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# The Power of Saving Wisdom

An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom  
in Relation to the Soteriology  
of the Fourth Gospel

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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ch. 5). Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel seems to indicate a difference between the work of the Spirit before and after the cross (hence the comments in Jn 7.39 and 16.7), and between the quality and availability of salvation before and after Easter. The Fourth Gospel seems to have differentiated between what was possible before and after the cross, i.e., the Gospel retains the difference that Jesus' hour (namely, the cross-resurrection-ascension) had made.<sup>82</sup> The issue we shall examine in our study (from the post-Easter stance of John and his readers) is how (and to what extent) life was already available before the cross, and what role the Spirit had in this. It seems unlikely to us, for example, that life only became available after the cross and that John had read this back into the time before the cross; rather, from a post-Easter, Spirit-provided perspective John understood much more clearly what actually had happened during Jesus' earthly ministry. Our observation after the brief overview of Johannine scholarship so far is that the realized dimension of salvation and the Spirit's work prior to the cross need more investigation.

While we will investigate the work of the Spirit and the availability of life before the cross, we will not attempt to reconstruct a 'historical' account in a strict sense. In our view, the Fourth Gospel is a theological narration from a post-Easter perspective (as are indeed the other Gospels) (cf. the brief treatment of the genre of the Fourth Gospel in ch. 3 section 2).<sup>83</sup> John's aim in retelling the dialogue between Jesus and, for example, Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman, was to persuade and convince his readers not of certain historical facts but of their significance and theological truths. However, our presupposition is that theological truth needs a historical anchor — the existence of the historical Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection are necessary historical facts for theological truth. Whether it is necessary (in order to accept the truth claim of John 3) that Nicodemus existed, or whether it is necessary that his conversation with Jesus took place exactly as has been recorded is perhaps more ambivalent. Nevertheless, even if historical facts cannot be reconstructed any more, we still require a kind of narrative plausibility: for example, we prefer to see some historical reality behind the Nicodemus story, in that it must be plausible that such a conversation could have taken place. In our understanding, the Fourth Gospel moves along a spectrum of a mixture of (what we would call) 'history' and 'fiction', in which the stories about Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, for example, perhaps contain more fiction than the passion narrative in John 18-19.

Looking at some scholars who have adopted Bornkamm's hermeneutical perspective on the Fourth Gospel, it seems that such a post-Easter perspective virtually neglects (and probably finds irrelevant), or remains (deliberately?) agnostic (so in general Frey),<sup>84</sup> or even (implicitly) denies (so Hoegen-Rohls)<sup>85</sup> the work of the Spirit and the availability of

<sup>82</sup> Cf. J. Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie II: Das johanneische Zeitverständnis* (WUNT 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 250-51, 262-63, 290-92.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. the designation of John's Gospel as 'fictionalized history' (M.W.G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative criticism and the fourth gospel* [SNTS.MS 73; Cambridge: CUP, 1992] ch. 4), 'theologized history' (D. Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* [JSNT.S 151; Sheffield: SAP, 1997] 226-27, 255), or 'history-like narrative' (A.T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000] 389-90).

<sup>84</sup> See Frey, *Eschatologie II*, *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> C. Hoegen-Rohls, *Der nachösterliche Johannes: Die Abschiedsreden als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zum vierten Evangelium* (WUNT II/84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 294-95, cf. 310-11). Cf. those in n.68, above.

purpose of the βίος is to draw out the significance and interpretation of historical events, and hence it does not necessarily need to be historically accurate in all its detail; it may be a mixture of historical accuracy and fictional imagination in its witness to the T/truth.<sup>12</sup> This is not to deny a historical substratum to the Fourth Gospel, but the question of how much is historical need not dominate the debate concerning to what extent the Fourth Gospel is true.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the author wants to persuade and convince his readers not primarily of the 'basic' historical facts, such as the existence of the historical Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection (for these were already known), but of their *significance*.

The *plot*<sup>14</sup> of the Fourth Gospel is the revelation of the Father and of the identity and mission of the Son, and people's response to this revelation (cf. e.g. 1.10-12, 18; 3.16-18; 20.31).<sup>15</sup> A structural analysis of John's plot can be visualized with Greimas's diagram to represent the way in which the implied author organized the characters in the narrated world of the Fourth Gospel:<sup>16</sup>

Cf. G.N. Stanton, 'The Communities of Matthew', *Interp* 46 (1992) 388. Esler, however, criticizes Burridge's view ('Community', 243-44).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lincoln, *Truth*, 369-97; *idem*, 'Gospel', 12-17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lincoln, *Truth*, 369-78. Contra M. Casey, who argues that the Fourth Gospel is profoundly untrue in that it is historically inaccurate and anti-Jewish (*Is John's Gospel True?* [London: Routledge, 1996]).

<sup>14</sup> Plot is the organization of events into a coherent unity characterized by a causal and temporal logic (Stibbe, *Gospel*, 34). Stibbe explains that John's plot helps the reader to expect his own story of faith and discipleship to follow a similar pattern (*Gospel*, 51-52).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 87-89; *idem*, *Gospel*, 67-86; Stibbe, *Gospel*, 40-44; Tolmie, *Farewell*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stibbe, *Gospel*, 44; Tolmie, *Farewell*, 141. However, both Stibbe and Tolmie entirely neglect the role of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry. Stibbe contends that Jesus does not have any obvious, consistent helpers, not even the Holy Spirit (*Gospel*, 43-44), but see our view in ch. 4 section 2. Moreover, Stibbe and Tolmie differ about the identity of the receiver — for Stibbe the receiver is Jesus, for Tolmie it is the world — which is due to their different understanding of Greimas's theory (Stibbe, *Gospel*, 39; Tolmie, *Farewell*, 120). Tolmie's interpretation is more generally used. Stibbe also sees a counter-plot in John — the quest of 'the Jews' to kill Jesus (*Gospel*, 47-49). The term 'the Jews' denotes those Jews who are suspicious, hostile and opposed to Jesus, and refers especially to Jewish leaders (cf. Motyer, *Father*, 46-57; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation*, 232-51). 'World' is in some sense personified as the great opponent of Jesus; 'world' (as 'the Jews') denotes those people who are in opposition to Jesus (cf. H. Sasse, 'Κοσμίω, κτλ.' in *TDNT*, III:894; Harner, *Relation*, 115-20).