

The Canonical Status of the Gospel of John – An Analytical Study –

Dr. Mohamed El Mehdi Boudaoud

Department of Fundamentals of Religion, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, University Oran 1 Ahmed Benbella, Algeria.

Email: bmehdi.edu@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The article examines the canonical status of the Gospel of John as one of the recognized books of the New Testament, within a comparative framework that brings together the Christian theological approach and modern historical and textual approaches to the study of the canonization of religious texts. The research proceeds from a scientific problem concerning the legitimacy of including the Gospel of John among the canonical books and the validity of attributing it to John the Apostle, with an analysis of its sources and the context of its composition in comparison with the three preceding Synoptic Gospels. The article adopts a critical analytical methodology based on examining texts and tracing early ecclesiastical testimonies to analyze historical and linguistic data, while benefiting from the achievements of Western textual criticism and contemporary theological studies.

The article highlights that the concept of the Gospel in the Islamic perspective refers to a divine revelation sent down to Jesus, peace be upon him, whereas the canonical Gospels in Christianity were formed through a long historical process of acceptance and exclusion, subject to multiple theological and ecclesiastical considerations. This is clearly manifested in the Gospel of John, which is distinguished by a particular philosophical and theological character, as it fundamentally differs from the Synoptic Gospels in structure and content, focusing on the concept of the Logos and the divinity of Christ, and presenting a theological narrative that goes beyond the descriptive historical dimension, with a clear influence of Hellenistic and Gnostic thought prevalent in the first century CE.

The article also discusses the wide disagreements among scholars regarding the identity of the author of the Gospel, the time and place of its composition, and the extent of its reliance on prior written sources or oral tradition, highlighting the absence of conclusive historical evidence proving its attribution to John the Apostle, in addition to textual indicators suggesting that it underwent multiple stages of editing and revision before the stabilization of its ecclesiastical canon. The study concludes that these data raise serious scientific issues concerning the canonicity and reliability of the Gospel of John from a historical and critical perspective, limiting its consideration as an authentic apostolic text in its early stages. This calls for a re-evaluation of the process of its canonization within the New Testament and opens the way for deeper critical approaches to the study of the formation of early Christian texts.

Keywords: canonic, Bible, Gospel, John, Christianity.

Introduction:

The four Gospels constitute the primary source upon which Christianity relies in constructing its doctrine, as part of the Bible that has been ecclesiastically recognized and canonized. However, the concept of the Gospel in its original religious and historical sense refers to the revelation that was sent down to Jesus, peace be upon him. This is affirmed by Christian texts themselves, which show that Christ's mission to the Children of Israel was associated with proclaiming the Gospel and believing in it: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" ⁽¹⁾, Paul also mentioned this in his Epistle to the Thessalonians: "We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much struggle. For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or deceit, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak..." ⁽²⁾, He then calls for investing effort in preaching and proclaiming the Bible, saying: "For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil, for while we were preaching to you the gospel of God..." ⁽³⁾, Thus, the Gospel existed among the early Christians who lived during the time of Jesus, peace be upon him, and the period that followed. It was referred to as the Gospel of God or the Gospel of Christ, after having been preserved in hearts and on tongues, which is termed in textual criticism as oral tradition, until the stage of writing and compilation.

The compilation of the Bible in general, and the Gospels in particular, has generated a large body of theological research and studies that have endeavored to give it due attention and have undertaken its defense. The debate surrounding it in terms of transmission and content, and the disagreements among scholars and researchers on this issue, along with the evidence they present, are claims devoid of validity.

