

## JOHN AND THE OTHERS: TO WHOM DOES THE “WE” IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL’S PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE REFER?

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### ABSTRACT

In both its prologue and the epilogue, the Fourth Gospel uses a corresponding first person pronoun in the plural form: *we*. This raises a question for the reader: what is the identity of the ones who say “we have seen his glory” (1:14) and “we know that his testimony is true” (21:24)? To answer this question, other textual indicators from the Fourth Gospel have to be taken into account, in particular those where the reader is directly addressed by the author (19:35: the unique witness of Jesus’ death at the cross; 20:30-31: not simply the book’s ending, but rather its statement of purpose, attached to the confession of Thomas). Additionally, there is the evidence of the so-called Muratorian Canon, according to which the other disciples encouraged John to write his Gospel and read along with him what he wrote down. This article sets out the following argument: the “we” in question must be interpreted as including the author himself as the chief witness. In the role of spokesman, he finds himself in the midst of a circle of eyewitnesses. Furthermore, the “we” given in the prologue does not suggest an identification with the readers, nor should it be interpreted as a substitute for “I”, as though it were a plural of majesty (or the “we” of authoritative testimony, as Richard Bauckham has argued). Thus, the Fourth Gospel is framed by John’s testimony together with that of his fellow eyewitnesses.

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## KEYWORDS

Fourth Gospel; Gospel of John; “We” passages; Muratorian Canon; Eyewitnesses.

## INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Gospel is intriguing for its combination of theological and literary-historical aspects. Theological, by presenting Jesus of Nazareth as a person of heavenly descent, for already in the prologue the Gospel asserts that the divine Word became man (1:14). Literary-historical, insofar as the approach differs from the synoptic tradition, though that does not make the Fourth Gospel less literary and historical in nature than the synoptic Gospels. Various perspectives in the past few decades have again drawn attention to what makes John’s testimony so distinct.<sup>1</sup> This renewed attention to John’s testimony does not take away from the fact that the Fourth Gospel passes on a particular theological message: it is written with the explicit aim that the readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:30-31).

For my working hypothesis I have taken as my starting point the traditional view that the apostle John was the author of the Fourth Gospel (I will use ‘John’ as the author’s name); that he is also the anonymous beloved disciple who is frequently mentioned in this gospel; that the Synoptic Gospels precede the Gospel of John, which according to early Christian tradition was published in Ephesus as last of the four. Today several other views are maintained, however they do not need to be considered here, since my particular intention is to offer an interpretation of some texts from the Fourth Gospel.

One view is that of Martin Hengel, which does not consider the apostle John to be the author and the beloved disciple but the presbyter John,<sup>2</sup> who would be further a very obscure figure in early Christianity. Neither do I agree with the view that attributes the authorship to the so-called Johannine community,<sup>3</sup> which would mean a collective of writers. And like many others,

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. STIBBE, Mark W. *John as Storyteller. Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; BLOMBERG, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues & Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001; BAUCKHAM, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; BARTHOLOMÄ, Philipp F. *The Johannine Discourses and the Teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics: A Comparative Approach to the Authenticity of Jesus’ Words in the Fourth Gospel*. Diss. Heverlee, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> HENGEL, Martin. *Die johanneische Frage: ein Lösungsversuch*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Two pivotal publications with this view: MARTYN, Louis L. *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979; BROWN, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. London: Chapman, 1979. Cf. CULPEPPER, R. Alan. *The Johannine School*. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975; reprint 2007. A cogent critique of the community hypothesis has been offered by BAUCKHAM, Richard (ed.). *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

I also take issue with the view with which John Robinson is often associated, that dates the Gospel of John even prior to 70 AD,<sup>4</sup> since the early Christian tradition lists this gospel as being *published* last. The word ‘published’ leaves room for the idea that the writer could have worked on the book earlier. In this regard I leave it undecided as to whether or not John made use of the Synoptic Gospels or had been acquainted with the synoptic tradition.

I wish to attempt to answer the following question: in the Fourth Gospel who is the author referred to as “we”? Firstly, this question concerns the prologue and the epilogue when the first person plural is used, respectively: “we beheld his glory” (1:14) and “we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). Secondly, and as a supplement, other references by the author should also be considered, especially when the writer speaks directly to the readers. He uses remarkable congruity in regard to the witness about the death of the Crucified One: ‘He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe’ (19:35); as well as in regard to the aim of the gospel: “...these signs are written so that you may believe” (20:30-31). Prior to my exegesis I will provide my own translation of these four key texts and also of three other texts from the Johannine literature.<sup>5</sup> The other texts (1 John 5:15; 3 John 9 and 12) are more or less parallel to the key texts.

In the convention of the ancient Middle East, wisdom literature and prophetic writings bore the names of the authors but historiography was anonymously published.<sup>6</sup> Historians preferred to conceal their identity in their writings. That is also the case with the Fourth Gospel. The first generation readers knew by whom they were addressed. Readers from following generations could identify the author by the heading of the gospel text, through indications from the Church Fathers, or by reconstructing the identity of the beloved disciple and writer from the content.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the anonymity of historiography comes an expression of purpose written in the passive form. John says: ‘these [signs] are recorded’ ...

<sup>4</sup> ROBINSON, John A.T. *The priority of John*. London: SCM Press, 1985; BERGER, Klaus. *Im Anfang war Johannes. Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*. Stuttgart: Quell, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> All other Bible citations between double quotation marks are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from the English Standard Version.

<sup>6</sup> Different than in Greek-Roman historiography, where the author habitually mentions his name in the prologue. See BAUM, Armin D. The Anonymity of the New Testament History Books: A Stylistic Device in the Context of Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Literature. *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008), p. 120-142.

