

REVISITING THE JOURNEY STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Abstract

To acknowledge that in writing the gospels, every evangelist has used information at his disposal with a specific theological purpose, implies that pinpointing that purpose is essential for understanding the gospel material. Of cardinal importance in discerning that purpose is knowledge of the design or the arrangement of that material. Both are indispensable tools for relevant textual hermeneutics. It is for this reason that the compositional design of the Fourth Gospel continues to generate a lively discuss. Without outrightly rejecting earlier attempts, proposing "a journey structure" for this gospel might throw up fresh and interesting insights.

Keywords: Gospel, John, Book of Signs, Book of Glory, New Creation, Structure, Gnostic

Introduction

Today it is inconceivable to do a critical study and interpretation of any text of the Bible without first locating it in its appropriate textual context. This assumption implies the importance of the study of structures or plots.¹ The structure or plot of any work is the very organizing line, the design or the skeleton of the main events the work contains. It is, relatively speaking, a detailed description of the whole work in such a manner that both the whole and its constituent parts are appreciated. It is this concern that informs the study of the structure or plot of the Fourth Gospel in this article. There are, of course, many valid ways of accomplishing this task. However, in recent developments in the field of exegesis, the study of text and context has been unified by the narrative approach. This approach searches for the narrative line that transforms the events into a chain, the actions into a coherent plot or *mythos* where these events have a cause-and-effect relationship with each other in one meaningful story. To prove the relevance and usefulness of some of the insights of structural

¹ G. H. ØSTENSTAD, *Patterns of Redemption in the Fourth Gospel. An Experiment in Structural Analysis*, The Edwin Mellen Biblical Press, Lewiston, New York 1998, xxiii.

studies, four structural hypotheses in respect of the Fourth Gospel will be critically examined with a view to highlighting both their strengths and weaknesses. This will prepare the scene for the decisive push for a journey structure of the gospel.

Earlier Structural Suggestions

The Gospel of John as a Book of Signs

The basic outline accepted by most scholars for a long time has been to divide the Gospel into two parts; “the Book of Signs” (1:19-12:50) and “the Book of Glory” (13:1-20:31) wedged in by a Prologue at the beginning (1:1-18) and an Epilogue at the end (21). The kernel of this proposal goes back to R. Bultmann who in his commentary of 1941 divided the text of the Gospel into two parts and coined the descriptions: “the revelation of the doxa before the world” (chapters 2-12) and “the revelation of the doxa before the community” (chapters 13-20). For him, chapter one is the Prologue and introduction, while he called chapter 21 the Epilogue and supplement.

Influenced by Bultmann’s, C. H. Dodd affirmed the two-fold division of the Gospel. He too considered chapters 2-12 as containing the account of the public life of Jesus characterized by miracles recorded by the Evangelist only as “signs” and thus called it “The Book of Signs.” Chapters 13-20 which contain the account of the passion as the culminating moment of the life and the mission of Jesus, Dodd called “The Book of the Passion.”²

Many other structural suggestions based on this approach, substantially accepted the opinion of Dodd but incorporated also other criteria for subdivisions within the two books. R. E. Brown, relying on this thematic division, only modified the appellation “The Book of the Passion” into “The Book of Glory,” a name which gained wider acceptability. The traditional division into two books is captured in the following schema:

1:1-18 **THE PROLOGUE:** An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word

1:19 – 12:50 **PART ONE: THE BOOK OF SIGNS:** The Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

² C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1953, 390.

13:1 – 20:31 **PART TWO: THE BOOK OF GLORY:** To those who accept him, the Word reveals his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection, and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

21:1-25 **EPILOGUE:** A series of resurrection appearances in Galilee of theological import.

According to this division, Book One largely concerns Jesus' six miraculous works, which are called "signs" and discourses carefully tailored to explain the "signs." This book also contains the accounts of the witness of John the Baptist, the call of the four disciples and Nathaniel, at least four accounts of the travels of Jesus to and from Jerusalem. The culminating sign is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, an episode which makes the Jewish leaders resolve to kill Jesus. The book closes with the incident of the coming of the Greeks to Jesus, his prediction of his own death and what appears to be a final summary of his mission (12:12-50).³

Book Two on the other hand is focused on the theme of Jesus' return to the Father, which is called "glorification." In this book, one notices a change of focus from an apologetics to convince listeners about the identity of Jesus to a focus on solidarity within the community of those who believe in him. So, it is in this book that Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as a model of community relationship (chapter 13), then invites his followers to abide in him as branches in the true vine (chapter 15), prays for faith and for community solidarity (chapter 17) after which he is arrested, tried and crucified (chapters 18-19), then rises from the dead and appears to his disciples (chapter 20). Chapter 21 serves as a concluding Epilogue.⁴

In this twofold division, the "signs," so dominant in Book One, anticipate the "glory" of Jesus in a metaphorical way. Similarly, the theme of glorification, which is so central to Book Two, is itself an accomplishment in reality of what is anticipated in the signs. Many scholars, however, consider this proposal to be inadequate because it fails to give much information. Perhaps after taking cognizance of the inadequacy of the two part thematic division, many scholars expanded the model to include more details. One of the most extensive versions of this proposal is that of R. E. Brown who complements the two book division with a combination of literary and thematic criteria to further subdivide the two

³ P. N. ANDERSON, *Riddles of the Fourth Gospel. An Introduction to John*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2011, 10.

⁴ P. N. ANDERSON, *Riddles of 10-11*.

macro parts (1:19-12:50 and 13:1-20) into smaller parts.⁵ He believes that Book One should have four parts, with Book Two having three parts. A summary of his work is provided below:

1:1-18 **THE PROLOGUE:** An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word

1:19–12:50 **THE BOOK OF SIGNS:** The Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they will not accept him.

