) can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

A PARTITION THEORY OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

AS the substance of the Fourth Gospel has fascinated and stimulated religious minds ever since its appearance, so during the last century the literary problem of its genesis has exercised an equal fascination on students, and has called forth theory after theory in the attempt to explain it. One such theory has lately been developed by Dr. Wendt, which, if not wholly new, is presented with a thoroughness, an attractiveness, and an acuteness which it has never received before¹. The theory is, in rough outline, that the discourses recorded in the Gospel are Johannine and historical, but the narrative is in the main the work of a later editor and cannot be relied upon as a trustworthy source of history. The suggestion had been made as long ago as 1838 by C. H. Weisse, and had been adopted for a time by D. Schenkel, but afterwards abandoned by him; and Dr. Hort, though indeed with no intention of disparaging the narrative, wrote in 1879 to Dr. Ezra Abbott, 'The discourses seem to me to have the ring of solid fact even more than the narratives².' Dr. Wendt has arrived independently at the same point; he assumed it in 1886 in *The Teaching of Jesus*, and has now elaborated it, with a detailed examination of the whole Gospel, into the following view.

i. St. John himself, acquainted with the synoptic tradition and with the definite intention of supplementing it, collected two groups of the Lord's discourses, the discourses being in some cases introduced with a very slight historical note (e.g. ix 1 served to introduce ix 4, 5, and 39, 41, but the whole of the rest of the chapter was absent). The first was a group illustrating the Lord's proclamation of Himself, 'of His inner communion with God and of His unique importance for human salvation,' to the representatives of Judaism in Jerusalem; the second giving His

¹ *The Gospel according to St. John: an enquiry into its genesis and historical value.* By Dr. H. H. Wendt. Translated by E. Lummis, M.A. (T. & T. Clark, 1902).

² Cf. Wendt, p. 52; Watkins, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 247; Hort, *Life and Letters*, ii p. 278.

inner teaching, at the most sacred and secret moment of His life, to the chosen Apostles. These discourses were, doubtless, altered in form in passing through the Apostle's mind, but the substance of them can be trusted, for it is protected alike by its essential agreement with the Synoptic teaching and by its own intrinsic value: they moved on the highest spiritual plane, the Lord dwelling on His own ethical and spiritual communion with the Father, appealing not to 'signs' but only to His works, 'His labours as a teacher,' 'the whole of that practical activity by which He set Himself to fulfil His Messianic call,' and calling upon His hearers to accept by faith the spiritual life which He offered them.

To this collection the Apostle prefixed the Prologue, wishing to guard the Christians of Asia Minor against some false teaching about the Logos—probably the teaching of Philo introduced from Alexandria—in opposition to which he emphasized the Jewish conception of the Word, as being alike one with God, and also one with creation which had been made through Him and was upheld by Him, and as having been most fully manifested in the historic life of Jesus the Messiah. The whole of this document was then published, and is the only document that was known to Ignatius and to Justin Martyr.

ii. At some later date, probably between 100 and 125 A. D., after St. John's death, some Asiatic Christian, of the school of St. John, wishing to make his master's work more complete and more widely known, edited it and treated it in much the same way as St. Matthew and St. Luke treated the Logia.

He compiled a narrative framework, and he re-edited the discourses, introducing touches more suitable to the beliefs of the sub-apostolic age. For the narrative he was partly dependent on oral traditions, whence he drew many of the traits of the individual Apostles, partly he borrowed from the Synoptic narratives (e.g. the Cleansing of the Temple and the Feeding of the Five Thousand), but partly he drew upon his own imagination; spiritual metaphors were transformed into material facts, and such events as the turning of the water into wine, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus were the result of this process. The desire to guard against an exaggerated estimate of John the Baptist, to exalt St. John at the expense of St. Peter,

introduced fresh incidents: and the second-century belief in the importance of miracles and its harder and more material view of the Sacraments led to greater stress being laid on 'signs,' on our Lord's own predictions of the future, on the introduction of the idea of water in the process of new birth, and of the idea of a literal future resurrection of believers side by side with the Lord's more spiritual teaching of their present resurrection from sin and unbelief to life eternal.

