CHAPTER 11

Tatian: Gethsemane Harmonized

While Justin practically interwove gospel sayings and traditions in a way that did not keep the distinctive Matthean, Markan, or Lukan wording, his most famous student Tatian\(^1\) composed a fixed Gospel harmony, the so-called *Diatessaron*, where the four gospels are turned into one continuous story.\(^2\) No complete text of Tatian's *Diatessaron* has survived; only fragments of it can be reconstructed on the basis of various translations and citations.\(^3\)

11.1 Ordering the Events

The order of the pericopes is relatively consistent in the available text, although there are some exceptions.\(^4\) As for the topic of the present study, it is evident from the context that the narrative framework is taken from the Synoptic Gospels, into which larger parts of John chs. 13–18 are interwoven. In chapters 46–47, however, Johannine texts dominate through longer passages from that Gospel. Section 45 is the table scene with the last meal, also inspired by John 13 and the dialogue about who the betrayer will be. It is well known

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3 William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Supplements to VC 25; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 1 and 444 refers with consent to Arthur Vööbus’ evaluation of the textual basis for a reconstruction of *Diatessaron* as “one of the most difficult topics in all the field of New Testament textual criticism.”

that Luke’s Gospel includes the meal in a farewell discourse,\(^5\) a fact that likely formed a bridge to John’s farewell speech with the final prayer (chs. 13–17); in any case, this option suggested itself for someone making a harmony out of the gospels. This Johannine speech sets the tone in sections 46–47 and brings out the intimate and harmonious relationship between Jesus and his Father. This Johannine notion, of course, finds an analogy in the second prayer about Jesus submitting to his Father’s will, but it has guided the understanding of the entire scene.

The Johannine farewell speech in Tatian’s harmony includes passages from Luke 22 about Jesus sending out his disciples and the dictum about two swords (46:12–16). Luke provides the framework,\(^6\) into which are added sayings from the other gospels, John in particular. Thus the prayer in ch. 17 belongs within the farewell assumed by Luke in ch. 22, but presented in a Johannine fashion. In this gospel harmony, John 17 immediately precedes the Gethsemane scene, which is the time for Jesus to be “glorified” (47:19–24). The combination of glorification and Gethsemane also comes naturally from John 12:27–28 as a Gethsemane text,\(^7\) as that passage speaks in the same vein. Although section 48 on Jesus in Gethsemane follows the Synoptic Gospels rather closely (see below), it is obvious that this arrangement of pericopes does have a corollary in the scene itself. Gethsemane is the initial step in Jesus’ “going to his Father” (48:2, 13, 31). The unity between Father and Son leaves no room for Jesus’ being abandoned in the garden, although Tatian by no means removes the anxiety of Jesus (see below). On the cross, Jesus speaks in the vein of John’s Gospel (52:7; John 19:30b), not like the Jesus of Mark’s Gospel who finds himself abandoned by God. According to 47:23 (=John 17:4) he has now accomplished this task. After having finished the prayer in John 17, Jesus goes with his disciples to Gethsemane.

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7 See Chapter 8.3 in the present study.