Part One: The Opening Days of the Revelation of Jesus: 1:19-2:11

Part Two: From Cana to Cana: various responses to Jesus' ministry in the different sections of Palestine: 2-4

Part Three: Jesus and the Principal Feasts of the Jews: 5-10 (introduced by 4:46-54 where Jesus restores life to the official's son at Cana)

Part Four: Jesus moves towards the hour of death and glory: 11-12

Conclusion: Evaluation and summation of Jesus' ministry – 12:37-50

13:1–20:31 **PART TWO: THE BOOK OF GLORY:** The Word shows his glory to those who accept him by returning to the Father in death, resurrection, and ascension. Once, fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

Part One: The Last Supper: 13-17

Part Two: The Passion Narrative: 18-19

Part Three: The Risen Jesus: 20:1-29

21:1-25 **EPILOGUE:** A series of resurrection appearances in Galilee of theological import.

Critical Observations

Relying on the "sign" criterion as a cardinal point for his proposal, Brown claims that this element is suggested in the pages of Scripture itself. This position no doubt has some merit as C. Bazzi also affirms that the importance of "signs" in the Gospel of John is confirmed by three "major" textual indicators. First, at the end of the first part of the Gospel, in John 12:37-41 it is said that "the Jews" did

⁵ F. F. SEGOVIA, "The Journey(s) of the Word of God: A Reading of the Plot of the Fourth Gospel," in *Semeia* 53 (1991), 27.

not believe the many and great signs (tosau/ta de. auvtou/ shmei/a pepoihko,toj) given by Jesus. This clearly suggests that in chapters 1-12 of the Gospel is a narrative that is first and foremost about “signs.”⁶

The second textual indicator is in 20:30-31. Here, while closing the Gospel, the Evangelist argues that his Gospel was principally written in order to bring readers to faith and life, and this he has done by a narration of selected “signs” (tau/ta de. ge,graptai). If these two verses of chapter 20 are very essential for understanding the Fourth Gospel, since they represent a clear statement of the author’s purpose, they need to be taken seriously in any meaningful description of the structure of this Gospel. These verses essentially and quite explicitly, rule out the possibility that the Fourth Gospel can be read in terms of any other structuring principle other than the sign criterion. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the cited verses make the Gospel of John the “Gospel of signs.”⁷

The third textual evidence that could be used for this same argument is 2:11. In this concluding verse of the narrative of what is considered Jesus’ first sign, the author describes the entire event as avrch.n tw/n shmei,wn. If avrch, in this context implies beginning as a point of departure or the commencement of a series of similar happenings, then it necessarily implies also that the narration that follows is a narration about signs and is organized in this manner.

Moreover, in the section which many scholars describe as “From Cana to Cana” (2:1-4:54), the author betrays an intention to tell the story of the signs in pairs. In narrating the story of the second sign, he twice explicitly connects the story with the first sign by employing the term pa,lin (again). First, by using the term pa,lin in 4:46 to introduce the return of Jesus to Cana, he reminds the reader that Jesus (and perhaps the reader too) had been here before and that it was here that Jesus had turned water into wine. Second, at the end of the story (4:54) by a clearly pleonastic use of the term pa,lin again, he connects the event of 4:46ff to that of 2:1-11 in such a manner that it becomes explicit why the former can be called the second sign.⁸ In a similar manner, by using the temporal phrase meta. tau/ta

⁶ C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 289.

⁷ C. BAZZI, *Vangelo di Giovanni*, Pimme, Casale Monferrato (AL) 2001, 10.

⁸ G. BIGUZZI “Giovanni 20,30-31, ‘I segni’ e la struttura di Gv. 1-12,” in *Euntes Docete* 50 (1997), 425-470. Cfr. also IDEM, *Il Vangelo dei segni*, Paideia, Brescia 2014, 99-110.

(after these things) in 5:1 and 6:1, he suggests a connection between the two chapters.⁹

Furthermore, Jesus' self-revelation, which elicits an immediate reaction of belief in 9:37-38, corresponds to a similar self-revelation and belief in 11:26-27. But more importantly however, the incident recorded in chapter 9 is recalled by the Evangelist in 11:37, thereby suggesting a link between the two chapters. With that being the case then, in the section which commences from 2:1 leading up to chapter 12, the author continues his narration of the rest of the signs in pairs (2:1-11/4:46-56; 5:1-47/6; 9:1-41/11:1-44)¹⁰ interspersed with themes of misunderstanding leading up to controversy, lack of belief and eventually, open hostility.

However, despite the popularity of this proposal, which has gained the appellation "The traditional position" because it is often revisited by scholars of John, it is too simple a structure to serve as a meaningful hermeneutical key.¹¹ Perhaps the biggest criticism against this proposal is its tendency to separate the "Signs" of Jesus from his "Glory" as if to suggest that when the Evangelist speaks of the "Signs," he avoids any discussion about "Glory." A closer view of the Gospel shows that "Glory" and the "Glorification" of Jesus are already mentioned as early as 2:11; 11:4 and 12:23.¹² The Evangelist therefore does not have to wait until chapter 13 to begin a discussion of glory. Besides, it is somewhat an anomaly that 1:19-50 falls under the appellation "the Book of Signs" while it says nothing in fact about "signs." Thus it can be argued that while it is true that chapters 1-12 do in fact record the "signs" as testimonies of

⁹ In the discussion which follows the *sign* given in chapter 6, Jesus refers back to the *sign* earlier given in chapter 5. Cfr. 7:21-23. This is another argument that suggests that the Evangelist saw the two *signs* as being connected.

¹⁰ It needs to be noted that some commentators prefer a different order for the pairing of these signs. For instance, J. Philips believes there are 8 signs and suggests the following pairing: 2:1-11/21:1-14; 4:46-50/11:1-44; 5:1-47/9:1-41; 6:1-14/6:15-21. Cf. J. PHILIPS, *The Gospel of John. An Expository Commentary*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1989, 52.

¹¹ C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of*, 289.

