

JESUS TRADITION AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. THE INSPIRATION OF MEMORY AND THE TRUTH OF WRITING

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Resum

L'Evangeli de Joan és una font important per a reconstruir les circumstàncies de la vida i la mort de Jesús. Aquest Evangeli és un document de la tradició de Jesús que combina la fe *en Crist* amb un interès teològic en la seva vida i la seva mort, en la seva predicació i en la seva pregària, el seu poder i la seva passió. L'Evangeli de Joan és també un llibre amb una història i un discurs que necessita lectors inspirats per a entendre la veritat de Jesús i el missatge d'amor de Déu. El camí per a reconstruir l'anomenat «Jesús històric» va des dels sinòptics, que donen la informació i orientació bàsiques, fins a Joan, que il·lustra amb els colors de Jesús el fons sobre el qual l'evangeli de Jesús s'ha d'explicar i llegir com a evangeli de Déu.

Paraules clau: Evangeli de Joan, tradició de Jesús, memòria, inspiració, veritat.

Abstract

The Gospel of John is an important source for the reconstruction of the circumstances of Jesus' life and death. The Gospel of John is a document belonging to the Jesus tradition, combining faith in Christo with a theological interest in his life and death, his preaching and praying, his power and passion. John is also a book with a story and a discourse which needs inspired readers to understand the truth of Jesus' own Gospel as the love of God. The way to reconstruct the so called "historical Jesus" is to start from the Synoptics which give the basic information and orientation to John who paints, with Jesus' own colours, the theological background before them. The Gospel of Jesus is to be told and read as the Gospel of God.

Keywords: *Gospel of John, Jesus tradition, memory, inspiration, truth.*

1. THE *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

“Let John be John”, is James Dunn’s slogan,¹ and “Let Jesus be Jesus” could be the standard answer of critical exegetes. It seems to be an axiom of modern biblical research that there is a big gap between the Gospel of Jesus and the Gospel of John. Some see not only a difference but an antinomy:² John’s Theology is discussed as an example of the divination of Jesus, but exegesis, in a historical approach, has to show his humanity. Therefore the Fourth Gospel has been outsourced from the so-called “Rückfrage”.

Indeed, a lot of differences between the Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of John are on the screen. On the one side there are strong discrepancies in the presentations of the historical framework in which Jesus was living and dying. In the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke only one year of public mission is being told, in John’s Gospel two or three years are narrated. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus has only a one way ticket from Galilee to Jerusalem, whereas in the Johannine Gospel he reaches the holy city three times, always on the road again between the Lake of Tiberias and the Mount of Zion. In John the so called cleansing of the temple after the wedding in Cana is the starting point of his public activities, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke it is, however, the beginning of the final countdown. The timing of the Passion makes the difference between a regular Passover meal in the Synoptic Gospels and an evening meal at the day of Preparation in John’s Gospel. The first three Gospels tell about a full court council of the high priests, the elders and the scribes, but John only mentions a meeting of some representatives in the house of Hannas. In John Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the risen Christ, in Luke the *proto-epiphany* is reserved for Peter; in Matthew Jesus first appears to the Galilean women in Jerusalem before the eleven disciples are allowed to see him in Galilee; Mark only has the promise of the angel in the empty tomb, where the women wanted to anoint Jesus’ body: “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mk 16,7).

In all the cases the impression John gives is of great plausibility. He seems to be well informed about space and time, about law and order, about feasts

1. «Let John be John. A Gospel for its Time», in Peter STUHLMACHER (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien. Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982*, Tübingen 1983, 309-339.
2. Cf. Ed P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London 1993; Gerd THEIßEN – Annette MÄRZ, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*, Göttingen ³2001 (¹1996); Jürgen BECKER, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Berlin – New York 1996.

and institutions in Jerusalem and Galilee.³ This needs explanation, although plausibility is not the same as reality. The Gospel itself offers the beloved disciple, virtual or real, traditional or editorial: He knows Gabbatha and Golgotha; he is the guarantee of the passion tradition with the feet washing, the visit of the courtyard of the high priest, the testimony of the crucifixion and the full and empty tomb. Perhaps he is also responsible for Bethesda and Siloam. The discussion about his unexpected death in John 21, the open question whether he belongs to the Twelve, the riddle of his name —this all gives evidence that he, the “other disciple” (John 18,15), is the ideal follower of Jesus and witness of his truth, but has a historical background in Jerusalem.⁴ There are other episodes, esp. the dialogue with the Samaritan woman at James’ well (Joh 4,1-42), the healing of the Official’s son (Joh 4,43-54) or the resurrection Lazarus (Joh 11) which has so many hidden connections with the Synoptic Gospels that a memory of an event seems to be not totally impossible.