It should be noted here that addressing such issues requires a great degree of objectivity and profound study in order to investigate the credibility of the Bible. One of the most important issues examined by textual criticism concerns the Gospel of John, which is considered different from the three preceding Gospels, known as the Synoptic Gospels, that is, those that are closely related to one another and harmonious or similar, as they describe. Therefore, I decided in this research to address a study related to the Gospel of John, also relying in this on the statement:

"Search the Scriptures, for you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify of Me" ⁽⁴⁾, The Reverend Munis Abdel Nour says: "If you want to discover the truthfulness of a message or a prophecy, leave it for people to criticize, interpret, and analyze. If it withstands criticism and is able to endure, then it is a true message from God. Do not try to protect it with men, money, or weapons, for the strength of a true message lies in the truth it contains" ⁽⁵⁾, Every book derives its value from the value of its author through proving its attribution to him; otherwise, the result is a loss of value and a lack of necessity for acceptance, rendering it vulnerable to distortion. Thus, the Bible derives its value from that which is most sacred.

Based on the foregoing, and in view of the importance and vitality of the topic, I chose to study a part of the Bible related to the Gospel of John and to examine one of the most important parts of the New Testament. I decided that the title of the research would be: The Canonical Status of the Gospel of John – An Analytical Study.

Studying this topic requires posing the following problem: What is the reliability and canonicity of the Gospel of John, and what are its sources? This will be addressed by tracing the author of the

Gospel, attempting to identify Christian positions regarding it, and examining the most important statements of the Church Fathers and theologians in this regard.

The methodology adopted in this study is a scientific approach appropriate to its nature, namely the critical analytical method, through presenting ideas, analyzing the topic, and revealing the most important critical studies related to it.

The objectives of the research lie in the importance of the topic as a focused study of an aspect of the Gospels, shedding light on it, clarifying the extent of the reliability of the Bible through one of its components, and uncovering the studies that have addressed it.

As for the sections to be addressed, their content is as follows:

Section One: Definition of terms, including the word “Gospel” and the “Gospel of John.”

Section Two: Sources of the Gospel and its content.

Section One: The Gospel

Preamble:

Defining concepts is one of the fundamental methodological steps in religious and historical studies, due to its effect on guiding the scholarly reading of texts and determining the horizon of their analysis. This issue acquires particular importance when dealing with religious terms that have doctrinal and historical dimensions, and that have undergone semantic transformations over time as a result of differing religious and linguistic contexts. From this perspective, the research requires examining the concept of the Gospel as a central term in Christian heritage, before moving on to the study of its origin, the development of its meaning, and its canonization within the sacred corpus.

First Requirement: Definition of the Gospel

It is a Hebrew or Syriac name, and some have traced it back to an Arabic origin. The Gospel has had many definitions, among them those who said that it is like the “iklel” and the “ikhrit,” and it was said that its derivation is from al-najl, which means origin; it is said, “he is noble of origin,” meaning origin and nature ⁽⁶⁾, It is also said that it is derived from najaltu al-shay’, meaning “I extracted it,” as if it brought forth and revealed what is within it ⁽⁷⁾.

Others have said that the word Gospel is a Greek word meaning a reward or gift, which is given by one who brings you good news; then the word came to mean the good news itself ⁽⁸⁾.

The word Gospel is derived from the Greek word Evangelion, in Latin Evangelium and in French Evangile; it also has many meanings ⁽⁹⁾, It is also used to refer to the book of Jesus, peace be upon him, and it is treated as both masculine and feminine: whoever uses it in the feminine intends the scroll, and whoever uses it in the masculine intends the book ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The word Gospel was in circulation in the Roman world and referred to the birth of the king (Euaggelion), and it was not coined by the early Church. The same word was also used to refer to the story of the king’s life, and in the Roman world this word appeared in both singular and plural forms ⁽¹¹⁾, Some have said that it is a translation of the Greek term Euangelion ⁽¹²⁾.

It also means the good news of salvation that Christ brought to humanity, and the apostles used it after him with the same meaning ⁽¹³⁾. Thus, the definition of the word became widespread and it came

to be used to mean the book that contains this good news from the end of the first century until today; hence we speak of the Gospel of Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John ⁽¹⁴⁾.

From the foregoing, we find that the word Gospel is disputed in its origin between Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic, and its meaning revolves around the concept of good news.