¹² Accordingly, the popular distinction between the book of signs and the book of glory should be rejected. For the very first inaugural sign manifests Jesus glory (2:11). At the very end of the Gospel, Jesus' resurrection-appearance to the disciples, especially when Thomas is present, must be considered to be, for John, a sign in some real sense. For his concluding statement of purpose (20:30-31) hardly to be dismissed as a colophon speaks of many other signs which Jesus worked in the presence of his disciples. Cfr. C. H. GIBLIN, "The Tripartite Narrative Structure of John's Gospel," in *Biblica* 71 (1990), 449.

Jesus' divinity, 20:30-31 also shows that the author might have considered signs as part of the narrative material right through to the last chapter. For by using the term *shmei/a* in v. 30 and referring back to it again with the demonstrative pronoun *tau/ta* in v. 31, the Evangelist shows his insistence that his narrative up until this point is about signs. Otherwise, it is very difficult to prove that this last use of the term *shmei/a* is meant to refer only to the first part of the Gospel (chapters 1-12).

Another reason why the twofold division is problematic is the fact that such a division (at least this is true of some of the earlier versions of the "Book of Signs" proposal) is at best idealistic. The earliest versions of this proposal gave undue emphasis to the discourses generated by the *signs* of Jesus. The *signs* were only relevant as long as they anticipated the discourses. This emphasis creates an impression that the content of the Gospel is an aggregation only of ideas, and that the Gospel together is a book of the revelation of the truth.¹³ The gnostic movement in earlier times had taken this type of opinion to extreme conclusions. Thus any opinion with a "gnostic flavour" already makes it suspect. C. Bazzi is correct when he argues that the Gospel as a whole should first and foremost be appreciated as an account of events of decisive significance.¹⁴

Furthermore, highlighting only the "signs" and the passion accounts of the Gospel smacks of a reductionist agenda. The dynamic complexity of this Gospel cannot be well appreciated when one is preoccupied with just the great deeds of Jesus called "signs" or the story of his passion. Part of the dynamism of the story is carried forward through for instance, the many dialogues and confrontations that are embedded in the accounts, something that is not well appreciated when there is an undue focus on the two terms "signs" and "passion."

Moreover, Brown's opinion that the division of the Gospel into two parts is suggested by the text itself tells only one side of the story. Brown, and perhaps those who preceded him argue that, because there is a break at the end of chapter 12 (vv. 37-43 and 44-50) and because Jesus' words are clearly addressed to his disciples in chapters 13-17, then these two points justify the division of the Gospel into two books; "the Book of Signs" (1:19-12:50) and "the Book of Glory" (13:1-20,31). This argument however ignores the fact that while it is true that

¹³ C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 9-10.

¹⁴ Un vangelo - ogni vangelo - in realtà è una storia che annuncia come decisiva una esperienza, degli eventi rilevanti come tali per il piano di salvezza di Dio sul mondo. Cfr. C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 10.

there might be a break between chapters 12 and 13, there is also strong evidence of connection between the two. On this, Mlakuzhyil is correct in observing that both chapters refer to the arrival of “the hour” of Jesus (12:23, 13:1) and also of his glorification (12:23; 13:31-32). There is also a temporal connection between them in that both chapters describe events preceding the Passover (12:1; 13:1).

In dividing “the Two Books” into smaller units, Brown is credited with having applied reasonable criteria. Unfortunately his application of such criteria seems rather inconsistent, arbitrary and subjective. Thus, although 3:22 is a transition verse just as 2:23-25; 4:1-3 and 4:43-45, Brown ignores it and views 3:1-36 as a single textual unit. Similarly, although the feast of Tabernacles is not clearly mentioned in 9:1-10:21, he joins the passage to chapters 7 and 8 under the description “the aftermath of Tabernacles.”¹⁵ Furthermore, though his division of the “Book of Glory” into three parts might appear reasonable at the narrative level, it however goes against the Evangelist’s interpretation of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus together as one single event and not as a series of successive events as suggested by the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁶

In conclusion, although the division of the Gospel using the *sign* criterion throws up many interesting points, there are also many arguments against it. In view of the counter arguments presented in preceding paragraphs, we find it an inadequate structural proposal. We now turn our attention to another hypothesis, one which is woven around the Jewish Feasts mentioned in the Gospel.

The Gospel of John and the Jewish Feasts

Popularized mainly by French speaking scholars is the argument that the Jewish feasts have an important role to play in framing the structure of the Fourth Gospel. One of the first names mentioned in connection with this view is D. Mollat. Mollat claimed that the Fourth Evangelist himself has given clear indications for the division of his Gospel following Jewish feasts namely; three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55) and an unnamed feast, (5:1), the feast of Tabernacles (7:2), a feast of Dedication (10:22), as well as the mention of weeks and days – the first week of the ministry of Jesus (1:19-2:11), the week of the feast of Tabernacles

¹⁵ G. MLAKUZHYIL, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel*, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1987, 82-83.

¹⁶ G. FERRARO, *L’Ora di Cristo nel Quarto Vangelo*, Herder, Rome, 1974, 301. Cfr. also F.F. SEGOVIA, “The Journey(s) of,” 82.

(7:2, 14 and 37), the passion week (12:1, 12; 19:31 and 42). Mollat singled out these temporal and liturgical references and proposed the following structure of the Fourth Gospel in the French original of the Jerusalem Bible:

O. Prologue: 'In the beginning.' (1:1-18)

I. First week of the messianic ministry: Jesus revealed as the Messiah. The week ends with the first 'sign' at Cana (1:19 - 2:11)

II. First Passover with its accompanying events, ending with the second 'sign' at Cana (2:12 - 4:54)

III. Sabbath 'of the paralytic': Jesus cures the man at the Bethzatha pool (5:1-47)

IV. The Passover 'of the bread of life': miracle of the loaves and the subsequent discourse (6:1-71)

V. The feast of Tabernacles with the cure of the man born blind (7:1 -10:21)

VI. The feast of Dedication and the resurrection of Lazarus (10:22 -11:54)

VII. Week of the Passion and the crucifixion Passover (11:55 - 19:42)

VIII. The resurrection and week of apparitions (20:1-29)

IX. Appendix: concerning the Church and the expectation of Christ' return (21:1-25).¹⁷

According to this proposal, references to the different Jewish temporal and liturgical categories are highly symbolic and schematic. This is because they suggest the division of the Gospel into eight parts wedged in by a prologue and an appendix as shown in the schema above.

