

WOOLHAMPTON PARISH

‘THE GOD WHO SPEAKS’ – YEAR OF THE BIBLE

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel according to John does not follow the same plan or pattern as the other three. It has no parables, no mention of scribes or Sadducees (Jesus’ opponents are simply “the Jews”) and fewer incidents or healings. John’s technique is to give a few “signs”, whose sign-value is then developed by a long reflection by Jesus or the evangelist. There is not just one visit to Jerusalem at the end of Jesus’ ministry, but four visits, beginning with the cleansing of the Temple, which in the other Gospels come at the end. The figure of Jesus is also different: in the other Gospels Jesus proclaims the Kingship of God; **here he proclaims himself in terms that those who refuse to accept him find blasphemous.** Instead of the pithy, short sayings of Jesus we have long meditations in the same style as the author of the Gospel.

Who is the author of this unique work? We are deliberately kept in the dark. It is the tradition of the Beloved Disciple, who is carefully left unidentified, but who is next to Jesus at his Last Supper, accompanies Jesus’ mother at the foot of the cross, recognizes the meaning of the empty tomb, and hands on the tradition. **This is a portrait of any disciple whom Jesus loves.** The message is the same throughout, and the same literary style pervades the whole gospel, marked by puzzled questions, irony, and teasing and deliberate ambiguities – what is “living water” or

“bread from heaven”? What is the “hour of Jesus”? On the other hand some of the Gospel seems to be assembled from independent blocks: the story of the raising of Lazarus is independent of its surroundings; there are three different versions of the discourse after the Last Supper; the final chapter follows a concluding paragraph (20:30-31); some series of sayings seem to be repeated (5:19-25 and 5:26-31); the story of the adulterous woman (7:53 – 8:11) is an extreme case.

The date when the Gospel of John was finally written is strongly disputed. Some would put it as the earliest Gospel. More general opinion is that it is the latest of the Gospels. It is not possible to show that John was written either to supplement or to correct the other three Gospels; in this matter they are entirely independent. Some of the sayings may be in a more primitive state, that is, nearer to the original sayings of Jesus, than in the other Gospels, but this is certainly not universally the case. **The opinion that John is the latest is founded on the fact that in a way the theology is the most developed.** Certainly the Christology [theology of the person of Jesus Christ] is the highest Christology, more aware of the exalted status of Jesus than any of the other Gospels. This does not demand that it be later than the others, just the product of another theologian, who was differently inspired or thought differently.

(from *The Bible – A Reader’s Guide*, by Henry Wansborough

Now read John chapter 1:

The Word was made flesh & the first disciples

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