So it could be helpful not to exclude the Johannine perspective in order to reconstruct the history of Jesus: from the pilgrimages to Jerusalem to the timetable of the Passion week, from his signs in the holy city and its neighborhood to the proceedings of his trial and from his contacts with Samaria to the Christophany of Mary Magdalene. That does not mean affirming directly the historicity of all special traditions in the Fourth Gospel but discussing it in a more open way than in the main stream exegesis of the 20th century.

But at the same time the main factor to discuss the relation between the Jesus tradition and the Gospel of John is the narrated Gospel of Jesus itself: In the Synoptic Tradition the “I” of Jesus is often highlighted, but the main topic of his proclamation is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Gospel of John, however, the Kingdom is only the background but the “I” of Jesus the very centre of his exegesis of God as Father (Joh 1,18). Of course the faith is the fundamental answer and the discipleship is the practical consequence in all of the canonical Gospels. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the proclamation of God the Father also in the Synoptic Tradition, which testifies a high Christology, as well.

3. Cf. Martin HENGEL, «Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Judentums», in Id., *Judaica, Hellenistica und Christiana*. Kleine Schriften zum Neuen Testament II (WUNT 109), Tübingen 1999, 292-334.

4. Cf. Th. SÖDING, «Die Perspektive des „Anderen“. Zur Stellung des Johannesevangeliums im Kanon», in Id. (ed.), *Johannesevangelium – Mitte oder Rand des Kanons?* (QD 203), Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2003, 258-317.

But to “believe the Gospel” (Mk 1,15) in Mark, Matthew and Luke means to trust in God and has the implication of the confession to Christ which to give the disciples are enabled after Easter, while in John Jesus often very openly speaks of being the Son of God. “Have faith in God” is the invitation to the disciples in Mk 11,22, but: “Believe in God, believe also in me”, he exhorts them in John 14,1.⁵ The eternal life is Jesus’ promise in the Synoptic Gospels as well as in the Gospel of John. But in Mark, Matthew and Luke, this life will be the reality of the transcendental future after the death and resurrection, while in John it is a reality of the transcendental presence; and in the first three Gospels it is the result of the *parousia* of the Son of Man while in the fourth Gospel it is the participation in the everlasting love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Synoptic teaching of Jesus is that of parables, disciple education, disputes, and *apophthegmata*, while in John Jesus is a mystagogue who is engaged to open in long dialogues and speeches the ears and hearts of the people for the truth of God.

At this point a new approach has to start. Is there a genuine trace of Jesus tradition in John? Is it an alternative to or an amplification of the Synoptic Jesus images? Harmonization is not a real possibility in scientific Jesus research. The philological evidence is clear: Johannine tradition is not a necessary condition to understand the Synoptic Gospels, but a number of Synoptic knowledge is needed to read John. So the Church fathers exegesis leads the right way from the Synoptics to John, maybe not insofar as John knows one, two or three of these books in their canonical form, but insofar as he works with Synoptic material and Synoptic presuppositions. In any case, the Gospel of John, whether written in Gaulanitis or in Ephesus, never was an isolated one, but it is from its very beginning a part of the Early Christian tradition building in different places with different traces but one subject: Jesus himself.

So the main question is, in which way does John himself present his own entrance to Jesus. Only when that position is clearly marked the next step is possible: to discuss the theological content but also the historical substance and hermeneutical dimension of John’s Jesus Gospel.

5. «Zur Einordnung cf. *Philippe Van den Heede*, Weggehen, um wiederzukommen. Das Ostergeheimnis nach der ersten Abschiedsrede im Johannesevangelium», *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift “Communio”* 40 (2011) 15-25.