Sensing perhaps that his proposal was short on details or perhaps influenced by other proposals, Mollat later modified his position and proposed a new structure for the Gospel which is also provided below:

A. Prologue (1:1-18)

B. Jesus' Ministry (1:19 – 12:50)

I. Proclamation of the New Order: The Ministry of Jesus (1:19 - 4:54)

II. The Second Feast at Jerusalem: First Opposition to Revelation (5:1-47)

III. In Galilee, the second Passover: Further Opposition to Revelation (6:1-71)

IV. The Feast of Shelters: the Great Rejection (7:1-10:21)

V. The Feast of Dedication: the Decision to kill Jesus (10:22-11:54)

VI. The end of the public ministry of Jesus and preparations for the last Passover (11:55-12:50)

C. Jesus' Hour Comes: the Passover of the Lamb of God (13:1-20:31)

I. Jesus' Last Meal with his Disciples (13:1-17:26)

¹⁷ D. MOLLAT, "L'Évangile selon Saint Jean," in *La Sainte Bible*, du Cerf, Paris 1953.

II. The Passion (18-19)

III. Resurrection narratives and the blessedness of faith (20:1-29)

IV. First Conclusion (21:30-31)

D. Epilogue (21:1-25)

I. The Appearance on the Shore of Tiberias (21:1-23)

II. Second Conclusion (21:24-25)

Here, however, Mollat has not abandoned his idea of emphasizing Jewish feasts as a structuring criterion. But he has complemented that criterion with a much greater emphasis on the conflicts surrounding Jesus and his death. Other authors who emphasized temporal categories especially as they revolved around liturgical feasts include: A. Guilding¹⁸ and D. M. Goulder,¹⁹ M. E. Boismard and A. Lamouille.²⁰ Its most recent adherents would be R. E. Brown who partially uses it in his proposal and T. L. Brodie.²¹

Critical Observations

According to this proposal, the most important element to be considered in dividing the Gospel is the Evangelist's idea of proposing Jesus as having come to put an end to the Jewish religious institutions.²² The trouble with this argument however is whether replacement theology was really the primary concern of the Evangelist when he wrote his Gospel.²³ But if at all replacing the Feast of "the Jews" was a major motive for the author of the Gospel, one wonders why he

¹⁸ A. GUILDING, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship. A Study of the Relation of St. John's Gospel to the Ancient Jewish Lectionary System*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1960.

¹⁹ M. D. GOULDER, "The Liturgical Origin of St. John's Gospel," in E. A. LIVINGSTONE (ed.), *Studia Evangelica* VII, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1982, 220-221.

²⁰ M. E. BOISMARD & A. LAMOUILLE, *L'Évangile de Jean*, Paris 1977.

²¹ T. L. BRODIE, *The Gospel According to John. A Literary Theological Commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, 22-29.

²² "Une idée se dégage de ce plan: Jésus met fin aux institutions juives en les accomplissant." Cfr. D. Mollat, *La Sainte Bible (Oecuménique)*, du Cerf, Paris, 1960, 150. But also D. Mollat, "L'Évangile selon Saint Jean," in D. MOLLAT - F. M. BRAUN (eds.), *L'Évangile et les Épîtres de Saint Jean*, Paris 1973, 40.

²³ R. K. Soulen, defines "Replacement Theology" (also called Supersessionism) as a teaching which claims that with the coming of Jesus Christ, the special role of the Jewish people and their institutions came to an end and their place was taken over by the church (now considered to be the new Israel) and its institutions." For more on the various forms of this theology, cfr. R. K. SOULEN, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1996 1-2.

does not state it clearly in 20:30-31. J. Caba is correct in observing that a Gospel that is so doctrinal in scope would hardly, as its principal target have been reduced to simply the replacement of the liturgies of the Old Testament.²⁴ Such a conclusion would be highly doubtful since the scope of the Fourth Gospel (20,30-31) goes beyond just nullifying the institutions of the Old Testament.²⁵

Moreover, this structural proposal leaves a reader helpless when reading long sections where there are no clear temporal indications or a reference to Liturgical Feasts. It is a fact that entire sections (chapters 3-4, 20-21 contain no explicit references to Liturgical Feasts) are without clear temporal indications, and even where these are present, their influence on and significance within the textual section is not quite clear.²⁶ Furthermore, the relevance of Jewish Feasts to understanding the structure of the Gospel is not entirely convincing. For it is hard to explain why only three major Jewish Feasts (Passover 2:13; 7:14; 11:55; Tabernacles 7:2; Dedication 10:22) are explicitly named, while other important Feasts like Pentecost, New Year and Purim are not explicitly named. Mlakuzhyil is correct in observing that if the Evangelist had really intended to organize his Gospel according to the annual Jewish Feasts, then it is hard to explain why some feasts are not mentioned at all.²⁷

Finally, although this proposal unlike the previous one is correct in singling out time and its important role in the framing of narratives, it unfortunately uses the concept of time in a very narrow sense. It views time only as chronology (as dates and seasons) but totally ignores the narratological concept of time. Narrative time is a movement from the beginning to the end of the story, passing of course through the middle. With this added understanding, time could refer either to the order and sequence of events in a narrative or to the length of the

²⁴ J. CABA, *Dai Vangeli al Gesù Storico*, Paoline, Roma 1974, 338-339. Cfr. also G. MLAKUZHYIL, *The Christocentric*, 20.

²⁵ Concerning the argument that John might advocate a theology of substitution, J. Beutler believes that John does not emphasize the passage from an old people of God to a new one. He rather admits the idea of the people of God before Christ followed historically by a group of those who believe in Jesus. Cfr. J. BEUTLER, *Judaism and the Jews in the Gospel of John*, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 2006, 74.

