Abstract — There are many religions, such as Christianity, that have sought to spread their messages and have subsequently created a collection of documents. However, as the literature grows, it becomes more problematic to interpret any single text and perceive how it relates to other documents. This situation is common in other areas of human activity, not just religions.

In this paper, we propose a method of Synoptic Network Analysis, to represent the relationships between multiple overlapping texts as a network, and to analyze the structure and semantics of the texts by clustering the network. This method is applied to the four traditional Christian Gospels and the Catechism of the Catholic Church in order to extract the main messages common to these Gospels, to highlight the dogmatic characteristics of each Gospel and the Catechism and to compare those results.

Unlike traditional literature-based approaches, Synoptic Network Analysis is a scientific method that incorporates falsifiability and replicability. The method makes it possible to scientifically evaluate various literature-based hypotheses.

1. Introduction

1.1. Problems for Various Canonical Texts

Recently, the Gospel according to Judas has attracted a great deal of attention [1]. The Judas Gospel shows that many Gospels may have been written to recount the acts and teachings of Jesus Christ. So, the traditional Gospels of Matthew, Mark Luke, and John are not the only Gospels ever written.

However, this revelation raises many questions about the Gospels, such as “how were they made and in what order?” “How are the Gospels related to each other?” “Why did the ancient church acknowledge four Gospels rather than selecting just one to convey their religious teaching?” and “why were other Gospels excluded from the traditional Bible?” These are questions that researchers have been tackling since ancient times.

There are undoubtedly many cases where a group of people have sought to spread their message and therefore developed a literature of “canonical documents,” but where issues concerning the interpretations of the texts and the relationships between various individual documents have become problematic. This kind of situation exists not only within Christianity but within other religions and schools of political thinking. Such interpretative issues would seem to have direct influences on many matters in the modern world.

1.2. What is Synopsis?

The term ‘synopsis’ is derived from the Greek word Syn-Opsis (together - see) and originates in the charts those make it possible to “see together,” for comparative purposes, the three very similar Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three Gospels are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels. While the synopsis format is believed to have been originally created in the fourth century, the first modern synopsis was produced in the eighteenth century.

In addition to a parallel chart of overlapping sections, the modern synopsis also represents correspondences between words and related sections. It is now regarded as an essential tool for the interpretation of “canonical texts” [2].

Recently, the term “synopsis” is being used in a less restrictive manner to refer to other comparisons beyond the three traditional synoptic Gospels. For example, many synopses also compare John with the three synoptic gospels, and some even add Thomas, which is not a traditional Gospel, in creating a chart of five parallel “canonical texts” [3].

1.3. Synopsis Research

There have been numerous studies concerning the synopsis and the synoptic Gospels throughout history, with a central focus of many relating to the order and the dependencies of the three synoptic Gospels, which are known as the Synoptic Problem. Traditionally the kind of problem, which is an issue for various “canonical texts,” has been investigated using general literature–based approaches. However, a major shortcoming with such approaches is that they do not provide for hypotheses to be falsified or replicated, so it is very difficult to provide conclusive evidence to settle the debates one way or another.

More recently, a few studies are utilizing modern information technology in order to analyze the
statistical characteristics of texts and to resolve the
synoptic problem scientifically [4][5].

However, those studies have only been concerned
with the chronological aspects to the construction of
the Gospels. Thus, they have not addressed the
synchronic semantic problems of how the central
teachings of Christianity are dependent on four
Gospels as a set of “canonical texts,” rather than on
just one.

2. The Aims of this Study

The central aim of this study is to develop a
scientific information-technological method to
analyze semantic differences that arise between
multiple overlapping “canonical texts”. We believe
that this method can be applied not just to the Bible
but also to the interpretation of the systematic
thinking embodied within collections of “canonical
texts” in other spheres.

Specifically, the goals of this study are to develop a
method that can analyze:
- How do the central messages emerge through the
  existence of multiple overlapping “canonical
texts”?
- How are these central messages modified under
different combinations of the “canonical texts”?
- How does each text contribute to the construction
  of the central messages?