<sup>7</sup> The anonymity of the beloved disciple concurs with the anonymity of the gospel of which he is the author. According to Baum the usage of the third person in John can best be taken as autobiographical. See BAUM, Armin D. Autobiografische Wir- und Er-Stellen in den neutestamentlichen Geschichtsbüchern im Kontext der antiken Literaturgeschichte. *Biblica* 88 (2007), p. 473-495 [494-494].

and not: ‘... I have recorded’. Compare 1 Maccabees 9:22 – the phrase is not written at the conclusion of the book but at the conclusion of the part about Judas Maccabaeus: “Now the rest of the acts of Judas, and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and his greatness, have not been recorded, but they were very many.” (NRSV; also see 1 Maccabees 16:23).

The use of “we” in the prologue and the epilogue of the Fourth Gospel is even more striking. Why is this book enclosed by the first person plural? And by using that plural, what does the author – who apparently prefers to conceal himself in his material – want to make clear to his readers? These questions will be pursued in the present essay, which consists of two parts. Part 1 deals with the prologue, part 2 with the epilogue of the Gospel of John. It will be argued that for both passages John, as the last surviving apostle, was the chief witness, and that there was a group of other eyewitnesses with him. Thus, the Fourth Gospel is framed by John’s testimony together with that of his fellow eyewitnesses.

## 1. “WE” IN THE PROLOGUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

### John 1:14

ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. The Word became a man, a person of flesh and blood; he pitched his tent among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the Father’s Only Begotten, full of grace and truth.

#### 1.1 *We beheld*

To readers of the Gospel of John it is not immediately clear who are meant by those who beheld the glory of the incarnate Word. Does “we” exclusively point to the author, or does it include him and other witnesses, or is it the author together with the believing readers, the Johannine community? The text only says what the “we” beheld. This does not concern “witnessing”. That is mentioned in the next verse about John the Baptist. In fact he would be the first eyewitness of God revealed in the flesh (1:29-32). Verse 14 remains ambiguous to its readers.<sup>8</sup>

What does John mean precisely with “to behold”? Based on ἐθεασάμεθα some commentators refer to mystical gazing at a deeper reality.<sup>9</sup> The Greek verb

<sup>8</sup> BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 381. From verse 14 a new section of the prologue begins that reflects on the redemptive historical line in verses 1-13. See WATT, Jan G. van der. The Composition of the Prologue of John’s Gospel: The Historical Jesus Introducing Divine Grace. *Westminster Theological Journal* 57.2 (1995), p. 311-332.

<sup>9</sup> For instance THYEN, Hartwig. *Das Johannesevangelium*. HNT. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, p. 95-97.

that John uses means: to observe something unusual.<sup>10</sup> However, it is important to bear in mind that something unusual does not necessarily refer to mysticism.

(1) In the Johannine writings “to see” or “to behold” are practically synonymous, as the following phrase shows: “no one has ever seen God”, where *ἑώρακεν* or *τεθέαται* can be used (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; see also John 1:32; 1:38; 4:35; 6:5; 11:45);

(2) The Greek form of the verb has an aorist aspect, whereby an obvious fact is expressed of what the “we-group” has seen;

(3) The prologue of the Gospel of John shows a clear parallel with the prologue of the first Epistle of John: “what we beheld” (*ὃ ἑθεασάμεθα*) is like “which we have seen with our eyes” (*ὃ ἑώρακαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν*).<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, even though the term “witness” is not used here, what the “we-group” refers to is all about perceiving with their eyes and ears – later on these people would become eye and ear-witnesses. The statement of purpose is comparable to this: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples” (20:30: *ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ]*, see also the comment of the evangelist: *Τοσαῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ σημεῖα πεποηκότος ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν* (12:37)).<sup>12</sup>

It is precisely their seeing with their own eyes that does not apply to the readers of John, neither the first nor the later ones. Who then are those indicated by “we”? The problem gets even more complicated when we consider that the prologue contains two other “we”-statements: one in the same verse: “the Word pitched his tent among us (*ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*)” and one in verse 16: “we have all received, grace upon grace (*ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν, καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος*).” The preceding verses stated that the Word came to the world. The world did not know him; the Jewish people (“his own”) did not receive him. Yet God’s children gave him a believing welcome. One can thus envisage the “we” in verse 14 coming from within the circle of God’s children, without forgetting the wider context, namely the Jewish people and the world.

Within the context, then, the connection is as follows: the incarnate Word has pitched his tent among *us* (which reminds of the Tent of Meeting in Israel, cf. Rev.21), so that *we* could see his glory (which is a reminder of Moses’ question whether he could see God’s glory, Ex.33:18-19<sup>13</sup>). There is a physical

<sup>10</sup> LOUW, Johannes P. & NIDA, Eugene A. (eds.). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, v. 2. Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1989, p. 279.

<sup>11</sup> Neither of the two passages mentions the other eyewitnesses by name, probably because the apostle was considered to be the chief witness. Evidently, the force of the argument is the collective testimony of all eyewitnesses (cf. the named apostles and the group of 500 unnamed brothers and sisters in 1 Cor. 15:1-7).

<sup>12</sup> More than with normal seeing, the own activity is expressed here, according to SCHLATTER, Adolf. *Der evangelist Johannes. Ein Kommentar zum vierten Evangelium*, Dritte Auflage. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960, p. 24: “Dieses θεάσασθαι hat aus den Jüngern “Zeugen” gemacht”.

<sup>13</sup> KEENER, Craig S. “‘We beheld His Glory!’ (John 1:14)”. In: ANDERSON, Paul N. et al. (eds.). *John, Jesus, and History*. Volume 2: *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009, p. 15-25.

presence of the incarnate Word among physical people.<sup>14</sup> In this case, we may think of the “we-group” as being especially the disciples of Jesus and others who have heard and seen him (cf. 20:30-31). In verse 16 that circle becomes wider again as it includes all God’s children.<sup>15</sup>

The subject of verse 14 is not *we all*, but we as *eyewitnesses*, we who beheld him for all God’s children. After all, not everyone has seen Christ (20:29: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”<sup>16</sup>). The testimonies of those who have seen him need to convince others to believe without seeing. Thus, the prologue concerns the interaction with Jesus when he, the Word, became a man of flesh and blood. Later his name is mentioned in verse 17: Jesus Christ. In verse 18 the prologue ends: “No one [that is: nobody] has ever seen God [that is: never met him physically]; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” [because we have seen the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father] – through Jesus Christ God is made known.” Seeing Jesus could be so normal that one could to ask him where he lived and promptly be invited by him to come to that place (1:38b-39: Andrew and the other disciple who later would become the beloved disciple).