²⁶ It is hard to conceive what role the mention of the Feast of Dedication plays in 10,22-42 and if in fact it does not confuse the reader who in the very next chapter hears of the Passover 11,55.

²⁷ G. MLAKUZHYIL, *The Christocentric*, 22.

narrative or even to the frequency with which an incident is narrated.²⁸ Thus the relationship between time and a narrative is more complex than can be expressed by just chronological time alone.

In conclusion, although the Feasts hypothesis appreciates the significant role played by the Jewish Feasts in providing a setting for many of Jesus' encounters with people, it is doubtful if depending on a single criterion is enough for determining the structure of any writing. Because the Feasts hypothesis proves to be inadequate, I will now explore the New Creation hypothesis.

The Gospel of John as the New Creation

Prominent especially in the Spanish speaking school, is the opinion that in the Fourth Gospel, or at least parts of it, is a revoking of the story of creation (Gen 1). According to this view, in the coming of Jesus, the work of creation is revisited and perfected. Combining this argument with the symbolism of the number six, Matteos and Barreto proposed the following structure for the Fourth Gospel:

- I. The Prologue: The Plan of Creation (1:1-18)
- II. An Introductory Section: From John to Jesus (1:19-51)
- III. The First Part: The Sixth Day. The Work of the Messiah (2:1-19:42)
 - A. The Day of the Messiah (2:1-11:54)
 1. The Cycle of the Institutions: "His own did not receive him" (2:1-4:46a)
 2. The Cycle of Man: The Exodus of the Messiah (4:46b-11:54)
 - B. The Final Hour: The Passover of the Messiah (11:55-19:42)
 1. The First Section: The Choice before the Messiah (11:55-12:50)
 2. The Second Section: The Supper. The New Human Community (13:1-17:26)
 3. The Third Section: The Betrayal, Death and Burial of Jesus. The Revelation of Glory (18:1-19:42)
- IV. Second Part: The First Day. The New Creation (20:1-31)
- V. Epilogue: The Mission of the Community with Jesus (21:1-25)

In this hypothesis, in imitation of the six days creation story recorded in Genesis 1, Christ' work of redemption, from beginning to the end is said to have been accomplished in six days. In this way, the work of creation which begins in the

²⁸ Cfr. R. A. Culpepper's lengthy discussion of G. Genette's concept of narrative time. R. A. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1983, 53-75.

Prologue (1:1), dominates the chronology of the Gospel and gives a vital key for its interpretation.²⁹

No doubt the concept of “New Creation” is a prominent one in the New Testament where it frequently describes the ministry of Jesus as well as the content of the message preached by his disciples. It is not surprising therefore to find instances of the concept in many of the writings of the New Testament, the Gospel of John included.

Agreeing with the proposal of Matteos and Barreto, M. L. Coloe has advanced arguments to prove its dominant presence in the Fourth Gospel. She claims that; “On reading the words “In the beginning...” the reader is reminded immediately of the creation account in Genesis 1.” In the same fashion, the final chapters (19 and 20) of the Gospel revoke Genesis 1 by situating the Passion and Resurrection accounts within the iconography of the Garden of Eden. The two allusions to the creation account at the beginning and at the end of the Gospel (1:1-19 and chapters 19 and 20) therefore frame its narrative. Such structural artistry helps to give meaning to the Gospel’s proclamation - “I have come that you may have life, life in abundance” (10:10).³⁰

Also favourable to “the new creation hypothesis” is A. J. Köstenberger, who in his book, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, argues that the Fourth Gospel alludes to the idea of creation. Like M. Coloe, he concludes that the Prologue of John evokes Genesis 1. He further argued, that just as the Prologue, the conclusion of the Gospel is also linked to the theme of creation. The passion narrative is set in a garden (18:1; 19:41). Jesus is mistaken for a gardener (20:15). Pilate proclaims him “the man” in a manner that suggests an allusion to Adam (19:5). After his resurrection, Jesus breathes out the spirit on his disciples akin to what the spirit did in the creation account (Gen 1:2). The Gospel begins with and ends with the concept of creation to make the point that the Johannine Jesus is bringing about the new creation in his redeeming work. The “signs” which the Gospel frequently talks about can therefore be seen as the signs of a new

²⁹ J. MATTEOS - J. BARRETO, *El Evangelico de Juan. Analisis Lingüístico y Comentario Exegetico*, Cittadella, Madrid 1979, 15.

³⁰ M. L. COLOE, “The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1,” in *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997), 40-55. Cfr. also IDEM, “Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John,” in *Pacifica* 24 (2011), 1-11.

creation.³¹

The most recent advocate of this view is C. R. Sosa Siliezar, who points to the presence of the creation imagery not only in the Prologue and the Passion/Resurrection narratives but also in the public ministry of Jesus as well. He concludes that these allusions are used by the Evangelist to portray Jesus as the agent of creation, revelation and salvation.³²

Critical Observations

Despite the relative merit of this proposal, it is not without its problems as well. Firstly, its tendency to divide the Gospel into two main parts with the first part stretching from chapters 2-19 and the second part containing just one chapter (chapter 20) is too uneven a division to be helpful. That already is a pointer to the problem one would have when interpreting the entire Gospel using a new creation structure. The confident claim that the theme dominates the chronology of the ministry of Jesus and that the ministry, including his death and resurrection takes place during a symbolic six day period is perhaps an exaggeration since the theme is not explicitly mentioned in the rest of the Gospel.³³ Similarly a theme which is rather more evident in the introduction (the Prologue) and the conclusion (the Passion/Resurrection) of the Gospel, as Coloe has argued, can at best speak of a literary inclusion. But to use this same theme for the reading of what comes in the body of the Gospel will pose some serious challenges. Perhaps, Sosa acknowledges this fact when he argues that his proposal is relevant only for reading parts of the Gospel.