And, to apply this method to the four traditional
Gospels included in the Bible and to compare with
the Catechism of the Catholic Church and to discuss
the results obtained. Through these aims, this
study illustrates numerically which messages
Christianity has sought to convey with the selection
of the four traditional Gospels.

3. Synoptic Network

3.1. Network Representation

Various methods have been utilized to represent
human cognition throughout history. Recently,
network representation seems to be one of the most
promising methods.

There are many examples of network
representations in various fields, such as semantic
networks in linguistics and cognitive science [6],
Social Network Analysis in sociology [7], the analysis
of link structures that represent relations between
WWW pages [8], and citation analysis used for
analyzing scientific papers [9].

Network representation has the merit that network
structures can represent complex relationships,
making network representations particularly useful
with handling the intrinsically complex nature of
human concepts, such that exist in systematic
thoughts. The effectiveness of network
representation has been demonstrated in a study that
focused on the Bible and Christian thoughts by
analyzing a co-citation network constructed from
documents by prominent theologians and extracting
their characteristics [10].

3.2. Relationships between Parts of the Synoptic
Texts

The internal structures of the Gospels are divided
into segments that are called pericopes. Pericope is
an ancient Greek words meaning cut-out. Each
pericope corresponds to a small segment of a Biblical
story that was transmitted orally.

In a synopsis, pericope units are identified for each
Gospel and the corresponding pericopes in each
Gospel are arranged in parallel and numbered such
as No. 235. However, a particular pericope in one
Gospel may correspond to multiple pericopes in
another Gospel.

This one-to-many relationship is due to the editing
process, as each Gospel writer combined pericopes
that he believed to be related. Thus, if one author
saw a connection between one pericope to several
others, that particular pericope unit would be
repeated in a number of sections within the Gospel.
Accordingly, there are many pericopes in the four
Gospels that have the same verses, because they were
taken and edited from the same source pericope. In
other words, the relationships between pericopes can
be identified by matching common verses in the
various Gospels.

For example, Fig.1 shows some part of pericope No.
235. Fig.1 depicts some corresponding Bible verses of
Mark and Luke, included in periscope No. 235. The
Bible verses are identified by the chapter number and
verse number, such as “Mark 13:19” as depicted in
Fig.1. The pericopes are also identified by the number,
such as “No. 235”. Fig.2 shows the all included verses
and the relationships for the same pericope as
depicted in a “Synopsis of the Four Gospels” [2]. The
periscope No. 235 includes Matthew 24:23, Mark
of those verses are similar, such as Mark 13:19 and
Luke 17:22 as depicted in Fig.1.

Fig.1 Example of a periscope (some part of periscope
No 235 “The Day of the Son of Man”.)
As Fig. 2 shows, pericopes containing verses in common with pericope No. 235 are Nos. 103, 290, 291, 296 and 302. This suggests that the writer of Matthew perceived some relationships between pericopes 235, 103, 290, 291 and 296. Similarly, the writer of Mark imagined relationships to 290, 291, while the writer of John make a link between pericopes 235 and 302.

![Fig. 2 Example of pericope relationships](image)

### 3.3. Constructing the Synoptic Network

The strategy used in constructing this network based on a single synopsis is to regard pericopes as nodes and the relationships between pericopes as edges (in Fig. 1, the pericope 235 would be a node with edges to other nodes indicated by the arrows).

Different synopses will differ slightly in terms of both how pericopes are defined and their correspondences due to author interpretation. This study uses the “Synopsis of the Four Gospels” [2] based on Nestle Aland’s “Greek New Testament” (version 26), as this is believed to be the basis for various synopses that have been used as data source in defining pericopes and their relationships. Tables 1 and 2 present numerical data relating to the synoptic network.

#### Table 1. Parameters of the synoptic network of the four Gospels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nodes (Size)</th>
<th>367</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edges</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 2. Subgraphs in the synoptic network of the four Gospels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of subgraph</th>
<th>Number of subgraphs</th>
<th>Total nodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Free)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The Significance of the Four Gospels

#### 4.1. Clustering and Extracting the Core

Although the maximum connected subgraph for the computed synoptic network contains the majority of nodes, this fact makes it difficult to identify its internal structure. In order to identify the internal structure, the maximum connected subgraph was clustered and the core element was extracted.