2. THE MEMORY OF THE SPIRIT

The farewell discourse in John⁶ is elaborated as answer Jesus gives to his disciples who fear that he could treat them when he will go his way through the death to his heavenly Father while they have to stay in the world of enemies. Jesus promises his comeback. But he also gives his word that they will not be alone in the days of their earthly life. They will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁷

In Joh 7 Jesus was announcing the coming out of the Spirit. The last day of the feast of tabernacles (Joh 7,2)⁸ when Jesus was speaking in the temple (Joh 7,14) knows a water ceremony that the high priests dip water from the pool of Siloam seven times to take it to the altar. It is a liturgy of joy and grace (Jes 12,3; Ez 47,1-12). Jesus contacts that rite and transcends it when he says: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink” (Joh 7,37f.). He reflects this proclamation in reference to the Holy Scripture: “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (Joh 7, 38). It is not a direct quotation but an echo of Scripture (Richard B. Hays); it comes from the theological model of the temple as well of the paradise’s river (Ez 17,1-7; Num 20,2-13; Jes 48,21; 55,1; Ps 77,16.20LXX). In John Jesus himself is the living shrine of God in the world; his body is the eternal temple (Joh 2,21), his flesh and blood is the resource of eternal life. As the Wisdom invites to the *symposion* of education (Prov 9,4f.), so Jesus invites to the meal of salvation. But in the Gospel of John the invitation of Jesus leads the *via dolorosa*. A central scene of the crucifixion in John is the piercing of Jesus: “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (Joh 19,34). This is a painful image of the salvation power which flows from the cross, understood in John as culmination of Jesus’ service to glorify the Father and to save the world. In Joh 7 the Evangelist comments: “But he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Joh 7,39). The glorification of Jesus is the resurrection of the crucified. The missing link of the Spirit in pre-Easter time is not a reserve in the ministry of Jesus but waiting for its fulfillment.

6. Cf. Jean ZUMSTEIN, *L'Évangile selon Saint Jean (13-21)* (CNT IVb), Genève 2007.

7. Cf. Th. SÖDING, «Das Wehen des Geistes. Aspekte neutestamentlicher Pneumatologie», in Bernhard NITSCHKE (ed.), *Atem des sprechenden Gottes. Einführung in die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist*, Regensburg 2003, 21-71.

8. Cf. Harold W. ATTRIDGE, «Temple, Tabernacle, Time, and Space in John and Hebrews», *Early Christianity* 1 (2010) 261-274.

In his “farewell” Jesus prepares his disciples to the challenge of the future. It will be a time without his bodily presence but it will be a time of his spiritual presence. There is a discussion whether John 14-16 is a literary unity⁹ or an addition of different traditions¹⁰ or the document of a *relecture*.¹¹ Whatever the result may be: four times Jesus is speaking about the Paraclete; four steps are marked by Jesus to introduce his disciples into their Easterly status and mission.¹² In the original as well as in the canonical version of the Gospel, Jesus is the pioneer; the way he takes the disciples with him is founded in his own way he goes for them; this is the way of salvation he takes into the world, in order to bring God, and through the death beyond this world to his father to come back to his disciples who have to live within the world. The Holy Spirit is building the bridge over troubled water in the deep ditch between the revelation history of Jesus and the actual situation of the ecclesial community.

In the first word Jesus presents himself as prayer: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever, in the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (Joh 14,16f.). It is God the Father who will give the Spirit; it is Jesus the Son who is praying for him; it is this Advocate—or Comforter—who is an *alter ego* of Jesus. He is the “other” Paraclete, because Jesus himself was “with” the disciples and will be “in” them; so the Spirit will be “with” and “in” the disciples all the time, although—and because—Jesus will be in heaven. The Spirit will be there as “advocate”: He will help the disciples, supporting and defending, comforting, inspiring and motivating them. In the Spirit Jesus himself will be present “in” and “with” the disciples. Moreover: The disciples are not alone in the world; Jesus, leaving the world, is giving himself to the world in the Spirit. Jesus presents the Paraclete as “the Spirit of truth”. The only help, the only support, the only defense, the only comfort, the only inspiration and motivation is truth. The gift of the Spirit is the gift of truth.

9. Cf. Ignace DE LA POTTERIE, *La verite de Sain Jean I-II* (AnBib 73-74), Roma 1974.

10. Cf. Raymond E. BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels I-II* (AncB.RF), New York 1994.

11. Vgl. Jean ZUMSTEIN, *Kreative Erinnerung. Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (AthANT 84), Zürich 2004.

12. Cf. Michael THEOBALD, «Was und wen hat Jesus angekündigt? Das Rätsel um den Parakleten im johanneischen Schrifttum», in Timo GÜZELMANSUR (ed.), *Hat Jesus Muhammad angekündigt? Der Paraklet des Johannes Evangeliums und seine koranische Deutung*, Regensburg 2012, 74-207.