Returning to the question of the chronology of the ministry of Jesus, the reference to the "third day" (2:1) which appears after a triple reference to the "next day" (1:29;35 and 43) has been misconstrued by the proponents of this view as a recalling of the "sixth day" of Genesis 1:26-31, the day of the creation of man. These scholars argue that because creation is attributed to the *Logos* in the

³¹ A. J. KÖSTENBERGER, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters. The Word, the Christ and the Son of God*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2009, 178-188. Cfr. also M. Y. EMERSON, *Christ and the New Creation. A Canonical Approach to the Theology of the New Testament*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon 2013.

³² C. R. S. SILIEZAR, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London 2015.

³³ J. MATTEOS - J. BARRETO, *El Evangelico de*, 15.

Prologue and because he gives the power to become children of God (1:12), then the “third day” has to be the “sixth day” of Genesis. While this might sound attractive to anyone who wishes to see the evoking of creation in the opening verses of the Gospel, it remains difficult to explain why the author of the Gospel uses the expression “third day” in 2:1 if he really intended to mean “sixth day?”

The application of this proposal is not only problematic at the micro level, it does raise some problems at the macro level as well. Matteos and Barreto in their structure have sought to divide the so called “sixth day” into two periods, namely, “the Day of the Messiah” (2:1-11:54) and “the Final Hour” (11:55-19:42). This division runs counter to the Johannine thinking which views the Passion, Death and Resurrection as one extended event through which “the Glorification” of Jesus is achieved.³⁴ For this reason, to leave the resurrection narrative outside a subsection called “the Final Hour” amounts to a misreading of the intention of the Fourth Evangelist. Moreover, to divide a single day into “the Day of the Messiah” and “the Final Hour” is not entirely sensible since one normally divides a day into hours and not into “a day” and “the final hour.”

Finally, one would also suspect that the persistent attempt by the scholars in question to read the entire Gospel using the creation theme betrays influence coming from Pauline studies. After all, as true as it may be that they are a recurring feature in the Pauline Corpus, one would find it very difficult to locate the terms creation, new creation and covenant in the Fourth Gospel.

Therefore, like the two proposals preceding it, the New Creation hypothesis also fails to provide a structure that convincingly covers all of the Fourth Gospel from its first to the last chapters. A study of The Journey proposal might just do that.

The Gospel of John as an Account of a Journey

B. Olsson had in 1968 made the first attempt to break up the Gospel of John using the journey motif as a criterion.³⁵ M. Rissi, had expressed similar convictions in his article of 1983.³⁶ Others who explored this line include J. L. Staley,³⁷ F. F.

³⁴ For a detailed study of this argument, cfr. G. FERRARO, *L'“Ora” di Cristo*, 77ff.

³⁵ 1:19-3:21; 3:22-5:47; 6:1-10:39; 10:40-20:31. Cfr. B. OLSSON, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel. A Text Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42*, CWK Gleerup, Lund 1974.

³⁶ M. RISSI, “Der Aufbau des vierten Evangeliums,” in *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983), 48-54.

³⁷ J. L. STALLEY, *The Print's First Kiss*, Crossroad, New York 1988.

Segovia³⁸ and recently C. Bazzi. For these scholars, a recourse to a very common literary motif of ancient narrative, namely, the journey or travel account can serve as a very useful means of meaningfully arranging the Gospel material.

The choice to discuss below the fascinating proposal of C. Bazzi, is not only necessitated by the fact that it is the most detailed but also because it is the most creative. He alone among other proposals has effectively used the journey motif to arrange the Gospel not only at the macrostructural but also the microstructural level. I now turn my attention to a detailed review of his proposal:

The Gospel of John: A Way of Life in the Maturation of Time and in the Dialectics of Response

1:1-18: The Primordial Way of the Word: From God to God, Through the Flesh, Amidst Acceptance and Rejection

I. 1:19-12:50: Ways in the Flesh: Geography of Existence as Health, Conflict and Gift

- The First Journey (1:19-3:21): The Plot of Contact and Insertion into Existence
- The Second Journey (3:22-5:30): The Plot of Health and Salvation
- The Third Journey (5:31-10:39): The Moment of Crisis and the Plot of Contrast
- The Fourth Journey (10:40-12:50): The Hour Draws Near, the Plot of the Drama of the Gift of Life

I. 13:1-17:26: Ways in the Spirit: The Vertical Dimension of the Journey and the Formation of a Community of Friends

- The Generative Moment (13:1-37): The *u`po,deigma* of Service
- The Second Moment (14:1-31): Dwelling with God, Theological Design and Plot of Destination
- The Third Moment (15:1-16:4a): The *Mashal* of Remaining in Christ, the Plot of Stability
- The Fourth Moment (16:4b-33): The Absence of the Risen Christ in the Spirit, the Plot of the Community

³⁸ F. F. SEGOVIA, "The Journey(s) of," 23-54.

Conclusion (17:1-26): The Prayer of the HOUR – The End as a Possibility of Life

II. 18:1-19:42: Ways in Death: The Dramatic Fulfillment of the Ultimate Gift

The Passion as Doing the Will of the Father, Liberty of Gift and Fulfillment of the Plan (18:1-19:16)

Death as Totality (19:17-42)

III. 20:1-21:25: Ways of the Faith of the Community

The Ways of Single Individuals and of the Group (20:1-31)

The Way in the Community: Pastoral Office and a Written Testimony (21:1-25).³⁹

One needs to note from the outset that the concept of “journey” as used by this scholar incorporates both a geographical (physical) sense with the figurative (non-geographical) sense. By embracing these two senses, the journey theme sums up the Gospel as a whole. Like J. Staley, Bazzi believes that the idea of the journey of Jesus is anticipated in the Prologue where the descent and ascent of the *Logos* is described.⁴⁰ In the Prologue therefore, the Word of God is presented as undertaking a journey of obedience to carry out the mission of the Father.⁴¹ This journey takes him from the world of God to the world of humans where the Word becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (1:14). The word made flesh, having accomplished the mission of the Father in the world of humans, returns again to the world of God (John 1:1-18), a return which signals the end of that mythological journey.⁴²

But while in the world, the journey of the Word becomes a physical one, in the flesh and among humans. The journey of the Word in this second sense is actually comprised of a series of four geographical journeys, with each following

³⁹ C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 265-267.