The procedure for clustering was as follows:
1. Detect cliques (sections where all nodes are completely interconnected) within the maximum connected subgraph. Edges which included in detected cliques are highlighted with bold lines in Fig. 3.
2. Detect nodes of cliques that are shared by more than one clique.
3. Combine cliques sharing a node and form a cluster (colored area in Fig. 3).

The feature of this algorithm is the ability to change cluster size by setting the size of cliques to be detected (i.e., more than three). If a created cluster is too large and its internal structure is not clear, then the algorithm can be reset to form a cluster by using larger cliques as depicted in Fig. 3.

In this study, a detected cluster consisting of three or more cliques is regarded as a normal cluster. The maximum normal cluster is again divided according to cliques that are larger than four, which are called core clusters. The hierarchical clustering algorithm is shown in Fig. 4.

![Fig. 3. Differences of the resultant clusters dependent on the clique sizes](image)

The clustering algorithm is applied to connected subgraphs. In terms of node connection strengths, the strength of a subgraph is weaker than that of a normal cluster, which in turn is weaker than a core cluster. Thus, normal clusters are extracted from the maximum subgraph and core clusters are extracted from the maximum normal cluster.
The result of applying this clustering algorithm to the synoptic network for the four Gospels was that eight normal clusters were extracted. A second process of clustering applied to the maximum normal cluster (size 57) extracted four core clusters. Table 3 presents data concerning these clusters.

Fig.5 shows the clustered maximum connected subgraph of the synoptic network for the four Gospels. This graph is made by Graphviz.

The elements of the core clusters are shown in Table 4, where the numbers indicate pericope reference number in Nestle-Aland [2].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Cluster</th>
<th>Pericope Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>203, 294, 295, 296, 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>103, 160, 235, 288, 289, 291, 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>81, 100, 166, 263, 284, 309, 313, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>97, 117, 188, 240, 247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Comparisons of Gospel Combinations

Four core clusters were extracted from the synoptic network based on the four Gospels. These core clusters occupy the central position of the network. This indicates that the core clusters represent the central concerns of the Gospel writers and the messages that they sought to convey.

In order to investigate how the central messages would differ according to the combination of the traditional Gospels, four further synoptic networks were created based on the different possible combinations of just three of the Gospels. The resultant core clusters and elements are shown in Tables 5 – 8.

A’, B’, and C’ indicate the partial core clusters that lack some elements compared to the clusters A, B, and C.
While another set of synoptic networks was created by combining just two Gospels together, only the combinations of Matthew + John and of Luke + John generate the core clusters of B' and C'. Synoptic networks based on only one Gospel failed to generate any core clusters.

These results indicate that the selection of four overlapping, but variant texts as a canon has been extremely effective in highlighting the core messages through an intricate network of interrelatedness created by the common verses.

Specific insights that can be gained from Tables 5-8 are as follows:

- Cluster C does not emerge when John is not included, suggesting that it is a characteristic of John. However, pericope 284 seems to be dependent on Matthew.
- Cluster D is dependent on both Luke and John. The relationships of the four Gospels and the core clusters are shown in Fig.6.

4.3. What do the four clusters represent?

The theological significance of these clusters can be interpreted by looking at how the constituent pericopes match to sections of the Bible.

Cluster A includes the verses Mt25:1-13 and Mr13:33-37, which relate to the teaching that we should always be prepared for the Day of Judgment, because we do not know when it will come. Those verses are advocating an eschatological preparation of mind. Cluster A would seem to be dependent on Matthew, which has traditionally been seen as an attempt to evangelize non-Christian Jewish people. Matthew emphasizes the urgency of becoming a Christian.