This writer is called 'The Evangelist,' in contrast to 'The Apostle,' the author of the original source.

iii. At some later date still, another member of the Johannine school added c. xxi as an appendix, for the sake of the proper interpretation of the saying about John's 'tarrying'; in v. 24, speaking on behalf of the circle of John's disciples in Asia Minor, he added their formal attestation to the truth of the Gospel and its Johannine authorship, and concluded with his own word in xxi 25¹.

Such is the theory; it is excellent on its positive side, in its examination of the Prologue, its comparison of the substance of the discourses with those in the Synoptists, in its argument for the possibility of St. John being the author of the first document, in its recognition that a disciple with strong individuality, who had entered into and absorbed his Master's teaching and reproduced it in his own style, may have 'a deeper apprehension of the spirit of the speaker than a third man who transmits more accurately the detailed wording of the discourse.' What then are the grounds on which a writer who accepts so much of the Gospel stumbles at the historical character of the rest? They may be summed up under three headings.

(1) There are certain discrepancies, inconsistencies, dislocations of the argument, within the Gospel itself, which point to a dual authorship.

Thus 'the Evangelist' lays very great stress on the miracles as

¹ The introduction of this third author is put forward hesitatingly, and is not important to the general argument. I shall therefore not return to it, but should like here to make the suggestion that the author of xxi 25, which differs from the rest of the Gospel in the use of the first person singular (*of μαι*), was an early scribe, perhaps a little tired with his task and aghast at the thought how much greater it might have been, if the whole life of Jesus had been narrated.

evidences of power, which ought to win belief; they are for him essentially 'signs' (ii 11, 23, iv 54, vi 2, 14, vii 31, ix 16, x 41, xi 47, xii 18, 27, xx 30), whereas the Lord Himself does not use this word but only appeals to His 'works,' which seem, at least in some cases, almost identical with His 'words,' His teaching. These facts are true, except that, in order to reach them, Wendt has arbitrarily to set aside vi 26; yet there is no ground whatever for limiting 'works' to teaching; it is the natural phrase for the Worker to use of all His work, whereas 'signs' is more natural to the disciple whose faith had been awakened by wonderful deeds and who had watched their effect on others; and the fact that the Lord did appeal to His miracles as 'signs' is as firmly attested as any fact can be by the narrative of the healing of the paralytic which was contained in the earliest Synoptic tradition (*ἡ αἰδῆτε*, Mk. ii 10 and parallels). There is a real difference in the point of view, but it is not such as to necessitate a difference of authorship; it is quite adequately accounted for by the difference between the words of one and the same author, at one time reporting discourses, at another making his own comment.

The charge of discrepancies between the narrative and the discourse in chapters v and vi is equally unsuccessful. It is urged that the discourse in chapter v is based on the charge that Jesus Himself had broken the Sabbath by healing a lame man, whereas the narrative only implies that the healed man had broken the Sabbath by carrying his bed and that it was this which had given offence. But this is mere hair-splitting; the charge against the man was that he carried his bed on a Sabbath: he throws it back upon Jesus who had healed him, and the charge against Him is that He not only taught the healed man to violate the Sabbath by carrying his bed but violated it Himself by healing; in a word, He was by precept as well as by example relaxing the obligation of keeping the Sabbath day (*ἔλυε τὸ σάββατον*).