Which truth Jesus has in mind and in which way the Spirit will serve the truth is still open in this first reference. But from the context of the whole Gospel it becomes clear —exactly in that sense, which the following Paraclete-words will explain.

The second verse is from the end of the first speech (or the first part of the speech): “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Joh 14,26).¹³ While Jesus in the first word was undertaken to pray for the Spirit, here he is promising that his Father will answer his beg and send this “Advocate”. In the second word Jesus says how the Spirit is the Spirit of the truth. Two explanations are bound together with a *kai epexegeticus*: The Advocate is a teacher —as Jesus is (Joh 1,38; 3,2; 6,59; 7,12.28; 8.20.28; 18,20; 20,4); and the teaching of the Spirit is remembering the word of Jesus. To teach the Gospel is not only to proclaim it but also to make it understandable and acceptable. As teacher Jesus is the *hermeneutes* of the word of God. Therefore faith is not only trust and confession but also insight and perception. But Jesus has proclaimed words of eternal worth, as Peter recognized after Jesus’ speech about the true bread in the synagogue of Capernaum (Joh 6,68). So the Spirit has nothing to teach beyond the teaching of Jesus but to teach only what Jesus taught. He is remembering. In Joh 14,26 the full biblical sense of memory is adapted: There is something what happened: the teaching of Jesus. But his past is present: because of his resurrection; and it is present through remembrance. To remember the teaching of Jesus does not mean to copy or to reduplicate but to repeat and actualize it. Memory is of great creativity. In order to keep the memory fresh, it is absolutely necessary to concentrate the core (forgetting the negligibilities), to synthesize the real sense of a spoken word (straining off the sidetones), and to correlate the traditional word not only with the past situation and context of the speaker but also the present situation and context of the hearer. To remember Jesus’ sayings does not only mean to keep his words in mind; he *is* the world of God in person (Joh 1,14); so to remember the teaching of Jesus means to spell out the word in the words and the person in the signs. This is, so to say, to discover the Spirit in the letter and to root the preaching of the disciples in the teaching of Jesus.

The next step is that from memory to testimony. Even if it is redactional it is consequent. At the end of the first (part of the) speech Jesus was talking

13. Cf. Peter STUHLMACHER, «Spiritual remembering: John 14.26», in Graham STANTON (ed.), *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins. FS James D. G. Dunn*, Grand Rapids 2004, 55-68.

about his will and wish “that the world may know that I love the Father” (Joh 14,31). The question in which way this message could become the news of the world is answered by the second (part of the) discourse. Here Jesus —as he is speaking in the Fourth Gospel— captures the cues of the former words and develops their meaning: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify of me” (Joh 15,26).¹⁴ Once more, the Spirit is presented as “Spirit of truth”. Once more Jesus proclaims that the Advocate will come “from the Father”. But now Jesus is not only the one who asks for him, but also the one who will send him —because his prayers will be fulfilled. The new dimension is that of witnessing. This witness is necessary because the disciples, elected as friends of Jesus (Joh 15,12-17), are persecuted in the world (Joh 15,18-25). So they do need a good Advocate. This counsel is the Holy Spirit. In the crisis of the hate of the world he is saying the truth and nothing than truth. So he is the one who will help the disciples testify for Jesus. The greek phrase *peri* does not only mean “about” or “on behalf of” but also “for” —under that aspect that there is no better word in favor of Jesus than the words, and deeds, of Jesus himself. To give the testimony “of” Jesus means to remember his own testimony of God. But the Spirit who will remind the disciples of what they are taught by Jesus also has to inspire the disciples to be the defenders of Jesus and preachers of his word. So the Paraclete-word continues: “And you also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning” (Joh 15,27). It is clear that the Spirit testifies Jesus through the mouth of the disciples and that they are only able to witness because of the Spirit who is “with” them and “in” them. To testify Jesus is the call of the disciples, the reason of their vocation, and the consequence of Jesus’ own mission. In John 14 the disciples are characterized as receiving the memory of Jesus by the Spirit; now the human factor of the evangelization is concretized because the disciples as subjects are mentioned. Their story with Jesus is of great importance. The Gospel is truth, no gnosis. The disciples do know Jesus from their own experience. That is why they have the possibility to tell the story of Jesus as witnesses. This mission corresponds to the competence and effort of the Advocate, insofar as he reminds them of the teaching of Jesus in which the disciples, as portrayed in John,

14. Cf. Giorgio GIURISATO, «Lo “Spirito di verità”. Struttura e messaggio di Gv 15,26-16,15», in Santo GRASSO (ed.), *Generati da una parola di verità* (Gc 1,18). FS Rinaldo Fabris (RB.S 47), Bologna 2006, 155-172.

were addressed themselves. The inspired memory is an inspiring one which defeats the fear and strengthens the faith of the disciples.