Cluster B is also concerned with eschatology (e.g., Lk17:22-37), but it also foretells of the persecution (Mr13:9-13) and recommends the path of discarding everything (Mt10:37-39). This cluster may be interpreted as providing concrete preparation guidance for the Day of Judgment. As a universal cluster, clearly all the Gospel writers were concerned about preparing for the Day of Judgment.

Cluster C appears to be related to teachings to the community of disciples, such as serving each other (Mt18:1-5) and not judging others (Lk6:37-42). It is a focus in John, which is believed to be the latest of the Gospels. It is thought that the focus on the preservation of the church and resolving inner problems emerged when the Gospel according to John was written.

Cluster D seems to be related to the Beelzebub Controversy (Lk11:14-23) over whether miracles were due to demons or not. While this cluster emerges in John and Luke, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark
appear to be less interested in demons. There has been much debate about what are the central messages of the Gospels. The results from the present statistical analyses of the computed synoptic networks indicate that preparing for the Day of Judgment (A, B) and promoting proper attitudes in disciples (B, C) were the central messages of the Gospel writers.

The analysis of multiple synoptic networks based on different combinations of the four Gospels indicates that the same core clusters still emerge when the Gospel according to Mark is excluded. This finding is consistent with the results of previous Biblical studies that suggest that Mark is probably the basis for all four Gospels.

On the other hand, in the traditional canonical interpretation such as “Catechism of The Catholic Church” [11], eschatological teaching is not thought as important messages of Jesus Christ in Catholic Church. Famous historical theologians’ common central dogma is salvation through incarnation of the God [10] rather than eschatological teaching.

Traditional literary-based approaches have generated many hypotheses about the central messages of the four Gospels. However, because these literary-based approaches do not provide methods of objectively evaluating and testing their hypotheses, this study proposes a synoptic network analysis method that makes it possible to scientifically and objectively detect the central messages of the synoptic Gospels.

5. Synoptic network of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

How different the messages of the Gospels with those of later Christian theology? To compare that, the Catholic dogmatic messages were analyzed by the same method. The target text is “the Catechism of the Catholic church” [11]. The Catechism is thought to be the brief summary of central teachings of the Catholic church. The latest Catechism, which made in the era of John Paul II was analyzed in this paper.

The messages of the Catechism were extracted and compared with those of the four Gospels. The differences between the messages of the Apostoles and the Catholic church were examined. The each item of the Catechism has identical number. The number is used as the ID when the item is cited or referred. The ID number varies 1 to 2865.

The relationships between those numbered items are complicated, and it is not rare that one item is related to more than several items. It is possible to construct a network of the items by making items as nodes and relations as links, same as the case of pericopes in the Gospels. The links have direction, but to compare with the pericopes, those links were thought as not to be directed links.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9. Parameters of the synoptic network of the Catechism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nodes (Size)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Edges</strong></td>
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<th>Table 10. Subgraphs in the synoptic network of the Catechism</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Size of subgraph</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 11 Subgraphs and clusters of the Catechism</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subgraph</strong></td>
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<td>Normal clusters</td>
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<td>Core clusters</td>
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<th>Table 12 Normal clusters of the Catechism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normal cluster</strong></td>
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The number of nodes is 2865, and that of links is 3584. The size distribution of subgraph of the gained network is shown in Table 9, the size distribution of the normal cluster is shown in Table 10, the relationships of subgraph, normal cluster and core cluster is shown in Table 11. No core cluster was extracted.

Table 12 depicts the contents and the items that are included in the normal clusters of the Catechism’s network. The size 3 (minimum) normal clusters are omitted. Those normal clusters are all included in the maximum connected subgraph.