Thus, by using the first person plural the author does not have the intention of identifying himself with his readers. Instead, he wants to distinguish himself from them on an essential point, namely that he, and not the readers, was present to behold the events that are recorded. He belongs to the eyewitnesses, the readers do not. He met Jesus in person, while his readers did not. There are now two probable interpretations. “We” could be a substitute for ‘I’ – a plural of majesty or in this case a plural of authority, as Richard Bauckham purports.<sup>17</sup> Notice, however, that the testimony of John the Baptist is stated in the form of the first person singular, in the “I-form” (1:15; 1:19-20; 1:32). Therefore, most of the other exegetes rightly prefer the idea that the author identifies himself with the others of his inner circle who have heard and seen the same as he did; they too are eyewitnesses of the glory of the incarnate Word.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 404.

<sup>15</sup> Phillips also draws attention to the broadening of the “we-group” that takes place in the prologue of John, but he disregards the distinction between verse 14 and verse 16 regarding the “we-group”. PHILLIPS, Peter M. *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. A Sequential Reading*. London: T&T Clark, 2006, p. 200-201; 210-211. This broadening is fully disregarded by MCHUGH, John F. *John 1-4*. ICC. London: T&T Clark, 2009, p. 56, 64.

<sup>16</sup> In this “beatitude” prompted by the confession of Thomas a distinction is also made between “seeing” and “not seeing”. See HOUWELINGEN, P.H.R. van. *Johannes. Het evangelie van het Woord*. CNT. Fourth revised printing. Kampen: Kok, 2010, p. 396-398; MOLONEY, Francis J. *The Gospel of John*. Sacra Pagina. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 538.

<sup>17</sup> BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 372: “the plural intensifies the authority expressed”.

<sup>18</sup> For instance the classic commentary of SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf. *Das Johannesevangelium*. Erster Teil. Freiburg: Herder, 1965, p. 245-246.

## 1.2 *We beheld his glory*

What exactly is meant by “glory”? Usually a reference is immediately made to 2:11, where the evangelist writes: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory (καὶ ἐφανερώσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ). And his disciples believed in him.” After that occurrence more instances follow in John’s Gospel where Jesus’ divine glory is revealed (7:39; 11:4,40; 12:16,20-33,41; 13:31-32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:5,22-24).

It is not putting it too strongly to say that we now have the main theme of the Fourth Gospel. In order to see the glory of Jesus Christ one needs to be aware of what consistently comes to the fore: his unique relation with God. Jesus Christ is from heavenly descent, he is God’s own Son. However, Jesus showing his glory or the revelation of his glory is not exactly the same as what John begins to say in the prologue. Here the “we-group” is the subject: we beheld his glory (ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ). The Son of God is seen by the eyes of those who were with him at that moment; they beheld his divine glory.

It is well known that the transfiguration on the mount is not recorded in John’s Gospel. That event is described in detail in the Synoptic Gospels. A glorification of Christ would also correspond with John’s approach very well: describing Jesus’ earthly life in the light of his divine glory. So we ask: why do the Synoptic Gospels have this central instance but John does not? The suggestion of Paul Anderson is as follows. According to 1:25 John the Baptist emphatically denies being Elijah or being “the Prophet” – that is a prophet like Moses.<sup>19</sup> The synoptic writers link both men to John the Baptist. The Fourth Gospel, however, presents Jesus as the great successor of Moses (sent by the Father) and Elijah (who did extraordinary miracles). It was truly a climactic experience in Jesus’ life on earth when those two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared on the mount of transfiguration. John, however, does not mention this climax of his life. Instead, he demonstrates how Jesus’ whole ministry follows the line of Moses and Elijah, and by doing so he supersedes their appearance.

Anderson sees a contradiction between John and the Synoptic Gospels. This is an interesting approach, but it would be preferable to consider another solution. The phrase “we beheld his glory” can be an allusion to the transfiguration as reported in the synoptic tradition. According to the first three Gospels, John was present at that event; he was there with his brother James and also with Simon Peter. They witnessed that high point in his life on earth. However,

<sup>19</sup> ANDERSON, Paul N. *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel. An Introduction to John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, p. 209; *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus. Modern Foundations Reconsidered*. London: T&T Clark, 2006, p. 156-157.

that occurrence was not a public matter, which is why the Fourth Gospel leaves it out. Three arguments speak in favour of this approach:

1. In the prologue the glory becoming visible to the eyes of men is more precisely described as the glory of the Father's Only Begotten (δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός). In this description the echo of the heavenly voice resounds on the mount of transfiguration; that voice sounds from a cloud (a sign of God's presence) and says: "this is my beloved Son!"

2. We read an eyewitness report of the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-18a. In the address of this letter, the name Simeon Peter is prominently mentioned; the author also uses the 'apostolic plural' in his letter.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of how one might assess the authenticity of 2 Peter, the report is about the three disciples who were present on the mountain. "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (ἀλλ' ἐπόπται γενηθέντες τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλειότητος). For when he received honor and glory (τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν) from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory (ὑπὸ τῆς μεγαλοπρεποῦς δόξης), 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased'." This passage too refers to a "we-group". They are people who have seen the divine glory in Jesus Christ with their eyes and have also heard the heavenly voice with their ears.