Among the terms mentioned in the Bible in relation to good news are those referring to the reward presented to a messenger in return for his glad tidings, after which it came to be applied to the glad news itself, as stated: “The one who brought me the news, saying, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ thought that he was bringing good news” ⁽¹⁵⁾. It also appears in (1 Sam 31:9) concerning joyful news of victory, and in (Jer 20:15) concerning the birth of a child ⁽¹⁶⁾. It was also used in the plural form to mean an offering of thanksgiving to the gods for glad news or favorable tidings ¹⁷. It was used in the Book of Isaiah in the Septuagint translation to refer to the glad news of the coming of the Anointed One appointed by God for the salvation of His people: “Go up on a high mountain, O herald of good news to Zion”¹⁸; and “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good news of happiness, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” ⁽¹⁹⁾.

As for the New Testament, the word occupied a central position as it expressed the Christian message in its entirety (Mark 1:1; 1 Cor 15:1): “For the kingdom proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is the good news of the kingdom, or the Gospel of the kingdom” ⁽²⁰⁾. This word is repeated seventy-two times in the New Testament, fifty-four of which occur in the epistles of the Apostle Paul, to express the joyful news of salvation, which Christians interpret as that which God presented in His Son Jesus Christ in order to bring them into the refuge of the Father.

For Muslims:

The Gospel is the book that God revealed to His faithful messenger Jesus, peace be upon him, as guidance and light for the Children of Israel ⁽²¹⁾. It confirms the revealed Torah and calls for acting upon it and reviving what had been neglected of the Law of Moses, peace be upon him. The revealed Gospel was not, in general, an abrogation of the revealed Torah; rather, God Almighty alleviated for the Children of Israel some of the rulings that had been made stringent upon them in the Law of Moses as a punishment for them. Christ, peace be upon him, informed them of this, and God related it in the Holy Quran, saying:

[وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَأَجَلٍ لَّكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجَنِّتُكُمْ بَابَهُ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا] (Al ‘Imran: 50) ⁽²²⁾, and the term “Gospel” is mentioned in several places in the Holy Quran, among them: ⁽²³⁾.

The Almighty’s saying:

[نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ مِّن قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ] [لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ] (Al ‘Imran: 3–4).

Also:

[يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ] (Al ‘Imran: 65).

The verses in this regard are numerous. Christians do not believe that God revealed the Gospel to Jesus, peace be upon him, even though they do not deny the revelation of the Torah to Moses, peace

be upon him, before him. Their disbelief in the revelation of the Gospel to Jesus is due to their belief in his divinity, because acknowledging that would lead to acknowledging his prophethood and message. In order to avoid falling into contradiction, they denied the revelation of the Gospel to him ⁽²⁴⁾. The Holy Quran has refuted and invalidated this claim, and it is also refuted by Christian sources themselves, as there is abundant evidence proving the existence of this Gospel.

It is stated in the Gospel of Mark: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the gospel’” ⁽²⁵⁾. It is also stated: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it” ⁽²⁶⁾. In the Gospel of Matthew it is stated: “And Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness among the people” ⁽²⁷⁾.

The Quranic verses mentioned earlier prove the existence of this Gospel, and from these statements it becomes clear that Christ, peace be upon him, came to his companions with a Gospel from God, and that he called them to believe in it and to proclaim it.

For Christians:

The term is applied to the four books, namely the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John, which are accounts of the life of Jesus, peace be upon him, and contain his sayings, teachings, and deeds ⁽²⁸⁾.

The books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels, are defined as the good news or glad tidings, which Christians call the Kingdom, the Gospel of the Kingdom, or the Kingdom of God ⁽²⁹⁾.

The author of the book Christ in the Gospels states that the word Gospel was not used to refer to a book, but rather always referred to the good news that Jesus proclaimed and brought to the world, which he realized in his life, death, and resurrection ⁽³⁰⁾.