Again, it is urged that in chap. vi, it is inconceivable that when challenged for a sign like that of the manna Jesus did not appeal to the miracle just wrought (v. 31); that the words of v. 36, 'I said unto you that ye also have seen Me, and yet believe not,' words spoken in Galilee, can only refer to v 17 ff., words spoken in Judaea; and that the mention of *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* (vv. 41, 52) does not suit a narrative whose scene is Galilee. But the miracle of the

feeding was not a sign 'from heaven,' such as the Jews were expecting; the reference in *v.* 36 may be equally well to *vi* 26, and indeed need not be tied down to any particular speech recorded in the Gospel; it may refer to the whole revelation of Himself and protest against their failure to believe: and the title of *Ἰουδαῖοι* may well be applied to the scribes from Jerusalem who had followed the Lord into Galilee to watch His work there. This would fall in well with the gradual narrowing of the circle of hearers to which the Evangelist seems purposely to draw attention (*ὁ ὄχλος*, 22; οἱ *Ἰουδαῖοι*, 41, 52; πολλοὶ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν, 60; οἱ δώδεκα, 67).

On the other hand, there seems much more solid ground in the argument that the text shows dislocation and possibly interpolations. The *Pericope adulteræ* and the comment in *v* 3, 4, illustrate the ease with which such interpolations were made (though, indeed, these have left their mark on the MSS), and Dr. Hort was inclined to suggest that *xxi* 25 originally stood after *xx* 31, and was transferred by the Apostle himself to its present place after the introduction of the Appendix¹. Following in the same lines, Wendt points out the awkwardness of the insertion in the Prologue of the references (*vv.* 6-8 and 15) to John the Baptist, and regards them as later additions. But the exclusion of all mention of John the Baptist in a document which *ex hypothesi* was written by one of his disciples and accumulates all the evidence that can be given as to the character and work of Jesus, is very unlikely; nor does the insertion of *vv.* 6-8 in this particular place seem unnatural: on the other hand the second reference comes in most awkwardly between 14 and 16. There is indeed nothing to suggest that it is an interpolation of a later writer: indeed the tenses *μαρτυρεῖ* and *κέκραγε* suggest one who had heard the witness and the cry, rather than a later historian: but the continuity of the paragraph would be greatly improved if we could assume that the verse originally stood after *v.* 18.

Again, the reference to the healing of the lame man in *vii* 21-24 may be thought unlikely after an interval of more than six months, such as the text evidently implies. The difficulty would be obviated if, with Wendt, *vii* 15-24 were transferred to *v* 47, or if, as Canon Norris (*Journal Phil.* iii p. 107) suggested

¹ *Life and Letters*, ii p. 114.

on this and other grounds, vi were placed before v. Yet the difficulty is not insuperable, as that miracle of healing had constituted a real epoch in the opposition to our Lord and would have stood out very clearly in the minds of the leaders at Jerusalem. There are other similar cases urged with more or less probability by Wendt; thus xii 36^b-43 would seem more appropriate after than before 44-50: xiii 18-19 have but a slight connexion with their immediate context: some surface inconsistencies suggest a disarrangement of the last discourse: e. g. the apparent ending of the discourse in xiv 31, *ἐγέλρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν*, and the apparent inconsistency of xvi 5 *οὐδεὶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐρωτᾷ με, Ποῦ ὑπάγεις*; with St. Peter's question in xiii 36 *Κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις*; would be avoided if xv, xvi were transferred to some point in xiii, as Wendt suggests and Spitta had suggested before. Yet this would upset the natural order of the tone of these discourses, which first is of the character of a conversation, the disciples first interrupting their Master with questions and He answering them (xiv): then it becomes a monologue; they listen in silence to His teaching, no longer needing to ask the question which Peter had asked before, but satisfied with the plainness of His words (xv, xvi): while at last their presence seems ignored as He speaks to His Father alone (xvii). And it is well to remember that we cannot justly transfer the exact methods of modern literary composition to an Oriental, especially to one who is professedly not writing a complete history, but painting a few tableaux, which illustrate a spiritual truth: at the outside such inconsistencies may be due to the carelessness of a scribe and do not necessitate the theory of a double authorship.