3. In their report about the transfiguration on the mount, Matthew and Mark only mention the hearing of the voice. Luke 9 is similar to John's prologue as he accentuates the experience of *seeing*. Luke declares that Moses and Elijah appeared, or rather "were seen" (verse 30: ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ) in heavenly glory. He also mentions that Peter and the two other disciples saw Jesus in all his splendour: "they saw his glory" (verse 32: εἶδαν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ). Luke's record concludes with: "And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen" (verse 36). The phrase 'in those days' suggests that they did speak about it later, as evidenced for instance by Luke's record in this reference.

Finally I want to make one additional comment. The remarkable ἐσκήνωσεν in John 1:14 could refer to what Peter said on the mountain (Luke 9:33b also found in Matthew and Mark): "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents (ποιήσωμεν σκηναὺς τρεῖς), one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah".<sup>21</sup> On that mountain John experienced that Jesus himself had set up his tent.

<sup>20</sup> HOUWELINGEN, P.H.R. van. *2 Petrus en Judas. Testament in tweevoud*. CNT. Fourth revised printing. Kampen: Kok, 2011, p. 45; followed by RUF, Martin G. *Die heiligen Propheten, eure Apostel und ich. Metatextuelle Studien zum zweiten Petrusbrief*. Diss. Utrecht 2010, p. 108-109. Compare the apostolic plural used sometimes by Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the usage of σκηνώμα in 2 Peter 1:14, right before the recall of the event of the transfiguration.



In his commentary about the passage of John 1:14, Herman Ridderbos deems the link with the transfiguration to be unlikely; at the same time he does refer to Luke 9 and 2 Peter 1.<sup>22</sup> B.F. Westcott makes only a mere textual reference to Luke 9 without drawing the conclusion that, in the prologue of John, an allusion is possibly made to the transfiguration.<sup>23</sup>

In the introduction to his commentary on John, C.K. Barrett has pointed out that John did not mistakenly leave out important synoptic passages. This observation could explain the absence of the transfiguration in the Fourth Gospel. Barrett writes: “John safeguards their meaning by stripping them of their historical individuality and building them into the theological framework of his gospel”.<sup>24</sup> This means that the evangelist subsumed the transfiguration in his prologue, and by doing so he used it as thematic principle for his entire gospel.

As an alternative for the transfiguration John records a heavenly voice in chapter 12, which we do not find in the Synoptic Gospels. His passage starts with the request from Greeks whether they could see Jesus, or rather meet him (12:21: θέλομεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἰδεῖν). During that meeting Jesus calls upon his heavenly Father: “Father, glorify your name!” (πάτερ, δόξασόν σου τὸ ὄνομα). Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it and will glorify it again” (Καὶ ἐδόξασα καὶ πάλιν δοξάσω (verse 28); also see 8:54 and 17:4-8, to be considered as a commentary on this glorification). That voice sounded in the presence of a large crowd of people; ὁ ὄχλος is the subject of this entire chapter. “The crowd that was there and heard it said...” (verse 29: ὁ οὖν ὄχλος ὁ ἐστὼς καὶ ἀκούσας), represents a collective reaction: Greeks, disciples, bystanders (Jews). Unlike the transfiguration, where only three disciples were present, this glorification of Jesus happened in public. It is an ‘international’ signal, intended to show that the kingdom of God will be opened for Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, where Jesus who is the incarnate Word appears, divine glory is made audible and visible. Now, John together with the other eyewitnesses says: *we* were privileged to behold that divine glory. This means that all readers of the Fourth Gospel are assured that John, as the last surviving apostle, represents a group of eyewitnesses who are in a position to confirm and support his testimony.

<sup>22</sup> RIDDERBOS, Herman. *Het evangelie naar Johannes: proeve van een theologische exegese*, v. 1. Kampen: Kok, 1987, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> WESTCOTT, B.F. *The Gospel according to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes*. Reprinted. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> BARRETT, C.K. *The Gospel according to St John. An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. London: SPCK, 1955, p. 42 in the first edition; somewhat shorter in the second edition (1978), 53.

<sup>25</sup> KIM, Byun-Gook. *The Voice from Heaven in the Gospel of John. Meaning and Function of John 12:20-36*. Kampen: Mondiss, 1998, p. 84-86, 94.

## 2. "WE" IN THE EPILOGUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

### John 21:24-25

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητῆς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας ταῦτα, καὶ οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθῆς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν. Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ' ἓν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία.

This is the disciple who bears testimony to these facts and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is trustworthy. There are also many other things which Jesus did. I suppose that if they were written down one by one, the world would be too small to contain the books that would have to be written.

### 2.1 Chapter 21 as a whole

A common view is that chapter 21 was originally not part of the Fourth Gospel. Consequently, there would have been no direct relation between the witness of the prologue and that of the epilogue. It is necessary, therefore, that we deal with a preliminary question: How does chapter 21 relate to the rest of John's Gospel? Three options are possible:

1. Chapter 20:30-31 is the conclusion of John's Gospel; chapter 21 is a later addition;
2. Chapter 21 belongs to the whole of John's Gospel;
3. Only the verses 24-25 are a later addition.

Option 3, although generally accepted today and in itself grammatically possible because the verses 24-25 are two independent clauses, may be ruled out for the following reasons. In the first place we should take note that the comment of the evangelist already starts in verse 23. Οὗτός points back to the beloved disciple mentioned there; it does not have reference outside of the gospel text.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, verse 24a contains three favourite terms of John: ἀληθῆς, μαρτυρεῖν, μαρτυρία. In the second place, without the addition of the verses 24-25, chapter 21 would have ended without a formal conclusion, which would seem very strange.<sup>27</sup> In that case the end would seem to be a question

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<sup>26</sup> THYEN, *Das Johannesevangelium*, p. 793. JONGE, M. de. *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God*. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977, p. 212: not without reason does verse 20 point back to chapter 13, where the beloved disciple as such is mentioned for the first time.