Thus, the Gospel for Muslims is the book that God Almighty revealed to Jesus, peace be upon him, confirming the Torah and calling for acting upon it, whereas for Christians it refers to the four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John which are accounts of the life of Christ, his sayings, teachings, and deeds.

Second Requirement: Definition of the author John and his Gospel.

Distinguishing between religious texts within the sacred corpus is a necessary methodological step in biblical studies, as it leads to a more precise understanding of the particularities of each text, the context of its formation, and its theological function. This distinction becomes even more important when studying the Gospels, given the structural and thematic differences among them that reflect the diversity of historical and intellectual environments in which they were written. Hence, it is necessary to examine the Gospel of John as a text possessing distinctive features within the New Testament before proceeding to define it, outline its general characteristics, and determine its place within the process of ecclesiastical composition and canonization.

Definition of the author:

John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, was from Bethsaida in Galilee. Christ called him along with his brother James, whom Herod killed. He is said to have enjoyed a measure of wealth, and his mother

was Salome, a pious woman, who was among the women who purchased a shroud to wrap the body of Christ. It is also suggested that his mother was the sister of Mary, the mother of Christ, peace be upon him. He adopted fishing as his profession ⁽³¹⁾.

This is further indicated by what is stated in the Gospel of Mark: “As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you become fishers of people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went after him” ⁽³²⁾.

John was among the disciples of John the Baptist and among the earliest disciples of Jesus. He was one of the three apostles whom Jesus chose to be his closest companions John, Peter, and James. Christ loved him and referred to him as the beloved disciple. At the crucifixion he remained steadfast and faithful, and he received from Christ the greatest trust, namely the care of his mother ⁽³³⁾.

Five books of the New Testament are attributed to him: the Fourth Gospel, the three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. He proclaimed his Gospel in Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus. He was exiled during the persecution that took place under Domitian, then released in the year 96 CE, after which he returned to Ephesus and remained there until his death ⁽³⁴⁾.

The exact date of his death is not known with certainty, though it is believed that he lived longer than the other disciples of Christ and that he was the last of them to die. He is said to have died in Ephesus ⁽³⁵⁾ at the end of the first century CE ⁽³⁶⁾.

There were many criticisms directed at John as the author, among them:

Doubts regarding the identity of John, as some say that the author of the Gospel was not John the Apostle but another person. This skepticism began in the second century CE ⁽³⁷⁾.

Georg Kümmel mentioned the disagreements concerning John, saying: “Scholars have differed regarding his true identity. Some thought that he was John the son of Zebedee, one of the apostles of Christ; others said that he was an unknown person who assumed the identity of John the son of Zebedee and wrote the Gospel under his name. In general, the dates of his birth and death are unknown. Others said that John was of Jerusalemite origin, but the view that he was of Syrian origin is closer to Christianity” ⁽³⁸⁾.

Definition of the book:

This Gospel is the fourth in the order of the New Testament Gospels and contains twenty-one chapters. It differs from the three preceding Gospels, known as the Synoptic Gospels, whether in the selection of topics, narratives, discourses, and their arrangement, or in style, chronological sequence of events, and even in theological horizons. It is not a narrative of the life of Christ, peace be upon him, but rather a presentation of it from a theological perspective, portraying him as the Word of God, the Creator of the world, and the Savior of humanity ⁽³⁹⁾.

a. Language of composition: It is agreed that it was written in Greek ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

b. Time of composition: The date of the composition of this Gospel is not definitively established. The author of Murshid al-Talibin states: “There is no agreement among scholars on determining the year in which John wrote his Gospel” ⁽⁴¹⁾.

It is stated in the Encyclopedia of the Twentieth Century that John wrote his Gospel sixty years after the ascension of Christ, that is, in the year 93 CE ⁽⁴²⁾.