The fourth step of the disciples' introduction of the Spirit belongs to the last (section of the) farewell discourse. It is the longest sequence. It has two parts. The first part is an accentuation that the Paraclete testifies Jesus in the world of hate and injustice: "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you, and when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you will see me no longer; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (Joh 16,7-11). The witness of the Paraclete is the same witness as that of Jesus, because he also was coming to confront the world with the truth of God (Joh 3,17-21). But the disciples are not only taught about this coming and function of the Spirit, but also included in this work. That is the second part of the last Paraclete-word. Here different aspects of the former verses are highlighted. The main aspect is the relation of the disciples to the truth: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Joh 16,13a).¹⁵ In this word of promise the "truth" does not appear as a coherent system of sentences or as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* but as a room in which the disciples are invited to share their experiences, their insights, their prayers and their stories, or as a horizon in which a real communication, an real sentiment, an real thinking is being made possible. The truth is not the possession but the aim of the disciples. To be disciples of Jesus means to be searching the truth, guided by the Spirit. The way of learning and understanding will not come to an end in this world because of the richness of truth. The sense of "all the truth" is substantiated in the following word: "For he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Joh 16,13b). So once more the memory of Jesus is expelled, but now under the aspect of the relation between Christ and the Spirit: "He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Joh 16,14). What Jesus has to give to his friends is a gift from his Father: "All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Joh 16, 15).

15. Cf. Reimund BIERINGER, «The Spirit's Guidance into all the Truth. The text-critical problems of John 16,13», in Adelbert DENAUX (ed.), *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis. FS Joël Delobel* (BETHL 161), Leuven 2002, 183-207.

The inspiration of memory is a gift of the Spirit, given by the Father, sent by the Son. It is a gift which the disciples are allowed to receive, to understand and to testify. If they accept the truth, this gift becomes the soul of their life. The Spirit will be with them and in them. They are on the way to discover the whole truth. They can remember what they were taught by Jesus. *His* words became *their* words, by listening to Jesus and remembering to his mission. *Their* words are *his* words, inspired by the Spirit. The dynamic of inspiration makes the disciples, the friends of Jesus, witnesses of his truth, the love of God. Memory is the way of preaching the Gospel because Jesus *is* the truth (Joh 14,6). Of course, there will be new insight, fresh inspiration, a dynamic development; Jesus promises that his disciples will do “greater works” (Joh 14,12). But all they need to know they hear and learn from Jesus, although they need time to understand it—with the help of the Spirit. Inspired memory in the sense of John is a creative memory (Jean Zumstein)—not to invent a Christ phantasy or to fabricate a *dogma*, but to re-imagine the history, to re-construct the theology, to re-design the performance of Jesus. That is their way to recognize the truth of Jesus and to present it in the story of a Gospel.

3. THE WRITING OF THE GOSPEL

In the first epilogue the Evangelist defines his hermeneutics of writing: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (Joh 20,30f.).¹⁶ Here the creativity and responsibility of writing is clearly explicated. The Gospel is not only a selection but also an election. There are a lot of things Jesus has done, and words Jesus has spoken which the disciples might have in mind because they are witnesses of them. But it is the decision of the author only to memorize and write down some of them: those who are the best to portray Jesus as Christ, the Son of God—so that faith is possible for all the people who have not the privilege of Thomas but the beatitude of Jesus (John 20,24-29).

16. Cf. Th. SÖDING, «Die Schrift als Medium des Glaubens. Zur hermeneutischen Bedeutung von Joh 20,30f.», in Knut BACKHAUS – Franz Georg UNTERGAßMAIR (ed.), *Schrift und Tradition. FS Josef Ernst*, Paderborn 1996, 343-371.

The point of view the Evangelist has is the faith in Christ. His story represents the history of Jesus' public mission and public passion, but his discourse is only possible after Easter. It connects the past and the presence; it also declares the way of tradition building: It is the process of remembering as the process of understanding. Twice this connection is established.

