

A STYLISTIC TRAIT OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL
IN THE *PERICOPE ADULTERAE*?

ALAN F. JOHNSON, Th.D.

As an evangelical and thus an adherent of the inerrant inspiration of biblical manuscripts, I am vitally interested in establishing the precise text and readings of the original New Testament documents even when no great doctrinal issue may be at stake. Our subject concerns the question of the genuineness of the celebrated passage about Jesus and the adulterous woman in John 7:53-8:11, known technically as the *pericope adulterae*. Admittedly, this textual problem has been settled in days past in the minds of most New Testament scholars who, while retaining the authenticity of the incident, exclude the account as an integral part of the Gospel of John. Since the story is found to be (1) absent in the oldest and best manuscripts, versions and patristic citations,¹ (2) foreign to the context² and (3) linguistically incompatible with the vocabulary and style of the Fourth Gospel,³ the cumulative decision reached by most is "conclusive against the Johannine authorship of the section."⁴ However, though the majority to the contrary, a few competent scholars have examined the evidence carefully and have been reluctant to consider the passage as an interpolation.⁵ There seems to be warrant for giving further attention to this passage in the contemporary status of New Testament textual criticism. Present trends are toward a shift of authority from external manuscript evidence to internal criteria for

1. Codex Θ , B, N, T, W, X, P66, P75, about 100 minuscules, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Old Latin (part), Gothic, all Greek fathers before tenth cent. cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), pp. 490-91; for a complete discussion of external evidence cf. Alan F. Johnson, "A Re-examination of the *Pericope Adulterae*, John 7:53-8:11," Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation (Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 1961), pp. 31-169.
2. B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Introduction and Appendix* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1882), Appendix, p. 87. Others also have followed Westcott and Hort's premise, cf. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), II, 715.
3. Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik Des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zurich: Gotthelf-Verlag, 1958), pp. 60-62, 187; Barrett, *Ibid.*; H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), II, 2.
4. Bernard, *Ibid.*; so also Barrett, *Ibid.*; R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (Oxford: at the University Press, 1956), p. 345; Vincent Taylor, *The Text of The New Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1961), p. 98.
5. William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on The Gospel of John* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), p. 35; J. P. Lange, *A Commentary on Holy Scriptures: John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House); Everett Falconer Harrison, "The Son of God Among the Sons of Men, VIII, Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CIII, No. 112 (October, 1946), 431.

establishing the best text.⁶ Years ago Colwell stated that the New Testament had to be determined verse by verse.⁷ This is known as the eclectic method and is carefully described by Vaganay⁸ and first illustrated in the monumental work of Zuntz⁹ on P46. The Greek text of *The New English Bible, New Testament* is the product of modern eclecticism. While external evidence must still be considered to some extent, the lack of certainty as to the genesis of our contemporary manuscripts leads scholars to examine the evidence for each variant impartially with no special predilections for or against any one type of text.¹⁰ Thus, the internal evidence of linguistics and context play a most vital role in recent methodology and should demand a more careful consideration of the internal character of the *pericope adulterae*. Since the matter of context is such a highly subjective area of discussion, our examination centers around the linguistic phenomena observed in the passage.

THE VALIDITY OF THE STATISTICAL METHOD CHALLENGED

The internal evidence of linguistics (i.e., vocabulary, grammar and style) has traditionally been used against the inclusion of John 7:53-8:11 as an integral part of the Fourth Gospel. Two main questions on this evidence may be raised. First, can statistical linguistic information derived from the passage prove that a different hand wrote 7:53-8:11 than wrote the rest of the Gospel? Secondly, does the linguistic phenomena of the *pericope* yield any positive stylistic feature that is similar to that found in the remainder of John's Gospel?

The linguistic argument against the Johannine genuineness of the *pericope* has been worked out in considerable detail in more recent days by Robert Morgenthaler in his *Statistics of New Testament Vocabulary* (*Statistik Des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes*, 1958).¹¹ Morgenthaler, following the traditional approach, shows that out of eighty-two vocabulary words employed in 7:53-8:11, fourteen do not occur elsewhere in John's Gospel. Furthermore, twenty-six out of seventy-five Johannine preferred words occur in John 4:6-18, where John likewise treats the meeting of a woman with Jesus, whereas only fourteen occur in 7:53-8:11. Certain common Johannine words and particles are totally absent from this passage. Morgenthaler continues to multiply examples of

6. Harold H. Oliver, "Present Trends In The Textual Criticism of the New Testament," *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXX (October, 1962), 314.
7. Ernest Cadman Colwell, "Biblical Criticism: Lower and Higher," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVII (1948), 4.
8. Leo Vaganay, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Sands and Company, 1937), pp. 91-95.
9. Gunther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).
10. Bruce M. Metzger, *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism: New Testament Tools and Studies*, Volume IV, edited by Bruce M. Metzger (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 39; G. D. Kilpatrick's studies favor determining the value of external witnesses by internal evidence in all cases except where the internal evidence is insufficient, cf. Oliver, p. 314.

words mathematically shown to be unlike John's frequency of usage and concludes that the passage must be an interpolation and not part of the Fourth Gospel.