Dr. Wafi, however, holds that it was composed in the year 90 CE, and that it is the latest of all the Gospels, being separated from the others by a considerable time span of nearly thirty years ⁽⁴³⁾. Dr. Post says: “The Gospel of John was composed between 95 CE and 98 CE,” while Mr. Horne believes that it was composed in the years 67 CE, or 69 CE, or 70 CE, or 89 CE, or 98 CE ⁽⁴⁴⁾. The reason for the disagreement regarding the date of composition of this Gospel is that it has been attributed to someone other than its true author. The cultural character of John the disciple and the context of his life events strongly reject this spurious attribution, for the Gospel of John is in complete contradiction with the Book of Revelation, although both are attributed to John ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

c. Place of composition: The prevailing view among Christian scholars is that this Gospel was written in the city of Ephesus or in one of the neighboring regions. There are, however, several opinions identifying other locations ⁽⁴⁶⁾, some saying that it was written in Antioch, and others saying that it was written in Alexandria due to the presence of papyrus manuscripts in Egypt ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Others assumed that the Gospel was written in the south of Judea in Palestine, due to the prominent Jewish elements found in the Gospel, especially in confronting the Jews with it ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

d. Reason for writing:

It is stated in the Dictionary of the Bible that another motive for writing the Fourth Gospel was to strengthen the early Church in faith in the reality of the divinity of Christ ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

This is also stated in his Gospel, where it says: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Howard says: “This Gospel of John differs from the Synoptic Gospels in many statements, and scholars see that the points of disagreement between this Gospel and the other Gospels are more numerous than the points of agreement. Therefore, some have said that John sought independence from the other Gospels. Indeed, John was the first to proclaim the idea of the Logos, and in this he was influenced by Greek philosophy and Roman and Hellenistic religions whose followers believed in the idea of the incarnation of the deity. They even believed in the idea of the Son of God who became a complete god, as was the case among the ancient Greeks. John was also the first to make Jesus eternal with God” ⁽⁵¹⁾.

Section Two: Objectives and Content of the Gospel

First Requirement: Objectives

The author of the book had objectives in writing this Gospel, as follows ⁽⁵²⁾:

Affirming the divinity of Christ along with his humanity, because some Christian sects believed that Christ was nothing more than a human being, that he did not exist before his mother Mary, and they completely denied his divinity. Consequently, the general body of bishops of Asia and others gathered and requested John to write a Gospel that would give special attention to affirming the divinity of Christ and refuting its deniers. Jad al-Manfaluti says: “John wrote the Gospel in response to the desire of the bishops of the Church in Asia Minor” ⁽⁵³⁾. Jirjis Zuwain al-Lubnani says: “When a group was teaching Christianity that Christ was nothing but a human being and that he did not exist before his mother Mary, in the year 96 CE the general body of bishops of Asia and others gathered with John

and requested him to write about Christ and proclaim a Gospel that the other evangelists had not written, and to write in a particular manner about the divinity of Christ; he could not refuse to respond to their request” ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Confronting and refuting the disciples of John the Baptist who sought to equate Christ with the Baptist, or even to prefer him over Christ, peace be upon him. The author of the Gospel thus focused on refuting this claim and demonstrating the vast difference between them, and that Christ is superior to the Baptist.

Hanna Jirjis al-Khudri says: “What prompted John to write his Gospel was the emergence of certain heresies that had begun to find their way into the Christian Church” ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Maurice Tawadros says: “He was writing to people who knew Christ and his teachings, but who were facing a wave of erroneous views and false philosophies spread by heretics. Therefore, the need was not for John to write as the other evangelists had written, but rather for him to confront new demands by presenting Christ from a different angle. The three Gospels were mostly concerned with events related to the outward life of Christ, whereas John presented Christ in his divine existence as indicated by events. Thus, it can be said that John intended by his Gospel to complement the other three Gospels” ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Attracting the philosophical Greek mindset, which, as some contemporary Christians see it, was in response to the circumstances and the era in which the Gospel was written.

Completing what the author believed the writers of the three Gospels had left out regarding aspects of the life of Christ, peace be upon him, especially what occurred at the beginning of his ministry, that is, before John the Baptist was imprisoned.