⁴⁰ J. BEUTLER, *Judaism and the Jews*, 10-11.

⁴¹ M. DE JONGE, *Jesus, Stranger From Heaven and Son of God. Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspectives*, Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana 1977, 5-9.

⁴² Cfr. also E. W. KLINK III, “Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine Literature,” in J. T. PENNINGTON et al. (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, T & T Clark, London, 83-84. But also J. Painter, “Rereading Genesis in the Prologue of John?” in D. AUNE et al. (eds.), *Neotestamentica et Philonica. Studies in Honour of Peder Borgen*, Brill, Leiden 2003, 179-201.

the same pattern (1:19-3:21; 3:22-5:30; 5:31-10:39; 10:40-12:50). Each journey begins “on the other side of the Jordan” (1:28; 3:36; 5:31-33; 10:40) which is connected with the figure of John the Baptist as a witness. The destination for each journey is always Jerusalem and the occasion is a Jewish Feast. In each case, Jesus’ journey terminates in the Jerusalem temple where he has confrontations with Jewish authorities (2:13;23; 5:1-2; 10:22; 11:55).

In the course of each journey, Jesus will have encounters with individuals (1:35;43; 4:1;46; 8:1 and 9:1; 11:20 and 12:1) and groups alike (4:40;45; 6:2 and 8:12;30; 12:12-13 and 12:30). In these encounters emerge some symbols of everyday life such as wine (2:3), water (4:7) bread (6:5), oil (12:3), sin (8:3; 9:2) and sickness (4:46; 6:2), etc. Bazzi considers the presence of these symbols highly significant.⁴³ They prove that the journeys of the Word bring Him into contact with the diverse realities that constitute the complex drama of human existence.⁴⁴ The fourth and final geographical journey of the Word (10:40-12:50), however does not end without including the events of the Passion (18:1-19:42). These events, the author believes are an expression of the height of self-giving and the culminating point of this structural design.

Following the argument of C. Bazzi thus far, a question arises regarding the place of John 13-17 and 20-21 in the journey structure. Bazzi answers this question by stating that the journeys of the Word (1-12 and 18-19) do in fact generate another journey. Not of the Word this time, but of His disciples. This new journey, he believes is recorded in the remaining chapters (13-17 and 20-21). The author is quick to admit that there is a limited occurrence of the journey motif in 13-17. The section is rather dominated by discourse.⁴⁵ Although discourse does not apparently have a relationship with a journey, Bazzi insists that in the very discourse contained in this section is an extension of the journey of the Word.⁴⁶

⁴³ These are some of the symbols that occupy a prominent place in the theology of the Fourth Gospel. Cfr. J. FREY, *Imagery in the Gospel of John. Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2006.

⁴⁴ C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 8.

⁴⁵ There are at least 40 occurrences of the verb of speech in the section (22 times in ch. 13; 9 times in ch. 14; 1 time in ch. 15; 7 times in ch. 16 and 1 time in ch. 17). The verbs of movement occur only 13 times (4 times in ch. 13; 2 times in ch. 14; 6 times in ch. 16 and 1 time in ch. 17) and Jesus, not the disciples is always subject.

⁴⁶ 13-17, fatti di solo discorsi e di per sé lontanissimi dal motivo e genere del viaggio ma in un altro senso – quello del prolungamento della presenza e attività di Gesù nel futuro – sono la

Using discourse, Jesus now invites his followers to discipleship, a spiritual journey which is meant to bring them to a disposition towards service to others and continual loyalty to Christ (13:13-15). The same spiritual movement continues in 20:1-21:25, where it is the disciples' journey towards faith both as individuals and as a community.

However, the journey that now becomes the destiny of the disciples is clearly spiritual and programmatic rather than geographical. It is a journey which has both horizontal and vertical implications because the goal of this journey is an eternal dwelling with the Father (14:1-6), but also a life of service to the community (13:13-15).

Critical Observations and Justification

This proposal has many positive points and therefore deserves both attention and commendation. Primarily, it is a solidly text-based proposal. It is obvious that the Gospel mentions many journeys of Jesus. More importantly, evidence of this is evenly spread from beginning to the end (1:43; 2:12-13; 3:22; 4:3-4:46; 5:1; 6:1; 7:10; 10:40; 11:7;17;54; 12:1;12; 18:1). For this reason, using it as a criterion for the structure is quite plausible and pragmatic since it has the capacity to cover all the sections of the Gospel.

Furthermore, the dominant presence of verbs of motion in this Gospel in comparison to the Synoptic Gospels also tells the same story. For instance *ercesqai* appears 156 times in John (Matt 111, Mark 86, Luke 100); *agein* appears 12 times (Matt 4, Mark 3, Luke 13); *peripatei/n* appears 17 times (Matt 7, Mark 9, Luke 5). Other verbs of motion include: 16 occurrences of *avnabai,nein* (Matt 9, Mark 9, Luke 9), 17 of *katabai,nein* (Matt 11, Mark 6, Luke 13), 32 of *pe,mpein* (only 15 occurrences in the Synoptic) and 28 occurrences of *avposte,llein* (Matt 22, Mark 20, Luke 25). Thus, verbs of motion are only second to the verbs of speech in this Gospel.⁴⁷ This in turn suggests that the Gospel is a journey

conferma e la prova decisiva per assumere il viaggio come struttura dell'intera opera. Cfr. C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 8.

