

THO 4103

Johannine Literature

John 1

September 20, 2010

(with update of material from September 27, 2010)

Questions for small group discussion and large group reflection

- What did you read to understand this passage?
- In general terms, how did you attempt to “get at” this passage?
- What major insights did you find from the passage and commentary on the passage?
- What major problems were raised by the passage and by commentary on the passage? What major questions are left?
- What do you think you will do differently for the next passages to be studied?

There are many possible ways of getting at the text (“methods” / “approaches”)

- Read the text through the eyes of the Church
- Philosophical and theological reading
- Historical-critical study
- Synchronic approaches (e.g., narrative analysis)
- Liberationist approaches

Suggested questions to ask of the text

To enable you to be ready to read the text and the commentaries and ask some questions of both

A first set of questions that you might ask the text (NB: there are others, too)

- Are there words that stand out?
 - What do we mean “stand out”? Big words? Unusual words? Repetition?
- What kind of picture do these words create?
- If you were to “stage” this scene, what would it look like?
- Is there a “flow” (e.g., something like a plot) to the picture?
- Are reasons give for statements in this text?
 - What words would help me to see this?
- Who is doing or saying what to whom? Are characters described as thinking or feeling anything?
 - Where “are” the characters on the stage? In what relationship are they to other characters?

A second set of questions

- What kind of world is being depicted in this text?
 - Do I recognize it? What kind of things are happening in this world?
- Does this world look like my world, or, if not, like any other world that I know?
- Does anything in this text remind me of anything that I have seen elsewhere than in this text?
- Does this text use other texts?
 - What is the evidence? How would I know?

A third set of questions

- What's the point of this text?
 - How would I know?
- How does this text make this point?

Sociorhetorical interpretation

- The above sets of questions arise from my use of sociorhetorical interpretation
- Throughout the course you will find me asking the same sets of questions again and again.
- You are invited to use these questions and also ask other questions that seem pertinent.
- In sociorhetorical interpretation these questions are grouped into three sets of questions:
 - Innertexture
 - Intertexture
 - Ideological texture

Innertexture

- TOOLS used to raise questions:
 - Repetition and progression in the text
 - Narrative elements of the text
 - Argumentation (rationales, reasons, etc.)
 - Actions (purposive, emotion-fused, self-expressive actions – cf. Malina)
- GOAL:
 - To ask: What kind of picture(s) does this text create?

Intertexture

- TOOLS used to raise questions:
 - Social world (what social actions are invoked in this text?)
 - Cultural world (what cultural “scripts” are enacted?)
 - Historical world (what historical events are involved?)
 - Textual world “oral-scribal” (what other texts are used in this text?)
- GOAL:
 - Since no text exists in isolation, but is written by someone and for someone and usually drawing on elements known to both, this text necessarily uses elements of the world of both (or at least perceived to be of both). The goal is to determine those elements.

Ideological texture

- TOOLS:

- What is the point of the text in question?
- How does the author do this?
 - How does the author use elements of innertexture?
 - How does the author reconfigure the worlds that intersect?

- GOAL:

- Since no text is written simply to describe the world around (which is impossible, since not everything can be described anyway), but to “do something”, on the basis of the pictures that are invoked and/or created using elements from the world of author and audience, the text “does” something(s). The goal is to determine what that something is (or ‘those somethings are’) and to whom and for whom they are done.

John 1

Some very initial questions to get you started

The “Word”

- Clearly the word that has drawn the most scholarly attention.
 - What does it mean?
 - Where does it come from?
 - Why is it used here (as opposed to any other word)?

... but is “the Word” the point?

- ... and if so, how? And why?
- Is it important because it is a “big” word, an unusual word, a repeated word?
 - If repetition is the question, note its limited use (Vss. 1-4 and 14)!

God

- The most repeated “character” in 1-18
 - Where does the word “God” come from?
 - How do I know who God is?
 - Is God spoken of elsewhere? Always in the same way?
 - Why is God so central in these verses?

“Creation” (lit. “all that has come to be”)

- What is creation?
- Whence do we know of it?
- Other texts that talk about it?
- Why is it mentioned here?
- What is the relation of “Word” to “creation”?
- What is the relation of “God” to “creation”?

“John”

- Who is he?
- How has he come to the “scene”?
- Why has he appeared?
- What does he do?

“Jesus Christ”

- How is Jesus Christ depicted in 1-18?
- When do you know for sure that the one being spoken of is in fact “Jesus Christ”?
- Is “Jesus Christ” compared/contrasted with anyone?

“Titles” used in 1:19-51

- John
 - Negative:
 - The Messiah
 - Elijah
 - The prophet (one like “Moses”, cf Deut 18:15)
 - Positive:
 - One crying in the wilderness... (Isa 40:3)
- Jesus
 - Lamb of God (twice)
 - Son of God (twice)
 - Messiah
 - The one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote
 - Rabbi (twice)
 - King of Israel
- Source of these titles?

“Actions” of Jesus (in 1:19-51)

- Jesus comes towards John / walks by John
- One who was before me (i.e., John)
- To be revealed to Israel
- Spirit descends on him and remains
- Jesus turns to two who follow him
- Jesus speaks to several men
- He stays somewhere
- Decides to go to Galilee
- Finds Philip
- Jesus “saw” Nathaniel
- How significant are these actions?

Who is “the son of man”?

- First introduced in John in 1:51
- In the Gospels it is used over 180 times, and always by Jesus (one minor exception)
- Is it used of Jesus about himself or about another?
- Where does it come from?
- Why is it used here by Jesus? Could he have used a different phrase?

Overview of some major points from John 1:1-18

- Title?
- God, in relation to *Logos*
- Light
- John the witnesser
- The “offspring of God”
- The *Logos coming to be as flesh*
- Grace, truth and glory: meaning?
- Relation to Moses and the law
- The only-begotten son/God *who is* and who makes the Father known

Overview of some major points from John 1:19-51

- John
 - Negative:
 - The light (1-18)
 - The Messiah
 - Elijah
 - The prophet (one like “Moses”, cf Deut 18:15)
 - Positive:
 - Witness to the light (1-18)
 - One crying in the wilderness... (Isa 40:3)
 - Baptizes with water
 - Jesus
 - Lamb of God (twice) – acc to John
 - ‘Baptizes with Spirit’ – acc to John
 - Son of God (twice) – acc to John and Nathanael
 - Messiah – acc to Andrew
 - The one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote – acc to Philip
 - Rabbi (twice) – acc to disciples of John and Nathanael
 - King of Israel – acc to Nathanael
 - Source of these titles?
 - Who asks questions? (NB: priests = holy ones) Who makes no confession?
 - Actions of the different narrative characters?
 - 1:51 “Son of Man”?
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