Christians also say that it is the only Gospel written for all believers in Christ as Lord and Savior, without being limited to a particular sect or group among them, as is the case with the other Gospels ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Second Requirement: The Content of the Gospel and Its Sources

Content of the Gospel:

John begins his Gospel with the idea of the Logos, or the Word of God that came and became flesh. This author constantly refers to the idea of the Redeemer and Savior that the books of the Old Testament had long spoken of among the Jews. There is no doubt that the author of the Gospel of John was a philosopher from Ephesus who was steeped in Greek philosophy and influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, whose thought spread during this period among Jewish and Christian circles, particularly his allegorical and symbolic interpretive approach to the Torah. Among the Church Fathers who found in Philo’s symbolic interpretation a solution to many of the problems created by free interpretation of the Torah were Origen and Alexander. Although the Old Testament referred to two meanings of the Word of God the first being His word by which He created the heavens, and the second being His word that came on the tongues of His noble prophets John combined the two meanings in the prologue of his Gospel and added to them the attribute of eternity. Instead of speaking about the Word of God, the Gospel of John speaks of God the Word, and the Word in this sense is in fact a product of pagan Greek and Eastern Gnostic thought ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

Philo influenced the author of the Gospel of John, as is evident from the beginning of his Gospel, although some Christians deny this, such as Wilfrid Harrington, who says: “Although the Logos used by John is a Greek term, John’s sources are Jewish and Christian, and the prologue of this Gospel is not strange; it is an unsuccessful Christian attempt to conceal the clear Greek and Gnostic influence on Christian doctrine” ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

He also spoke about the miracles of Christ Jesus, peace be upon him, about his dialogue with prominent Jewish figures, about the followers of the apostles, and then mentioned the event of resurrection after death ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

Its sources:

The divergences between the three Gospels and the Gospel of John have created questions and have been considered evidence supporting the view that the Fourth Gospel relied directly on one or more of these Gospels. The problem is as follows ⁽⁶¹⁾:

Was John familiar with the three similar Synoptic Gospels, or with one of them, when he wrote his Gospel? The answer to this question is not agreed upon among researchers.

In fact, there are some limited points of similarity between John and the three earlier Gospels. The strongest points of connection between the Fourth Gospel and the three earlier Gospels appear in the Passion narratives (John 18–19; Mark 14–15; Matthew 26–27; Luke 22–23). The agreements in these narratives indicate the existence of a common predecessor. In any case, this fact does not prove the literary dependence of the Gospel of John on the three Synoptic Gospels, as John’s treatment of this material seems to point to another conclusion. It is clear that John followed an established tradition that undoubtedly has its roots in the earliest Christian era. In general, it can be assumed that he possessed a written source. In any case, John’s treatment of the Passion narrative indicates that he relied on a source other than the three Gospels. Thus, the difference between John and the three earlier Gospels does not appear to reflect a distinctive vision of the author of the Fourth Gospel; rather, it is clear that they are connected to the same tradition from which the Gospel of John benefited ⁽⁶²⁾.

Some believe that he did not use any of the three similar Synoptic Gospels, and that linguistic parallels are not sufficient to prove that he used them or even that he was familiar with them. In any case, it is acceptable, in agreement with ancient tradition and with what some scholars maintain, that the evidence indicates his reliance on Mark, and possibly on Matthew and Luke. In addition to the Passion narrative, there is shared material preserved between John and the three earlier Gospels at many points. These similarities between John and the three Gospels demonstrate his direct reliance on them ⁽⁶³⁾.