(2) It is urged again that there are certain facts which are inconsistent with Apostolic authorship. One such fact is supposed to be the way in which the writer is dependent on the synoptic Gospels: 'the whole nature of his employment of the synoptic literature is symptomatic of the secondary character of his history.' This is an extraordinary charge from one who admits that the writer has treated this literature with independence and freedom and has boldly and rightly supplemented and corrected it in respect to the Judæan ministry and the date of the death. The only arguments adduced are certain verbal coincidences, never

sufficient, as Wendt himself admits, to lead us to believe that he had the actual Gospels before him as he wrote; and also the fact that in the anointing at Bethany he has combined the account of St. Matthew and St. Mark with that of St. Luke, who had already made the mistake of identifying the Mary of this narrative with the woman who was a sinner: but the only proof of this is that John states that Mary anointed Jesus' feet (xi 2, xii 3, cf. Luke vii 38), whereas Matthew and Mark only mention His head. Which is the more probable, for a writer who has already proved his independence, that he has been misled or that he is adding an additional and perfectly consistent trait from his own knowledge?

A more interesting point is that, when the writer adds explanations of our Lord's statements, the explanations seem inadequate or wrong.

Thus ii 19, 'destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,' is said to have no real reference to the Resurrection, but to mean, 'If you destroy the place of the worship of God, I in the shortest space of time will raise in renovated state that worship which you have abased.' This interpretation of the words seems quite true, and I have often thought that it is what St. John meant, that '*the temple* of His body' did not mean the literal body but the spiritual body, the Church, which had become the new scene of worship. This will meet the objection that Jesus is nowhere else said to raise Himself, but always to be raised by God. This is not, indeed, conclusive, as the claim does not go beyond that of x 18 (which is included in Wendt's 'source') 'I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again': yet on this interpretation the words might legitimately be paraphrased, 'Destroy yonder scene of worship, and when raised by God from the dead I will raise another temple in its place.' Certainly whether He meant the literal or the spiritual body, it remains true that the Resurrection was the fact upon which the new worship was built.

Again, vii 38 is said to be unduly narrowed down to the gift of the Spirit after the Lord's death; but to any one who had experienced that gift it must have seemed to dwarf and throw entirely out of sight all previous inchoate gifts of the Spirit; the words οὐπω ἦν Πνεῦμα do not negative the existence of the Spirit before, but do say that the gift then was so great that all previous gifts

were as nothing (cf. for this use of the negative sentence ix 3, xi 4, 2 Cor. iii 10).

Once more, xii 32 *ἐὰν ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς* is said to be wrongly applied to the death, whereas it must refer to the exaltation of the Lord. I would rather call this inadequate than wrong: the words (*ἐκ τῆς γῆς*) must reach their richest fulfilment in the exaltation (cf. Acts ii 33, v 31), but the analogy of the brazen serpent (iii 14) and the fact that the Lord speaks of this 'lifting up' as an act done by the Jews themselves (viii 28 *στὰν ὑψώσητε*) shows that the death must be included, and make it probable that He purposely used a word which should suggest the double meaning. Considering that the death on the cross was the ground of the exaltation (cf. Phil. ii 8, 9 *ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. διὰ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσε*), it cannot be wrong to apply the words to the death.

Lastly, in xviii 8 'the Evangelist' is said to apply to literal death words ('of them which thou gavest Me have I lost none') spoken by the Lord Himself (xvii 12) of spiritual loss; this is true, yet he does not limit their application, and the quotation of the words here would only illustrate the fondness of a disciple for finding fresh meanings and happy accidental fulfilments in a loved Master's words. However much we may feel the inadequacy of some of these applications, there is nothing to make us think them not the work even of a loved Apostle.