The first place is the revolution of sanctity Jesus instigates in the temple. The Evangelist narrates: "His disciples remembered that it was written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me' (Ps 60,10)" (Joh 2,17).¹⁷ This remembrance seems to be a part of the story. But later on the narrator comments the temple event and the impressions of the disciples: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (Joh 2,22). Their faith is the same faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; which, in the light of the epilogue, is the resource and the goal, the motivation and the perspective of the Fourth Gospel. The resurrection is the key to understand the temple action of Jesus and to tell the story as a story of faith which recognizes the true meaning. What Jesus was doing once in Jerusalem was the ministry of his whole life. So the real death of Jesus reveals the absoluteness of his devotion for the sake of the world. It is the context of the whole way of Jesus to the cross and through the cross into the highness of God that makes understandable every single station of his way of life. The temple action is mentioned as beacon of his whole mission.

The second place corresponds to the first. The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Joh 12,12-19)¹⁸ is—in the Synoptic narrative as in the Johannine—an eschatological event. The people cry an enthusiastic "Hosanna" (Ps 118,25f.): *vox populi – vox Dei*. The Evangelist comments Jesus' ride with reference to Is 40,9 and Sach 9,9: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (Joh 12,15), and John continues: "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him" (Joh 12,16). Here once more the easterly point of view is marked as turning point of understanding by remembering. Looking back in faith they are able to understand what happened: that Jesus did not choose a horse but a donkey to appear as humble Messiah who is

17. Cf. Christina METZDORF, *Die Tempelaktion Jesu. Patristische und historisch-kritische Exegese im Vergleich* (WUNT 168), Tübingen 2003.

18. Cf. Claus-Peter MARZ, «Siehe, dein König kommt zu dir... Der "Einzug" in Jerusalem», *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 38 (2009) 5-13.

prepared to go the way of the cross. The disciples remember not only the messianic entry but also the reference to the Scripture which makes them discover the sense of the story.

Commenting the story of Jesus and characterizing the process of the disciples' understanding the Evangelist presents himself in his book as an inspired author. He is one of the disciples or a disciple of the first disciples who now are learned because the Holy Spirit has trained their memory.¹⁹ He is able not only to tell the Jesus story but also to enlighten in essential aspects the genesis and formation of the Jesus tradition which lives in the community of the believers.

In the full text of the Gospel the relation between the Evangelist and the beloved disciple is essential. In John 1-20 this disciple is a character of the narrated world. In Joh 19,35 his central position under the cross is described: "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (Joh 19,35). The Evangelist writes that he knows that the disciple knows the truth. The beloved disciple is the best witness because he "saw". When he "testified", he said what he saw. So the world could know what happened with Jesus on the cross —and the Evangelist is the mediator of this knowledge. In John 21,24f., the second epilogue, the beloved disciple is the ideal author of the whole book, edited and confirmed by a community of readers: "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true" (Joh 21,24).²⁰ John 21 is written to integrate the Galilean Easter tradition and to establish the special position of the beloved disciple in his relation to Peter. It is not so clear that the ideal author is the real one, as it seems to be in centuries of traditional exegesis; but it is not so clear, too, that he is only a virtual person, as it is argued in

19. That connection is criticized by Jürgen BECKER, *Johanneisches Christentum*, Tübingen 2004. He reads John as narrated dogma.

20. It is an open question if Joh 21 is an original part or an addition to the Gospel; cf. on the one side Gilbert VAN BELLE, «L'unité littéraire et les deux finales du quatrième évangile», in Andreas DETTWILER (ed.), *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes. FS Jean Zumstein* (AThANT 97), Zürich 2009, 297-315; on the other side Armin D. BAUM, «The original Epilogue (John 20:30-31), the Secondary Appendix (21:1-23), and the Editorial Epilogues (21:24-25) of John's Gospel. Observations against the Background of Ancient Literary Conventions», in Michael F. BIRD – Jason MASTON (eds.), *Earliest Christian History. History, Literature, and Theology. Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel* (WUNT II/320), Tübingen 2012, 227-270.

important modern studies on John.²¹ He is the privileged witnesses, and in this respects the first link in the tradition chain which the Fourth Gospel belongs to.²² The Evangelist has a strong connection to the beloved disciple. He describes his position and his story; he affirms his truth; he gives his witness the form of the Gospel. So the Evangelist presents himself as inspired author in the discipleship of Jesus. The promise of inspired memory allows to write a book in which the truth of Jesus is performed.