Addressing the details of this issue requires an extensive study that often ends with the statement that only God knows who actually wrote this Gospel ⁽⁶⁴⁾. Despite his frequent appearance in the other Gospels, he is not mentioned by name in the Gospel of John ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

This Gospel is considered the most poetic, and since it is the last Gospel written among the four Gospels, it may have undergone revision and editing. This is evident to textual critics, as there appear to be additions to the original Gospel due to its late composition. Such added material may have been written either by the original author or by another different writer. The Gospel itself mentions that the author was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20), the beloved disciple who was an eyewitness to the events of the crucifixion (John 19:35). Although the beloved disciple should have been mentioned more explicitly, especially since the Gospel of John is attributed to him, his name is

not mentioned. There is therefore a consensus that these additions come from an unknown source introduced at a later time ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Theologians and textual critics hold that the Gospel of John, like the Synoptic Gospels, passed through several stages: first, eyewitness accounts and what is known as oral tradition; second, the narratives were shaped according to the needs of the churches in the early days; finally, an individual in one of these Christian communities reformulated and reshaped the material in written form to suit the needs of the earliest readers, a stage also referred to as written tradition ⁽⁶⁷⁾.

Critics have also pointed out that there are contradictions in the Gospels, which diminishes their value and strength. They were composing theological books. For example, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Last Supper with the disciples is presented as the Passover meal, commemorating the last meal eaten by the Children of Israel before their escape from Egypt. In the Gospel of John, however, they ate this Last Supper on the previous day. Likewise, the first three Gospels state that during the Passover meal the ordinary bread and wine became the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, whereas John, on the other hand, presents the Lord Jesus as the lamb eaten at the Passover meal, stating that Christ died at the time when the Passover lamb was being slaughtered. Thus, the day changes, and each Gospel presents different aspects, making historical accuracy less important than the theological truth intended by the Gospels ⁽⁶⁸⁾.

Conclusion:

In concluding this research, I present briefly the most important results reached:

Through studying the Gospels, the researcher can discern the reality of Christian beliefs, as well as their own testimonies regarding distortion and errors, which constitute the strongest evidence against them in demonstrating the extent of their claimed sanctity. From the works of the People of the Book, the doubt surrounding the Book in which Christians have long been immersed becomes evident. We conclude that the contradiction of ideas and inclinations has influenced mentality and thought, leading to confusion and to the corruption of the accumulated scholarly heritage.

In our research on the Gospel attributed to John, which is the fourth Gospel in the order of the New Testament, it is found to be distinct from the three preceding Gospels because it focuses on the divinity of Christ from a philosophical perspective. It is the only Gospel among the four that explicitly states this. Moreover, in the absence of evidence proving the validity of its attribution to John the Apostle, no proof can be found for its authenticity and reliability. This strongly indicates that the formation of the Gospels was built on fragile foundations, as the origin and accurate history of the Gospel's emergence are unknown due to the loss of the original. The Gospels in general appeared later than the Epistles, whereas the Gospel of God or the Gospel of Christ is mentioned repeatedly in the words of Paul, and it is also mentioned in the Gospel of Mark and the Acts of the Apostles, which indicates its existence as a name. However, whether it was preserved in memory or committed to writing remains doubtful, and no one can assert that it was free from human intervention, rendering it subject to criticism.

Christians attempted to find chains of transmission for these books to strengthen their claims, or evidence to satisfy their doubts, or reports about them in the writings of their predecessors, and what was discovered of manuscripts corresponded to the period in which they claim they were written. However, these efforts only increased their contradictions, and their attempts ended in failure, forcing

them to acknowledge the fragility of their books due to the blemishes attached to them. They admitted their distortion, whether by copyists or others who nevertheless affirmed the sanctity of the Book.

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3. Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians 2:9.
4. John 5:39.
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19. Isaiah 52:7.
20. See: Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14.
21. Sarah bint Hamid, *Distortion and Contradiction in the Four Gospels*, 1st ed., 2003, Dar Tayba al-Khadra', p. 18.
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23. The previous reference, pp. 20–21.
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25. Mark 1:14–15.
26. Mark 8:35.
27. Matthew 4:23.
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31. Sarah bint Hamid, *Distortion and Contradiction in the Four Gospels*, p. 40; see also: Sabir Tu'ayma, *A Reading of the Bible*, 1st ed., Maktabat Dar al-Zaman for Publishing and Distribution, 1426 AH, p. 281.
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