<sup>27</sup> BAUM, Armin D. The Original Epilogue (John 20:30-31), the Secondary Appendix (John 21:1-23), and the Editorial Epilogues (21:24-25) of John's Gospel. Observations against the Background of Ancient Literary Conventions. In: BIRD, Michael F. & MASTON, Jason (eds.). *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature, and Theology. Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 117-160 [149]. Contrary to Culpepper, who interprets 24-25

of Jesus to his beloved disciple in direct speech, a question that would remain up in the air: “If it is my will that he [Peter] remain until I come, what is that to you?” In the third place, in John’s Gospel we find a parallel in which the author corrects a wrong interpretation of an utterance from Jesus, namely 2:21: “But he was speaking about the temple of his body.” This shows that the verses 24-25 do not need to be taken as an editorial addition; rather, they form an integral part of chapter 21, whatever one may think about the authenticity of this chapter.<sup>28</sup>

Option 2 can be traced back to Augustine; more recent proponents of it are Hartwig Thyen and Richard Bauckham. In their view, 20:30-31 and 21:24-25 form a carefully arranged inclusion within chapter 21. Thyen considers chapter 1-20 to be a testimony to Jesus through this Gospel and regards chapter 21 as a testimony of Jesus to this Gospel.<sup>29</sup> According to Bauckham the prologue outlines the pre-history of the gospel as the epilogue does the post-history.<sup>30</sup> Many conservative exegetes share that view. However, they downplay a textual problem. How is it possible that the author of the Fourth Gospel refers to himself in three different ways, even in one sentence, and continues in the next one with the first person singular? The “we”-form evokes questions particularly in verse 24b. In Part 1 above we already saw how Bauckham tries to avoid this textual problem by interpreting this first person plural as a plural of authority.

Option 1 is favoured by most exegetes today. However, they also downplay the above mentioned problem. They state that from the verses 23/24 onward the publishers are speaking and are responsible for this chapter as a whole. They first identify the beloved disciple as the author, then they say

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as a certificate of authenticity, which would have been added by an editor, Baum argues that this would only be true for poetic literature, and only as self-identification by the author [155-156]. CULPEPPER, R. Alan. John 21:24-25: The Johannine *Sphragis*. In: ANDERSON, Paul N. e.a. (eds.). *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2. Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009, p. 349-364.

<sup>28</sup> On careful consideration of all the arguments, Porter comes to the conclusion that there are no compelling reasons whatsoever against the authenticity of chapter 21. Taking the tradition of the manuscripts into consideration, the Fourth Gospel has never been in circulation without chapter 21. PORTER, Stanley E. The Ending of John’s Gospel. In: BRACKNEY, William H. & EVANS, Craig A. (eds.). *From Biblical Criticism to Biblical Faith*. FS Lee M. Mc.Donald. Macon: Mercer, 2007, p. 55-73; see also MINEAR, Paul S. The Original Functions of John 21. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983), p. 85-98; BERGER, Klaus. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011, p. 412-413: he says among other things that a redactor could have easily removed the disagreeable “first ending” (20:30-31). The reference to “sons of Zebedee” (21:2) has a connection point only outside the Fourth Gospel (Baum, *Observations*, p. 136: the names of both sons are not mentioned, nor the names of their parents), yet the same is true for other references to the synoptic tradition, such as 11:2 (it does not point ahead to 12:1-8 but it refers to that what generally was known). This reference is made in the context of going fishing on the lake of Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> THYEN, *Das Johannesevangelium*, p. 772-774.

<sup>30</sup> BAUCKHAM, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 364-369.

that his testimony is true, and finally that one of them is making a personal comment. One wonders, however, (1) how editors speaking on behalf of the Johannine community can guarantee the testimony of an eyewitness (the general view is that the comparable reference of John 19:35 which has the third person singular – he knows that his testimony is true – is from the evangelist himself); and (2) where else in ancient literature does one find a postscript from a group of editors among whom one person rounds that off with a concluding phrase?

The epilogue of the Fourth Gospel requires further examination in regard to the used “we”-form, in comparison with the use of the third person singular and the first person singular. The verses 24a, 24b and 25 will be discussed separately.

## 2.2 *Identification of the writer*

By using the demonstrative pronoun twice, verse 24a points to the identification of the beloved disciple as the witness who has lived the longest and the writer of the book. Since the phrase “he who wrote these things” (ὁ γράψας ταῦτα) is parallel to the phrase where the purpose for writing is expressed “but these are written” (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται), one should relate that to the whole of the book. The authorship of the Fourth Gospel apparently cannot be attributed to the other disciple, Simon Peter, who played such an important role in chapter 21.<sup>31</sup> Would attributing the Fourth Gospel to the beloved disciple be fiction – an obvious attempt at giving authority to this Gospel? However, let us not gloss over the usage of the third person singular in verse 24a identifying somebody as witness being comparable to the testimony of Jesus’ death on the cross, which according to *communis opinio* is from the Evangelist.<sup>32</sup>

What happens in verse 24a is in complete agreement with John 19:35:

καὶ ὁ ἑωρακὸς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία, καὶ ἐκεῖνος οἶδεν ὅτι ἀληθῆ λέγει, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς πιστεύ[σ]ητε.

He that saw it has borne witness, and his testimony is trustworthy, and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.

The readers are directly addressed here; the testimony of Jesus’ death on the cross is aimed also (just as it counts for the witness himself too) at their

<sup>31</sup> PORTER, *The Ending of John’s Gospel*, p. 67: “The major focus is Peter, with secondary interest in the beloved disciple”.

<sup>32</sup> In fact verse 23 does not give an indication whether or not the beloved disciple was alive. Jesus gave an indication concerning Peter about the manner of his death. He did so concerning John about his exceptionally long life. RESE, Martin. *Das Selbstzeugnis des Johannesevangeliums über seinen Verfasser. Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 72 (1996), p. 75-111 [87]; KEENER, Craig S. *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, 2 Volumes. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003, p. 1240: μαρτυρῶν is durative, though one could interpret it otherwise; also see λέγει in 19:35.

profession of faith.<sup>33</sup> Think of the purpose for the writing of the whole book according to verse 20:31 “so that you also may believe” (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε). The faith, to which the writer endeavours to arouse the addressees, is closely connected with and based on past history.