The truth of the Gospel, seen with the eyes of its writer, is not the documentation of as much details of the life and death of Jesus as possible but a good selection and an ambitious presentation of his words and works in the right prospective: the prospective of God. The ambition of John is the proclamation of Jesus in his unity with God the father, and that not on the level of theological reflection about Jesus, but with his own words. For that he reclaims the witness of the beloved disciple who is the profiled representative of the disciples, by whom remembering of Jesus is inspired.

4. THE STIMULUS

The new discussion on Jesus and John should stimulate the exegetical debate. On the one hand it is necessary for every work on John to realize that he wrote a Jesus Gospel. Jesus' body and soul, his blood and tears, his flesh and spirit are not only a topic of theological thinking but the essence of the narration. Indeed, there is a good theological neighborhood to the First Epistle of John; the Fourth Gospel is deeply embedded in the early Christian theology. But John wanted to clarify in what deepness the confession of the Church is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus. That is a similar hermeneutic like that of the Synoptic Gospels, although their way to connect the Easterly theology with the message of Jesus has another construction and another direction.

On the other hand it is stimulating not only to discuss the Synoptic but also the Johannine Jesus tradition in a historical approach. To compare Mark, Matthew and Luke on the one side with John on the other side does

21. Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte. Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte. Mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6* (SBB 16), Stuttgart 1988.

22. Cf. Th. SÖDING, «„Er hat es gesehen“ (Joh 19,35). Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannesevangelium», in Matthias KRATZ – Ludwig MÖDL (Hg.), *Freunde und Feinde – Vertraute und Verräter*, München 2009, 97-113.

not only help to profile the different views and presentations; it also helps to see the Synoptic Traditions in their theological interests, their theological intentions, and their theological perspective. All Evangelists are theologians, the Synoptics no less than John. But they do present Jesus with his theology in different ways. To say that Jesus has proclaimed the Kingdom of God is not so much the identification of a historical fact but a well founded result of a critical reading of the Gospels which are engaged to figure Jesus as *Basileia*-prophet. The Johannine perspective is not the same, but it is an alternative one. He highlights the topic of eternal life which is a synoptic theme as well.

John is not the first but the fourth Gospel. It needs the Synoptic tradition. Sometimes it tries to correct it a little bit (never without reason), often it adds it, especially in the Cana-, the Samaria-, and the Jerusalem-episodes (always with local traditions in the background). Consistently it expels its implicit Christology. While in the Synoptic Tradition Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18,12ff. par. Lk 15,3-7), in John he proclaims himself as the Good Shepherd (Joh 10). While in the Synoptic Tradition Jesus tells the parable of the Sower (Mk 4,3-9 parr.), who sows the word (Mk 4,14 parr.), in John his *is* the word of God. While in the Synoptic Tradition Jesus tells the parable of the beloved Son who is sent into the vineyard and killed by the tenants (Mk 12,1-12), in John he reveals himself as the Son who is loved by the Father so that he can share this love which all people who God will bring in contact with him. While in the Synoptic Tradition Jesus invites the people to find the highway to heaven, in John he himself appears as door (Joh 10) and way (Joh 14,6).

The process of expression is a process of personalization; so it is not another theology but an Christological explication of a lot of implications in the Synoptic Gospels. There is no reader of John who will not be able to recognize Jesus —the same as that Jesus who is acting and suffering in the Synoptic Gospels but from another side and in another light. Because of this process of theological expression it is not possible to isolate some *ipsissima verba* from the rest of the Gospel— just as it is very difficult to cut between tradition and redaction. But that is a phenomenon which also —although in other forms— is present in the Synoptic Tradition: There is no single Jesus word in all the Gospels without selection, without translation, without stylization, without contextualization. John is only the most prominent case.

The stimulus for Jesus research is threefold. First, the Gospel of John is an important source to reconstruct circumstances of Jesus' life and death. Second, the Gospel of John is a document of Jesus tradition which combines

the faith *in Christo* with a theological interest in his life and death, his preaching and praying, his power and passion. And third, John is a book with a story and a discourse which needs inspired readers to understand the truth of Jesus' own Gospel the love of God.

The way to reconstruct the so called "historical Jesus" is the way from the Synoptics which give the basic information and orientation to John who paints, with the colors of Jesus, the theological background before them the Gospel of Jesus is to be told and read as Gospel of God.