⁴⁷ This opinion is expressed in view of the fact dialogue plays a dominant role in the Gospel. P. N. Anderson enumerates at least 15 instances of dialogue between Jesus and various persons or groups. Disciples (1:35-51; 4:27;31-38; 9:1-7; 11:1-16; 14:1-31; 16:17-33), Nicodemus (3:1-21), the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), the royal official (4:46-54), an invalid at the pool (5:5-15), religious leaders in Jerusalem (5:16-47; 7:14-8:59), the crowds (6:25-70), the blind man (9:35-41), sisters of Lazarus (11:17-45), the Greeks and a Jerusalem crowd (12:20-36), Peter (13:1-20; 21:15-

narrated in words. But the opposite is also true. The Gospel is a conversation that progresses because it makes room for movements, mainly of the principal character.⁴⁸ In this way, journey becomes an avenue for encounters between persons. The encounters in turn generate conversations without which no encounter is complete.

Secondly, the journey motif is quite old and appears to be one that is often used by literature in general. For instance, two works of Homer from the group, *The Trojan Myths*, namely, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* tell the story of a journey. Whereas, in *The Iliad*, Odysseus moves from Ithaka to participate in the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, *The Odyssey* deals with his return journey from Troy, years later, after many adventures as a man enriched by the experiences and encounters on the way. During that return journey he is repeatedly in peril: he is attacked a number of times, is almost killed by a cannibal, fights against opposing winds etc. The perennial presence of trial is so overwhelming that Odysseus' return becomes possible only thanks to the helpful intervention of the gods.⁴⁹ Perhaps it is possible to find similar incidents in Jesus' experience of a journey as narrated by the Fourth Evangelist.

The journey motif, however, was never confined only to myths. After Homer, the motif also appeared in historical literature. For instance, Diogenes Laertius in his work *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* tells the story of Plato's cyclic journey from Athens to Egypt, and then back to Athens.⁵⁰

From the two preceding examples, it is suggestive that because the journey motif is popular in literary works of different kinds, it is probably present in the Gospel of John as well, not only in the very structure of the work but also in its individual *pericopes* too.

Thirdly, outside of literature, the journey proposal is one which springs forth from an anthropological reality that embraces all humans. All people are familiar with what a journey entails. It is not surprising then that the metaphor of life as a journey is quite old in literary circles. The same metaphor may be a good avenue for entering into the experience of the Fourth Gospel. M. Rissi rightly believes in

23), the high priest and a guard (18:19-24), Pilate (18:28-19:16), Mary Magdalene (20:11-18) and Thomas (20:24-29). Cfr. P. N. ANDERSON, *Riddles of*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 3-4.

⁴⁹ HOMERUS, *Odyssea* I,19-21.

⁵⁰ DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *De Vitis Dogmatibus et Apophthegmatibus Clarorum Philosophorum*, III,8

fact, that the journeys recorded in the Gospel become in this way the means by which a reader is not only involved in the story but is also enabled to share in the destiny of Jesus, the central character of the story.⁵¹ J. Staley similarly spoke of Jesus being accompanied in his journeys by certain central figures which include; John the Baptist, Lazarus and the Beloved disciple. The reader who shares in the destiny of the journeying Jesus will therefore be in good company.

However, in spite of its many positive and helpful insights, Bazzi's proposal is not without its own limitations. First, although the proposal throws light on larger textual units (such as 1:19-3:36; 4:1-5:47 etc), the conclusion that the micro structure of even smaller text units has also been shaped by the journey theme as well, is rather too ambitious and perhaps unrealistic. When one takes passages containing long speeches or dialogues, for instance, these pose a serious challenge as to how they are to fit into the journey structure. Bazzi himself in fact acknowledges the absence of explicit references to the journey motif in chapters 13-17; 20-21.⁵² It is probably the realization of this fact that made him in his discussion of 8:12-59 (another long dialogical passage) to abandon his own proposal and instead discuss the passage as an example of juridical rhetoric.⁵³ This after all shows that even though it is true that the Fourth Gospel, taken together, speaks of the journey of Jesus, Bazzi's overall thesis that the journey has a formative influence on the structure of the whole Gospel in such a way as to exclude other proposals such as the ones earlier discussed is not entirely convincing.

Secondly, although it is true that there are many references to the physical movements of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, it is hard to tell if these movements can lend themselves as major tools for a meaningful, painstaking exegesis of the passages of the Gospel. In chapter 8, for instance, expressions of movement are spread out in verses 31,35,38,40,42,47 and 59. All the same, it is difficult to see what role these can play in the exegesis of the chapter as a whole.

Thirdly, when one surveys the entire Gospel of John as a whole, it is noticeable that the theme of the journey is never treated in itself anywhere. Nor is it an object of explicit reflection. It is hard to say if there is a single passage in which the journey of Jesus is really at the centre of the Evangelist's interest. The journey is rather a sub-theme used in the service of other themes such as the Christology

⁵¹ M. RISSI, "Der Aufbau des," 48-54.

⁵² C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 8

⁵³ C. BAZZI, *Giovanni*, 95-96

or soteriology of the Fourth Gospel. To make the journey therefore a major key for interpreting the whole Gospel amounts to emphasizing what is rather ancillary.

Conclusion

Despite its limitation in being a reliable resource for a rigorous and meaningful exegesis of the passages of the Fourth Gospel, one cannot deny the fact that Bazzi's proposal can be used as basis for a theological reflection. The preference of the journey structural proposal in this research write-up is based on the fact that, in my opinion, it is one of the deepest such attempts and one which covers every part of the Gospel without necessarily exaggerating any irrelevant elements. By using this structure, the proposal has highlighted both the complexity and dynamic nature of the Gospel, and yet at the same time has left an opening for the integration of other themes since no one single theme is made absolute. The relative flexibility of this structure proposal makes it quite attractive. Perhaps it is this flexibility and openness that makes scholars to place it under more than one approach. For instance, although C. Bazzi lists it among the narrative approaches, F. F. Segovia before him had described it as a literary-rhetorical approach.⁵⁴ In the spirit of the same flexibility, even a literary reading of all or part of the Gospel can indeed benefit a great deal from this proposal.

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⁵⁴ F. F. SEGOVIA, "The Journey(s) of," 31.

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