On the Differences in the Expressions in the Gospels and their Meanings

Yahya ibn Adi (AD 893–974)

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On the Differences in the Expressions in the Gospels and their Meanings, also by Ya yā ibn Adī
[Translated by Sam Noble]

”Difference” is used in various ways. One way is to mean a contradiction, as when a speaker says something and its opposite which contradicts it. This is like when someone recounts something and also recounts its opposite, which undermines it. This is impossible in the books of God, on account of the infallibility of those who recount them. ”Difference” also has another meaning, as when someone reports about something that no one else reports. In reality, this is not called a difference because one person may say one thing and another something else but these two things are not called different. ”Difference” is used in another way, which is a difference in names but not in meanings, as when we say ”rock” and ”stone”. When the Spirit of the Paraclete rested on the disciples and they were made infallible with the infallibility with which we are made secure from mistakes and errors, the writers of the gospels only wrote them at the times when necessity called for writing, each one of them writing what is useful from what he saw by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Do you not see the Evangelist Luke mention that the reason that he wrote his gospel was that many people had written stories and reports about Christ but that their stories were not satisfactory for him, as when he says ”As for me, I write to you O Theophilus, what I have taken from those who saw with their eyes and witnessed”?[1] If each of the evangelists brought something that the others did not bring, this is not a difference, as we have explained it according to the types of differences. Rather, in this is keen wisdom and one of the great graces of God, because if the expressions and meanings and language of the gospels were the same, then it would be possible for one to accuse the evangelists of collusion in writing them and spreading them through the world, as those who oppose us among the sects claim.

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[1] Luke 1:3 [2] 3:1 [3] : ” ”

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