Formally speaking, John 19:35 is a parenthesis where the text does not define the subject or the object of seeing. Both need to be derived from the preceding verses. The witness does not explicitly indicate himself as the author (that only comes later in 21:24). However he does so implicitly through the manner in which he addresses the readers with his stated purpose for his testimony. λέγει is durative: the witness is still speaking; he is more than his book. Seeing and hearing are closely connected (cf. 1 John 4:14: ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατήρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου).<sup>34</sup> Why is his testimony true and trustworthy?<sup>35</sup> Two aspects can be distinguished: 1. An objective aspect, in connection with the testimony: he saw it himself; 2. A subjective aspect, from the perspective of the speaker (not the author, though Scripture too can speak, see the introduction of verse 36): he knows that he says true things (ἀληθῆ is neuter plural) for Scripture was fulfilled!

Can a person guarantee his own testimony? If he is the only witness then according to the law of Moses it would not be a valid one (John 5:31-32; in connection with this see 8:14-18 as well: since Jesus testifies about himself and that testimony receives confirmation by the Father, it is legal because there are two witnesses). John 19:35 however, does not concern the legality of the witness as such but the content of his testimony as an observed fact.<sup>36</sup> That fact is ἀληθινῆ, trustworthy, because it has unearthly authenticity, dependability and quality. The beloved disciple testifies with a good conscience about Jesus' death on the cross. At the same time, as the conclusion of chapter 21 shows, he is also the author of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> BYRSKOG, Samuel. *Story as History – History as Story*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000, p. 236-237: “legitimation of the faith of those who were not eyewitnesses”; “the faith of the story is the faith of history, and vice versa”.

<sup>34</sup> See John 1:14; here it concerns his glory on the cross; see John 4:46 for Jesus as the Saviour of the world.

<sup>35</sup> The term ἀληθινῆ points to divine or heavenly truth. See 1:9; 6:32-33; 7:28; 17:3; cf. 1 John 5:20. Would no other witness of the crucifixion have been alive anymore?

<sup>36</sup> MORRIS, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Revised Edition, 1995, p. 725, footnote 100.

<sup>37</sup> THYEN is of the opinion that the Roman soldier is presented by the author as witness, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 748-749. The Greek word ἐκεῖνος would mark a second subject in the sentence. Therefore the Church Fathers have often taken this with God or Jesus as subject. However, in 13:25 and 21:7,23 we find ἐκεῖνος in combination with μαθητῆς referring to the beloved disciple; and it is also used referring to John the Baptist (5:35 > 5:33 his witness), Moses, the man born blind, Mary of Bethany, and Peter. ἐκεῖνος is John's favourite word to refer emphatically to someone, so BERNARD, J.H. *A Critical*

### 2.3 *The author as spokesperson*

Verse 24b says: “and we know that his testimony is trustworthy.” Four possible interpretations have been proposed:

(a) I, the evangelist, and you, my readers, we know that my testimony is trustworthy. The thought here is that the “we”-form would have greater importance as a claim of authority; however, as already remarked, the testimony of John the Baptist is stated in the “I”-form.

(b) I, the evangelist, know that my own testimony is trustworthy. Here the problem is that the tension between the third person singular, the first person plural and the first person singular, all occurring in one sentence, is difficult to explain.

In short, the “we” does not necessarily represent the evangelist on his own but rather the evangelist in the company of a group around him. When that is clear the two first possibilities can be dropped. Now, when we think of a “we-group”, then there are also two other possibilities:

(c) Including the evangelist: I, the evangelist, and my fellow eyewitnesses or fellow workers, we know that my testimony is trustworthy.

(d) Excluding the evangelist: We from the congregation at Ephesus<sup>38</sup>, or the authors and editors of chapter 21, know that the testimony of the evangelist is trustworthy.

Here we need to consider: when John writes “we know” (οἶδαμεν), he is always including the spokesperson, as is clear from these examples:

- 3:2: “We know that you are a teacher come from God”; Nicodemus on behalf of the Pharisees.
- 4:22: “We worship what we know”; the Samaritan woman on behalf of the Samaritans. The “you-group” is the Jews who do not know that.
- 14:5: “We do not know where you are going”; Thomas on behalf of the other disciples.

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*and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Volume II. ICC; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1942, p. 650 with the other passages: 5:35; 5:46; 9:10; 11:29; 18:17,25; 20:15-16. Formulated more precisely: it is always used for a change of subject a, via subject b, and back again to subject a. In this case, the person who has seen it (ὁ ἑωρακὼς), his testimony (ἡ μαρτυρία αὐτοῦ), he knows that he speaks the truth (ἐκεῖνος = ὁ ἑωρακὼς). Cf. 13:23-25: the beloved disciple was reclining at table, Simon Peter motioned to him [to the beloved disciple], leaned back against Jesus (ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, νεύει οὖν τούτῳ Σίμων Πέτρος, ἀναπεσὼν οὖν ἐκεῖνος). Thus, in the Gospel of John ἐκεῖνος does not mark a simple change of the subject (except when recording a conversation) but it is taking up a previously used subject in the sentence.

<sup>38</sup> GROTIUS, Hugo. *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, Volumen IV. Groningen: Zuidema, 1828, p. 287: “Loquitur Ecclesia Ephesina”. De JONGE, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God*, p. 211-213: “pluralis ecclesiasticus” [212]. BLOMBERG, *Historical Reliability*, p. 38 is thinking of the approval of a group of John’s followers from the Johannine congregation.

- 16:30: “Now we know that you know all things”; the disciples as group.
- 20:2: “... and we do not know where they have laid him”; Mary Magdalene on behalf of Peter and John. The “they-group” consists of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.<sup>39 40</sup>

Thus, when John uses the phrase “we know” in a narrative context, he includes the speaker as part of the “we-group”. One also finds this usage of the first person plural in the context of a letter that is found in 3 John: 9 and 12. Those two verses form a parallel with the epilogue of John’s Gospel:

Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ:  
 ἀλλ’ ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.  
 I wrote something to the congregation,  
 but Diotrefes who loves to have the first place among them, declines  
 to recognise us.