(3) But a more serious class of objections consists of those which arise from the apparent inconsistency of some of the representations in the Gospel with those in the earliest basis of the Synoptic narrative. These resolve themselves into two, the description of the feelings and teaching of the Baptist and the Lord's proclamation of His own Messiahship. In the fourth Gospel the Baptist is described as convinced by a Divine sign that Jesus is the Messiah, as pointing Him out as the Lamb of God and as having come from above; there is a ring of certainty about the proclamation: whereas in the Synoptists, he only speaks of Jesus as one mightier than himself, he does not call Him the Messiah, and is represented at the end of his life as doubting whether Jesus is He who should come. But really there is no fundamental inconsistency here: Wendt admits that John '*meant* the Messiah by the one mightier than himself';

but if he meant that, can he have failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and to speak of Him as such to his disciples? The difficulty is not a literary one; it is the problem of human inconsistency, of

‘that most difficult of tasks, to keep
Heights that the soul is competent to gain’:

indeed this difficulty lies within the narrative of the ‘Evangelist’ itself: who, though recording this ring of certainty in the Baptist’s teaching, yet also records that the Baptist himself never became a disciple of this Messiah, but remained outside the kingdom still baptizing disciples after Jesus had begun to baptize. What we have then is no inconsistency, but a closer insight given by one who had himself passed from discipleship to John to discipleship to Jesus, an account perhaps coloured in form, like the discourses of Jesus, by his own later teaching and meditation, but essentially trustworthy. This same consideration has a bearing on the care with which the Gospel is said to guard against an exaggerated estimate of the Baptist. The narrative of Acts xix 17 shows that such an exaggeration was possible as late as the time of St. Paul’s work at Ephesus; the existence of the Hemero-baptists probably implies that it was possible in the second century (cf. Lightfoot, *Colossians: Excursus on the Essenes*): but the contrast between the Baptist and the Lord is drawn in such a way as to reflect not so much contemporary controversy as the remembrance of a real struggle in the writer’s own mind between his allegiance to his first leader and that to his second; he is justifying to himself—and perhaps in thought to those friends who had been with him in his first allegiance and had not followed him to his second—the fact that he had not remained a follower of John. As St. Paul in a similar spirit pleaded that it was through the law he died to the law, so St. John seems anxious to prove that it was through John the Baptist that he forsook John the Baptist.

Very similar are the facts about the Lord’s own proclamation of His Messiahship or acceptance of the recognition of it by others. In the earliest Synoptic narrative He does not call Himself the Messiah; He rebukes the evil spirits who recognize Him as such; there are many various opinions as to who He is; gradually

St. Peter is drawn to the recognition of the Messiahship; the disciples are told not to make it known; it is only on His trial that He formally declares it. In our Gospel He is recognized at once by Andrew as the Messiah; He reveals Himself as such to the Samaritan woman, and His claims are already known to the crowds in Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles. Yet even here it is remarkable how seldom the actual word is used; the conversation and appeal of the crowd in x 24, 'If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly,' show how little He had proclaimed Himself, and St. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi is exactly parallel to his confession in vi 69. Neither implies a recognition made for the first time: each implies a loyal adhesion, in the face of the opposition of others, to a recognition made long before. As far as there is a difference, it arises out of the difference of circumstances. In each narrative Jesus is evidently conscious from the first of His Sonship and of His mission as God's representative: in each He does what we should expect of any one with such a consciousness; He accepts adhesion to the fact from individuals whom He can trust: He refuses recognition proceeding from the opposition of evil to His work: He discourages all premature disclosure: He will not speak plainly: He will have a faith drawn out through sure conviction; only when the right moment is come does He speak openly and before the challenge of the High Priest disdain to be untrue to His own consciousness. 'Nowhere in more marked degree than in the Lord's method of education is respect shown for the spontaneous growth of true conviction, nowhere is greater care taken to avoid compulsory adhesion'¹; and this is equally true of each narrative; but St. John, writing from the inner circle of those who had given a complete adhesion, has naturally the larger number of instances of the recognition and its acceptance.

Such are the main lines of objection, and along these Wendt has not succeeded, unless it be in proving the existence of dislocation of text and of interpolations. But there is another region in which he is even less successful, the attempt to show that certain second-century presuppositions have affected the narrative; of one of these, the desire to depreciate the Baptist,

¹ A. J. Worlledge, *On Prayer*, p. 43.