6. Comparing the teachings of the four Gospels with the Catechism

Table 13 Themes of the core clusters of the four Gospels

| Theme | A. We don't know the Day of Judgment.  
|       | B. To prepare for the Day of Judgment  
|       | C. Teachings to the community of disciples  
|       | D. Beelzebub Controversy and so on |

Table 14 Themes of the normal clusters of the Catechism

| Theme | A. The Holy Spirit and the Sacraments  
|       | B. The authorities of the church  
|       | C. The virgin Mary  
|       | D. The temptation of the sin and malice, the miracles of the Christ  
|       | E. The repentance, remittance, atonement  
|       | F. The icons  
|       | G. The human dignity as the figure of the God  
|       | H. Death  
|       | I. Poverty  
|       | J. Participation of layperson to the priesthood and the prophecy |

Table 13 depicts the themes of the core clusters of the four Gospels, and table 14 depicts those of the Catechism. The themes of the maximum 3 clusters in the Catechism’s normal clusters (correspond to A, B and C) are “the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments”, “the authorities of the church” and “the virgin Mary”. Those themes are typical to the Catholic, and not approved by many Protestant churches. Considering that the emphasized messages are typically different to the Protestant churches, it is possible that the differences between the Catholic and Protestants are the focused points when the Catechism was edited.

Other typically Catholic characteristics are the normal cluster about the icons (F).

About the message for disciples to abandon everything and to follow Jesus, that message is included in the normal cluster which size is 4 (I), but it is merely small part in the whole network.

Otherwise that, the problems of the liturgy (A) and the authority in the church are closed up. In the four Gospels, “serve each other” is one of important messages, but in the Catechism, the authority of priests is insisted on. One main characteristic of the four Gospels is the eschatological warning, but the Catechism doesn’t emphasize that. As a whole, the messages to the disciples became more suitable for religious organization and the eschatological messages were made weaken.

7. Conclusion

- The method of synoptic network analysis has been proposed that creates a network from multiple overlapping texts and extracts their central messages.
- Synoptic network analysis differs radically from traditional literary-based approaches, by incorporating methods of falsification and replicability, which are essential in order to scientifically evaluated and test various hypotheses about the central messages of a canon.
- Synoptic network analysis was applied to the traditional four Gospels and four central messages were detected. This study also investigated how the central messages change according to the combination of Gospels, as well as examining the interdependencies between the various messages and the different Gospels.
- The messages of the Catholic Church were extracted from the relationships of the items in the Catechism same as the case of the pericopes of the four Gospels.
- The uniqueness of the Catholic is one of the focused points of the Catechism’s messages. It is supposed that the Catechism was edited on the effects of the Protestants’ teachings.
- In the Catechism, the recommendations to the disciples were changed, and the eschatological messages were weakened.

This study has employed the unit of the pericope which is used in general Biblical studies. However, the method developed in this study utilizes the pericope units to yield more scientific and objective results.

The developed synoptic network analysis method can also be applied to other textual canons, apart from the Bible, that consist of multiple, overlapping texts that form a single body of systematic thought. The method is particularly relevant for religions,
such as Buddhism and Islam, and for schools of political and social ideology that can draw on a rich tapestry of discourse, as well as fables and myths that have been passed down through various manuscripts. But in order to apply this method to other texts, it is needed to develop a scientific numerical method to evaluate similarity of two parts of some texts.


Appendix
Correspondence between pericope reference numbers and Bible verses
(Only main elements, referential verses are omitted).

| No. | Core cluster A | | Core cluster B | | Core cluster C | | Core cluster D |
|-----|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 203 | Lk12:35–48    | 103               | Mt10:37–39        | 81               | Lk6:37–42         |
| 294 | Mr13:33–37    | 160               | Mt16:24–28/Mr8:34–37/Mr9:1/Lk9:23–27 | 100               | Mt10:17–25        |
| 296 | Mt24:37–44    | 288               | Mt24:3–8/Mr13:3–8/Lk21:7–11 | 263               | Mt20:20–28/Mr10:35–45 |
|     |                     | 302               |                     | 313               | Lk22:24–30        |
|     |                     | 322               |                     | 322               | Jn15:18–25        |
|     |                     |                     |                     | 97                | Mt9:32–34         |
|     |                     |                     |                     | 117               | Mt12:22–30/Mr3:22–27 |
|     |                     |                     |                     | 188               | Lk11:14–23        |
|     |                     |                     |                     | 240               | Jn7:14–39         |
|     |                     |                     |                     | 247               | Jn8:48–59         |