The “I-figure” represents only the author; the “we-group” is the author and the brothers who came to the congregation of Diotrefes with him.

Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας: καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν,  
 καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθῆς ἐστίν.  
 Everyone speaks well of Demetrius, and the Truth itself speaks for him.  
 We too speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is trustworthy.

Three witnesses are mentioned who provide a positive commendation of Demetrius: a. “everyone” = the (Johannine) Christians; b. the personified truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ who indeed is the Truth; c. our testimony as given by the group of ear- and eyewitnesses of whom the author is the representative (cf. 1 John 1:1-4). Now Gaius, the recipient of this letter, *knows* that the latter testimony (that is *ours*) is trustworthy.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> In 3:11 John probably speaks on behalf of himself and his Father, “we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony” (see 14:23); thus van HOUWELINGEN, *Johannes*, p. 94-95. Even if one likes to think of John the Baptist or of the group of disciples, yet the “we” is including Jesus. The Johannine community cannot be meant here since they cannot testify to what they have seen.

<sup>40</sup> In 7:27 and 9:24,29,31 it seems to be a matter of collective knowing certain things in which the speakers also share: it is common knowledge that, etc.

<sup>41</sup> LALLEMAN, Pieter J. *1,2 en 3 Johannes. Brieven van een kroongetuige*. CNT; Kampen: Kok, 2005, p. 99-100.

The *Muratorian Canon* provides a hint to determine the “we-group” further, line 9-16a:

The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. (To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, 'Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it.<sup>42</sup>

It was Andrew, together with the other disciple who later was called the beloved disciple, who belonged to the first disciples of Jesus (John 1:40). In line 14-15 the Latin text has the verb *recognoscere*: “while they all were considering it”. At the moment when it all was narrated, they remembered everything: it all actually happened that way. The *Muratorian Canon* relates the Fourth Gospel to recollection and recognition. John is part of a circle of eyewitnesses. We see that line 26-34 complements the reference to 1 John 1:1:

What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, saying about himself, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eyewitness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvellous deeds of the Lord, in their order.<sup>43</sup>

It appears, that John was the center of and the spokesman for a circle of eyewitnesses. Considering the relation between the prologue and the epilogue, the retrospective effect of John's position for the prologue is that the circle around John is the same “we-group” of 1:14. John does not identify himself with his readers there; neither does he use a plural of authority. He knows himself to be closely bound to the other eyewitnesses who also saw the glory of the One and Only Begotten. They are part of the same “we-group” who confirms the trustworthiness of his testimony in the epilogue as written in the Fourth Gospel.

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<sup>42</sup> Translation by METZGER, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament. Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Online: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>. See also VERHEYDEN, J. The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute. In: AUWERS, J. M. & JONGE, H. J. de (eds.). *The Biblical Canons*. Leuven: Peeters, 2003, p. 487-556.

<sup>43</sup> One could also discover something similar in Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI 14,7: “But that John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels, was urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel” (translation by J.E.L. Oulton in the Loeb-series).



## 2.4 *The author has the last word*

The singular of verse 25 still needs our attention now. The phrase “I suppose” (οἶμαι) expresses humility on the part of an ancient author who is making his own comment to his readers.

Furthermore, as Andreas Köstenberger shows after extensive research, it is an “integral part of the authorial perspective.”<sup>44</sup> In antiquity there is no precedent for such usage of οἶμαι by a later editor or a group of editors. In fact, why should one voice from a group of editors still add a last word? The probability is much greater that the author himself has the last word, considering the just given testimony of the “we-group” of which he is a constituent. The “I-form” is prepared by the impersonal construction of the statement of purpose (20:30-31).

Moreover, it has become possible through the author’s identification with the beloved disciple in verse 24a. The argument that the author never speaks in the first person singular<sup>45</sup> is not valid at the conclusion of the book anymore. The writer of the Gospel of John gives his own commentary in the verses 19-20, starting already from verse 23.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, verse 25 presents a self-conscious author who at the end is reflecting modestly on his starting point, namely that he has written this book.

Finally, verse 25 is not a substantial duplication of 20:30-31. John is not a book with two endings. Foremost, because **John 20:30-31** is not an ending but a statement of purpose.

Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ], ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ: ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.<sup>47</sup>

Many other miraculous signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written down in this book, but these are written that you

<sup>44</sup> KÖSTENBERGER, Andreas J. ‘I Suppose’ (οἶμαι): The Conclusion of John’s Gospel in Its Literary and Historical Context. In: WILLIAMS, Peter J. et al. (eds.). *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting. Essays on Context and Background*. FS Bruce W. Winter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, p. 72-88 [87].

<sup>45</sup> BAUM, Observations, p. 151. Baum himself indicates that there is a partial analogy between the books of John and Acts, if one considers the “we-passages” from Acts as biographical. In the prologue of Acts Luke uses an “I-form” (see also BAUM, *Autobiografische Wir- und Er-Stellen*).

<sup>46</sup> RESE, *Selbstzeugnis*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> The text-critical issue (πιστεύητε with the aspect of duration: “so that you would continue to believe” or πιστεύσητε with the aspect of an aorist: “so that you begin to believe”) does not need to be touched here since it does not have bearing on the theme of this article; about that see: van HOUWELINGEN, *Johannes*, p. 399; ANDERSON, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 85-87; VAN DER WATT, Jan G. *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*. London: T&T Clark, 2007, p. 10-11.

may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Here ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται does cover the whole book, because (a) the first of the σημεῖα is already recorded in chapter 2; (b) ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ has to imply the book as a whole. We also find here an impersonal passive construction, because the author keeps concealing himself in the material he is presenting. However, he connects it to the confession of Thomas that Jesus is his Lord and his God. He has reached his goal with that, because the writer desires to lead his readers to the same profession of faith as Thomas. In 12:37 the evangelist assessed their response yet with disappointment: “Though he had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in him.” The more blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

The first Epistle of John also has an objective, where the writer personally directs himself to his readers in the “I”-form:

### 1 John 5:13

Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

These things have I written to you that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God.