The statistical method of determining the authorship of a New Testament writing was first popularized by the detailed work of P. N. Harrison on the criticism of the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.¹² By the use of word-counts and mathematical patterns established for the other Pauline epistles, Harrison concluded that the vocabulary and style of the Pastoral epistles were so different that they couldn't have been written by Paul. However, recent studies by competent conservative scholars have exposed two serious limitations of the statistical method. First, when this method is applied to other literary works than the New Testament, the analogy breaks down. Purser applied the method to Cicero and found it unreliable.¹³ The statistical method does not take into account the mood, purpose, and subject matter of the author. Furthermore, G. Udney Yule, a professional statistician and reader of statistics at the University of Cambridge, has shown that it takes at least 10,000 words to form any solid statistical basis for authorship.¹⁴ In 7:53-8:11 there are only 174 words. The insufficiency is evident.

Secondly, the statistical method proves too much. It can be applied to sections of writings of known authorship and prove them to be from a different hand.¹⁵ This point can be demonstrated by subjecting the statistical information on John 2:13-17 to the same methodology used by Morgenthaler and others on 7:53-8:11. The following tabulations may be considered.

It may be noted that in each case of *hapax legomena* words that 7:53-8:11 fares considerably better in percentage of total vocabulary than the undisputed passage 2:13-17. Attention should also be called to the fact that nearly twice the percentage of Johannine preferred words occur in 7:53-8:11 than in 2:13-17. Furthermore, Morgenthaler tabulates a number of words and particles that he feels are necessary for Johannine writing and are absent in the *pericope adulterae*.¹⁶ How-

11. Morgenthaler, pp. 60-62, 187; "The vocabulary is not Johannine, and several words characteristic of the Lukan writings may be noted," *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952) VIII, 592.
12. P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1921); More recently by K. Grayston and G. Herdan, "The Authorship of the Pastorals in the Light of Statistical Linguistics," *New Testament Studies*, VI (October, 1959), 1-15.
13. Cited by Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles and the Mind of Paul* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1956), p. 9.
14. G. Udney Yule, *The Statistical Study of Literary Vocabulary*, cited by Bruce M. Metzger, "A Reconsideration of Certain Arguments Against the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles," *The Expository Times*, LXX (October, 1958), 93-94; cf. also Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 178-79 for cautions in using internal information.

	7:53—8:11	2:13—17
TOTAL WORDS ¹⁶	168	73
TOTAL VOCAB.	81	47
TOTAL HAPAX IN JOHN	13 (16%)	14 (30%)
TOTAL HAPAX IN SYNOPTICS	1 (1%)	3 (6%)
TOTAL HAPAX IN N.T.	4 (5%)	4 (9%)
HAPAX IN GREEK BIBLE	2 (2%)	4 (9%)
LUKAN PREFERRED WORDS ¹⁷	4 (5%)	2 (4%)
JOHANNINE PREFERRED WORDS ¹⁸	14 (17%)	4 (9%)

ever, over two-thirds of these same words are totally absent as well from 2:13-17.²⁰ Four possible reasons, then, based on statistics, could be advanced against the Johannine authorship of 2:13-17: (1) the large number of hapax words (14) not found elsewhere in John, (2) the use of frequent synoptic words rare in John,²¹ (3) the use of words more Lukan and Markan than Johannine,²² and (4) the absence proportionately of a sufficient number of Johannine preferred words and particles compared to other sections in the Fourth Gospel. To these could be added the abruptness of the incident in the context and the apparent historical anachronism of an early temple cleansing. It is hoped that by seeing how statistics can discredit a genuine passage in John, the obvious weakness of such a method will be acknowledged and abandoned by serious students who are searching for a true evaluation of the linguistic phenomena of 7:53-8:11. The shortcomings of the statistical method are evident and the trend in recent opinion is that such an approach is invalid for disputing authenticity.²³ A much too narrow stricture upon an author's vocabulary, grammar, style, mood and subject matter is