I have spoken already : another, the desire to exalt the disciple whom Jesus loved at the expense of St. Peter, seems to me entirely baseless ; the attempt to show that Ignatius and Justin only knew 'the source' and not the narrative part of the Gospel is unsuccessful ; the argument must be the precarious argument from silence ; the amount of material is too slight on which to build any clear conclusion.

Wendt has to explain the reference to John the Baptist in Dial. 88 *οὐκ εἰμι ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλὰ φωνὴ βοῶντος* as compiled from Matt. iii 11 and Acts xiii 25, though the reference to John i 20, 23 is easier : and he admits in Dial. 69 an allusion to the man blind from his birth. It would seem as if it were in order to avoid this inference that he had introduced ix 1 into the text of his 'source,' but this does not avail him, as Justin speaks of the healing of those maimed from birth, whereas the 'source' had no mention of healing ; nor is it clear why the 'source' should have laid any stress on *ἐκ γενετῆς*, as it did not contain *υἱ. 2, 3.*

The chief evidence, however, that is alleged of a later non-Apostolic thought is the presence of the material aspect of religion, the introduction of water as well as of the Spirit in the new birth, the doctrine of a literal resurrection of the body, the occurrence of miracles in the material world side by side with the deepest and most universal spiritual teaching. Certainly Wendt has proved the co-existence of these two sides ; but on what ground does he treat it as impossible in the first century and in the writings of an Apostle ? If the basis of the Synoptic narrative proves anything, it proves the existence of a belief in the miraculous in the earliest stage of Apostolic history. The co-existence indeed goes back, as far as all evidence carries us, behind the Apostles to their Master. It may be thought by some that in this more material side He was in self-adaptation accommodating Himself to men trained in the practice of frequent lustrations and material sacrifices, steeped in expectations of a literal day of judgement and in a belief in the miraculous nourished on the Old Testament history. But perhaps the truth lies deeper still, and in no mere 'economy,' but in the simplicity of a Divine worker He moved among material things, filling them too with a Divine Presence, and making them subserve the purposes of spiritual truth. Such a view of the relation

of the spiritual to the material is at least natural to one who had already conceived and formulated the great thought, 'The Word became flesh.'

In dealing with the relation of the Johannine to the Synoptic teaching Wendt shows great literary *ἐπιεικεία*, a willingness to consider differences of time and place, a readiness to make allowances for the circumstances of the narrator, and adroit skill in reconciliation. But these qualities fail him when he deals with the narratives; he minimizes the facts that the strongest marks of the presence of an eye-witness occur in the narratives, that the bold independent treatment of the Synoptists points to a first-hand authority; he explains away the striking stamp of literary unity which is impressed upon the whole; he becomes at once not merely subjective, giving insufficient weight to external evidence and Synoptic parallels, but even narrowly subjective, with a subjectivity that is bred of literary study not of the experience of life. The book abounds with the assertion of impossibilities, which would be challenged by any one with a rich experience. For instance, 'such a demonstrative act as the cleansing of the Temple *can only* once be morally justified' (p. 12): 'The question "Art thou He that cometh" *is only intelligible* on the supposition that the Baptist did not conceive until he was in prison the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah' (p. 16): 'The remark of John iv 54 *can only be explained* by reference to another record in which the miraculous help given to the king's officer at Capernaum appeared as Jesus' first sign in Galilee' (p. 33): 'Jesus *cannot have used* the expression *ὡς θάνατος* of the external manner of His death' (p. 60): these are a few of the many instances of this subjective standard. But the chief of all is the attitude to the miraculous. It is this which in the last resort determines his attitude to the narratives: but to discuss this would be to carry the discussion into another region. Putting this aside, it can scarcely be doubted that in the main, apart from minor questions of transposition and interpolation, scholars will tend more and more to feel the extraordinary unity that is stamped upon the Gospel, to whatever author and to whatever century they may assign it.

WALTER LOCK.