This objective of 1 John 5:13 is not written at the end of the epistle<sup>48</sup>, but it is connected to the confession of God’s Son being the true life (verse 12). The writer (“I”) would like to lead his readers (“you”) to the same confession of faith.

When we similarly reconstruct **John 20:30-31** in the first person plural the purpose for recording the events is expressed as follows:

Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον ἡμῶν, ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ: ταῦτα δὲ γέγραφα ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

Many other miraculous signs did Jesus in our presence, which are not written down in this book, but I have written these that you may believe

<sup>48</sup> For the sake of comparison Baum quotes four Old Testament epilogues from the Old Testament; three of them are not placed at the end (Ps. 72:20; Jer. 51:64; 1 Kings 11:41). The one of Numbers 36:13 only functions as the end of the whole book. BAUM, *Observations*, p. 125: John does not follow the Greek-Roman convention, but – if he had, in any event, a specific example in mind – the Old Testament or the early Jewish custom. See also 1 Mac.9:22.

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The above clearly shows that there is a “we-group” including the writer as eyewitnesses. There is also an “I-figure”; he is one from the “we-group” who subsequently takes up his pen to formulate his objective. The second person plural “you” indicates a community of believers engaged in a relationship with both the “I-figure” and the “we-group”.

There is still another reason why the Gospel of John does not have two endings: chapter 21:25 does not give a review of the Gospel of John but rather looks forward to the apostolic period. There Jesus’ earthly life is not in view, but his acts from heaven.<sup>49</sup> We note:

- (1) With reference to 20:30-31 we do not read the phrase ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ], “in the presence of his disciples”, nor the term σημεῖα, “signs”;
- (2) According to verse 23 the period of John’s extraordinarily long life needs to be considered. It does not make any difference whether this verse or even the whole chapter 21 would have been written by the author or by an editor. John was now at such an old age that the rumor had spread in the church that he would stay alive till Christ’s return;
- (3) Such a forward-looking view corresponds with the ending of the other gospels: Matthew ends with an eschatological perspective, the completion of the world; the long ending of Mark narrates the period after Pentecost; Luke even dedicated a whole book to that apostolic period: the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Looking back we may state that the working hypothesis as outlined in the introduction of this article proved to give a plausible and coherent explanation of the usage of the “we-form” in the prologue and the epilogue of the Fourth Gospel. Written towards the end of the first century, when nearly the entire first generation of Christians had passed away, this corresponding “we” denotes John (the last surviving apostle and therefore the chief witness) and the others (together with the group of his still-living fellow eyewitnesses). This explanation does not conflict with current models in Johannine scholarship, but offers insights that may be helpful in understanding the coherent conceptual framework of the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>49</sup> van HOUWELINGEN, *Johannes*, p. 414.

<sup>50</sup> CARSON, D. A. *The gospel according to John*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1991, p. 686: at the end of the prologue Jesus is the one who now rests at the Father’s side.

More specifically, the results of this essay may be summarised in five points:

1. In the prologue (1:1-18) and the epilogue (that formally starts in 21:23) “we” should be understood as including the author as an eyewitness. He acts as the spokesman of a circle of observers who are in a position to confirm and support his testimony.
2. Through the “we-form” the author does not wish to identify himself with his readers or to dignify his style of writing. Rather, he desires to emphasize the unique reality of being witness. The Fourth Gospel is framed by John’s testimony *together* with that of his fellow eyewitnesses.
3. In the prologue, “seeing God’s glory” could include a reference to the transfiguration. In that case “we” would point to John, James, and Peter in particular. The “we”, however, should not be restricted to those three eyewitnesses. John 12 records a public occasion of glorification, while the transfiguration was a private event.
4. In chapter 20:30-31 the Fourth Gospel gives the statement of purpose in the passive form (it is linked to the confession of Thomas), while chapter 21:24-25 differs with that because it has a more personal ending (linked with the last statement on the beloved disciple).
5. Through the eyes of John as the longest living apostle who was also the chief witness, the end of the Fourth Gospel looks forward to the apostolic period that had already started at the time of the publication of his book.

## RESUMO

Tanto em seu prólogo quanto no seu epílogo, o Quarto Evangelho usa um pronome correspondente da primeira pessoa na forma plural: *nós*. Isso levanta uma questão para o leitor: qual é a identidade daqueles que dizem “vimos a sua glória” (1.14) e “sabemos que o seu testemunho é verdadeiro” (21.24)? Para responder essa pergunta, outros indícios textuais do Quarto Evangelho precisam ser levados em consideração, em particular aqueles nos quais o autor se dirige diretamente ao leitor (19.35: o testemunho singular da morte de Jesus na cruz; 20.30-31: não somente o final do livro, mas sua declaração de propósito, ligada à confissão de Tomé). Além disso, existe a evidência do chamado Cânon Muratoriano, segundo o qual os outros discípulos incentivaram João a escrever o seu evangelho e leram junto com ele o que ele escrevia. Este artigo propõe o seguinte argumento: o “nós” em questão deve ser interpretado no sentido de incluir o próprio autor como a testemunha principal. No papel de porta-voz, ele se encontra no meio de um círculo de testemunhas oculares. Além disso, o “nós” encontrado no prólogo não sugere uma identificação com os leitores,

nem deve ser interpretado como um substituto para “eu”, como se fosse um plural de majestade (ou o “nós” de um testemunho autorizado, como Richard Bauckham argumenta). Assim, o Quarto Evangelho é moldado pelo testemunho de João junto com o de seus companheiros, também testemunhas oculares.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Quarto Evangelho; Evangelho de João; Passagens “nós”; Cânon Muratoriano; Testemunhas oculares.