15. If Harrison's same method is followed, "II Thessalonians cannot be accepted as Pauline, and one must postulate a separate authorship for each Pastoral letter, since out of the total of 306 hapaxes only nine occur in all three letters," William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 9.
16. The text adopted for the *pericope*, 7:53-8:11 is the resultant text of Hermann Friehen Von Soden, *Die Schriften Des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1911), I, 486-524. Von Soden has probably done more work on the text of this passage than anyone else; the text for 2:13-17 is Nestle's 24th edition (1961); for a detailed examination of each word in both passages, cf. Alan F. Johnson, pp. 170-248.
17. Morgenthaler, p. 181.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (αλλά, εκ, μαθητης, οίδα, οτι, ου, εαν, εαν μη, εγω, ει, ει μη, ημην, εμω, ημεις, ινα, ινα μη, ος, ου).
20. There is no συν, αλλά, οίδα, ου, εαν, εαν μη, ει, ει μη, εγω, εμω, ημεις, ινα μη, ος, in 2:13-17.
21. For example, πολεω, τε, περισσερα, καθημαι, εκβαλλειν, etc.
22. For example, βοας (only here in John, 3x in Luke), πας 63x in John but 152x in Luke) τε (3x in John, 9x in Luke,) καταραγειν (only here in John, 2x in Luke), etc.
23. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, cited by Guthrie, p. 6; Earle Ellis, "The Authorship of the Pastorals: A Resume and Assessment of Current Trends," *Evangelical Quarterly*, XXXII-XXXIII (July, 1960), pp. 151-61.

imposed by this method. In conclusion to our first question concerning the validity of the statistical method, we answer that mathematical word counts are insufficient to discredit the Johannine authorship of 7:53-8:11. The question of genuineness is still left open.

A STYLISTIC TRAIT OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In setting aside the validity of certain popular word-count statistics as having no value in deciding the genuineness of the *pericope adulterae*, the question is still open as to whether the passage may contain any stylistic trait or literary pattern that would clearly show its affinity with the Gospel of John. One of the unmistakable literary patterns of the Fourth Gospel is the practice by the author of interjecting short explanatory phrases which interpret the significance of the words that have just been spoken in the narrative. For example, in John 6:5 Jesus speaks to Philip and says, "Whence should we purchase bread that these should eat?" John then adds the interpretive phrase, "Now this he spake tempting him, for he knew what he was about to do" (v. 6). The explanatory phrase is introduced by three elements. It has the conjunction "now" (δε), the demonstrative "this" (τουτο) and a form of the verb "to speak" (λεγειν). How completely this trait is in keeping with the style of the Gospel of John is seen in that it is employed at least ten times by the author throughout the book. It may be helpful to set these occurrences before us.

- 6:6 τουτο δε ελεγεν πειραξων . . .
 6:71 ελεγεν δε τον Ιουδαν . . .
 7:39 τουτο δε ειπεν περι . . .
 11:13 ειρηκει δε ο Ιησους . . .
 11:51 τουτο δε αφ' εαυτου ουκ ειπεν . . .
 12:6 ειπεν δε τουτο ουκ οτι . . .
 12:38 τουτο δε ελεγεν σημαινων . . .
 13:11 δια τουτο ειπεν οτι . . .
 13:28 τουτο δε . . . ειπεν αυτο . . .
 21:19 τουτο δε ειπεν σημαινων . . .

- In seven out of the ten above examples all three introductory elements (δε, τουτο, λεγειν) occur in the phrases and in the remaining three cases two of the elements appear in each instance. This type of literary style is completely absent in the Synoptic Gospels. In a personal letter to us, Ernest Cadman Colwell, President of The Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California, has acknowledged this phenomena to be a literary pattern of the Fourth Gospel.²⁴ An exact duplicate of this pattern occurs in the middle of the *pericope adulterae*. After the Pharisees have asked Jesus what he should do with the adulterous woman, the author has inserted the interpretive phrase, "Now this they were saying tempting him, that they might have to accuse him" (τουτο δε ελεγον πειραξοντες . . .). The phrase has
24. "I Certainly think that what you have identified is an element of Johannine style in the sense of literary pattern in the Fourth Gospel," letter dated March 12, 1964.

all three introductory elements that have been observed earlier (*δε, τουτο, λεγειν*). That this fact has generally been ignored in discussions on the passage is evident from the complete silence of critical commentators in mentioning anything about it.²⁵ The explanatory phrase in 8:6 might be explained as a scribal interpolation in an attempt to make the *pericope* appear to be Johannine. However, since this literary pattern is so little observed, it is unlikely that an approach so subtle would deliberately be attempted. It seems more reasonable to assume that this interjectory statement is an integral part of the whole narrative and thus that the passage also is an intergral part of the whole Gospel.

We conclude that the traditional and popular internal linguistic criticism of this disputed passage is not as strong as it has usually been represented. No one should feel compelled from statistical tabulations to exclude the *pericope* from the Gospel of John. Furthermore, the distinctive literary trait of the Fourth Gospel that can be seen in John 8:6 must be adequately explained by those who would reject the genuineness of the passage. If internal evidence is highly determinative in our methodology of New Testament textual criticism, perhaps a re-interpretation of the *external* evidence of John 7:53-8:11 is in order.

Moody Bible Institute
Chicago, Illinois

25. Some twenty-five to thirty critical commentaries (including French and German) on John were checked for this point and found to be silent (cf. bibliography cited by C. K. Barrett).