

Krzysztof Mielcarek

"A Wealth of Revelation: The Four Evangelists' Introductions to Their Gospels", John J. Kilgallen, Rzym 2009 : [recenzja]

The Biblical Annals 2/1, 347-349

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

John J. Kilgallen, *A Wealth of Revelation: The Four Evangelists' Introductions to Their Gospels* (Subsidia Biblica 34; Roma: EPIB, 2009). Pp. xvi, 142. € 20.00. ISBN 978-88-7653-640-3

KRZYSZTOF MIELCAREK

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: krzysztof.mielcarek@kul.lublin.pl

Since “each Gospel writer has his own way of introducing the public life, death and resurrection of Jesus” and the author “wants his reader to understand the public, contested life of Jesus in a certain, precise way and he does this by the statements or stories which anticipate the Gospel and direct the reader’s thoughts”, J.J. Kilgallen decided to focus on these introductory pericopes in order to show the necessity of keeping them in mind while reading the whole book. A biblical scholar from Chicago and professor emeritus at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Kilgallen guides his readers through the four Gospels in nine subsequent chapters. The first one is introductory in character and devoted to several general issues. Then, each Gospel is discussed in two steps: first there comes the presentation of its specific picture of Jesus in the narrative as a whole and then various connections between its introduction and the rest of the text are presented.

In the first chapter Fr. Kilgallen discusses the variety of introductions, their problematic identity and the way they are connected to the main bulk of their narratives. Then he switches to Jesus’ own testimony followed by a presentation of Jesus’ teaching and His identity in the Gospels. The rest of the book tackles the issue in every Gospel, but even though the author agrees with the generally accepted dating, he decides to follow neither the canonical order nor the historical one.

Kilgallen starts his study with the Gospel of Mark showing the two titles ascribed to Jesus in Mk 1:1 are the key issues of the book. This is “Mark’s faith statement”. Then he briefly but profoundly discusses the main features of the Markan text and concludes with the opinion that the Gospel is certainly planned to deepen the believer’s faith “that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel” (p. 25), the divine Son of God, and the obedient One (p. 26).

However, Mark was equally interested in presenting the responsibilities of Jesus' disciples and thus he stresses the necessity of the cross in the lives of Christians.

The third chapter shows the Markan introduction in the context of John the Baptist, Jesus' public life and His Davidic origin. Finally, some essential relations between the introduction and the two main parts of the second Gospel are discussed. The author arrives at the conclusion that the first verse of the Gospel of Mark helps readers understand that the main goal of his text is to encourage Christians to fully appreciate the mystery of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.

The next two chapters devoted to the Gospel of John analyze its first eighteen verses. For this reason Kilgallen presents the idea of Incarnation against both the Hellenistic and the Jewish background. The first one has to do with Platonic-like philosophy, while the latter is rooted in Genesis 1–3. John confronts both of them showing that *logos* became flesh – a Person who is still “a perfect reflection of the mind of God”. In his next step the American scholar characterizes John's image of the Word as Life and Light and continues to present this perspective within human history and in the fourth Gospel. Later on he elaborates on love and faith as main threads of the Johannine work, before finally focusing on the relation between God and His Son. Every part of his study is constantly related to the prologue of John (1:1-18) showing how everyone who believes in Jesus receives the gift of eternal salvation (J 20:1ff).

The last two parts of the book cover the two Gospels with long introductory sections that contain infancy narratives. First Kilgallen discusses two chapters devoted to the Gospel of Matthew. He begins with an analysis of the commonly noted themes in Mt 1–2: scriptures fulfilled in Jesus, and Jesus as the King of Israel and as the crucified One. Then he draws attention to the fundamental importance of genealogy, the magi, the star and the following scenes, all of them confirmed by the Old Testament text. According to the American scholar, Matthew planned to show his readers that Jesus was the real son of Abraham, the son of David and finally – the Son of God. A Christian was to uphold his beliefs even though the majority of Jews were not willing to do so. The same main themes of the Matthean introduction play an important role in the main narrative of the first Gospel. Hence, Kilgallen gives his reader a panoramic view of these themes in the major sections of Matthew's Gospel: John the Baptist's cycle, Jesus' temptation, the five discourses and his miracles, the role of Peter, and the final days of Paschal events in Jerusalem. In all these sections the Kilgallen finds a vast number of ideas connecting Matt 1–2 with the rest of the Gospel.

The work of Luke, according to Kilgallen, is the only Gospel that was not written for the Church under pressure. This is why this Evangelist most of all seeks certainty of faith for all those who have already been taught that salvation has come to the mankind through Jesus Christ. In chapters 1–2 he multiplies the number of figures who operate as a link between Old and New Testament times. Seven stories presented there are not meant only as an introduction to the Gospel but also as a prologue for the two-volume work of Luke. In his image, Jesus, being the obedient Son of God, is also a man from Nazareth rejected by His nation. Thus, it is important to find an answer to the question how to reconcile these two features in one person. Luke gives his reader a sequence of important theological themes introducing John the Baptist, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the identity of the Messiah, His journey towards Jerusalem and the main stories of the Paschal events. In Acts he stresses the role of gentiles and their relation to the Jews within the body of Christ. All of them are planned to be witnesses of the Gospel to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8). He also pictures the beginnings of the Church in her pneumatological context showing that it is Jesus the Messiah who is the very source of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

Fr. Kilgallen concludes with an important thought: “In case of each Gospel, the story of the adult, public life and death of Jesus is best understood by paying close attention to the introduction and how each of the Evangelists presents it in accord with the particular needs of his audience. It is through the introductions that we particularly appreciate the wonder of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God, through whom we learn of the love that brought Him to offer salvation to all.” Even though the book has neither a bibliography nor notes and the subjects presented in it are in most cases well known to biblical scholars, it does have a very positive and original impact on the discussion about the Gospels. As an experienced scholar and academic authority Kilgallen proposes a new and well thought-out concept of treating their literary introductions as a kind of a hermeneutical and theological key to their better understanding.