

Prologue: Jesus' Discourses in the Fourth Gospel

The Gospel of John has frequently been compared to a pool in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim. This particular pool, we may add, owes at least some of its characteristic appeal to the fact that it is filled to a significant degree with discourses. In his *Preface to the New Testament* from 1522, Martin Luther poignantly remarks:

“Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about his preaching, while the other evangelists write much about his works and little about his preaching. Therefore John’s Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them.”¹

However one rates the significance of John among the canonical Gospels, Luther’s impression about the amount of direct speech in the Fourth Gospel is not exactly right. John’s Gospel contains a total of 15,420 words of which more than half, i.e., 8,993 words, are direct speech.² The percentage of speech material within the Fourth Gospel (58 percent) is thus similar to, yet even lower than, that of Matthew (66 percent) and Luke (60 percent). Only Mark has less direct speech (46 percent) than narrative material. Within all four canonical Gospels, most of the *oratio recta* is found on the lips of Jesus. In John about three quarters of all direct speech can be attributed to Jesus (6,547 words or 42 percent of the Gospel’s total). Apart from the so-called high-priestly prayer (John 17:1-26; about 500 words) and several shorter sayings like those uttered on the cross, more than half of Jesus’ *oratio recta* is found in dialogues (about 3,600 words) and more than a

¹ Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 362. The German original reads: “weil nun Johannes gar wenig Werk von Christo, aber gar viel seiner Predigt schreibt, wiederum die anderen drei Evangelisten viel seiner Werk, wenig seiner Wort beschreiben, ist Johannis Evangelium das einzige, zarte, rechte Hauptevangelium und den andern dreien weit, weit vorzuziehen und höher zu heben.” (Idem., *Das Neue Testament Erste Hälfte: Evangelien und Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 6 of *Die Deutsche Bibel*, ed. Ulrich Köpf, D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe 46 [Weimar: Böhlau, 1929], 10.)

² These statistics as well as the percentages below go back to a hand count provided by Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context*, WUNT 2/220 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 133-34, based on the total numbers in Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1982), 164. All other numbers in this section are based on my own hand count and are rounded.

third in longer, contiguous speeches (about 2,400 words). In this last count, an utterance had to contain at least 200 consecutive words in order to be considered as a speech.³ However, if we include those dialogue elements with hundred or more consecutive words, the extent of speeches increases to about 3,200 words.⁴ The bulk of Jesus' speech material in the Fourth Gospel is contained in nine discourses or rather extensive dialogues, which comprise a total of about 4,700 words:⁵

- (1) The Discourse on New Birth [John 3:1-21]
- (2) The Water of Life Discourse [John 4:1-42]
- (3) The Discourse on the Divine Son [John 5:19-47]
- (4) The Bread of Life Discourse [John 6:22-59]
- (5) The Discourse on the Life Giving Spirit [John 7:1-52]
- (6) The Light of the World Discourse [John 8:12-59]
- (7) The Good Shepherd Discourse [John 10:1-42]
- (8) Words on the Glorification of the Son [John 12:23-50]
- (9) The Farewell Discourse [John 13:31-16:33]

In these Johannine discourses Jesus turns to three groups of addressees: individuals (Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman; discourses 1 and 2), his disciples (discourses 8 [at least parts] and 9 [as well as parts of discourse 2]), and a broader group of people, either designated as "the Jews," "the Pharisees," or "the crowd" (discourses 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Jesus' *Oratio Recta* in the Gospel of John⁶

Speech Material (total)		6,500 words
<i>Dialogue</i>		3,600 (2,800) words
<i>Extended Discourse</i>		2,400 (3,200) words
John 3:1-21 [<i>The New Birth</i>]	Individual	308 words
John 4:1-42 [<i>The Water of Life</i>]	Individual (4:1-30, [39-42])	176 words
	Disciples (4:31-38)	102 words
John 5:19-47 [<i>The Divine Son</i>]	Jews	512 words
John 6:22-59 [<i>The Bread of Life</i>]	Jews	480 words
John 7:14-39 [<i>The Life Giving Spirit</i>]	Jews	213 words
John 8:12-59 [<i>The Light of the World</i>]	Jews	431 words
John 10:1-42 [<i>The Good Shepherd</i>]	Jews	497 words

³ Extended discourse sections with 200 or more words are John 3:10-21; 5:19-47; 10:7-18; 14:9-16:16; 16:19-28.

⁴ More than a hundred consecutive words of Jesus are found in John 6:35-40; 6:43-51; 6:53-58; 8:14-19; 8:42-47; 12:23-28; 12:44-50.

⁵ We may possibly add to this list the dialogue with Pilate in John 18:33-38 and 19:9-11.

⁶ The parentheses in the right column indicate the numbers when dialogue elements of a hundred or more consecutive words are included.

John 12:23-50 [<i>The Glorification of the Son</i>]	Jews (Disciples)	310 words
John 13:31-16:33 [<i>The Farewell Discourse</i>]	Disciples	1,650 words

When it comes to the function of these Johannine discourses, it has often been observed that they are closely linked to the narrative parts of the Gospel. In fact, “the incidents narrated receive an interpretation of their evangelical significance in the discourse; or, to put it otherwise, the truths enunciated in the discourses are given dramatic expression in the actions described.”⁷ Words and deeds are closely knit together and within this structural unity the impact and importance of the discourses in the Fourth Gospel can hardly be overestimated. Several of the “signs” narrated in the Fourth Gospel can even be linked to a specific discourse that functions as a theological explanation of the particular event or action. This interpretive role of the Johannine discourses further highlights “that [in John] the spoken words function as the main vehicle for communicating the author’s point of view.”⁸ Jesus’ words are foundational for the literary and theological purposes of the Gospel of John.

As we look at characteristic features of Jesus’ discourses in the Gospel of John, we encounter numerous noteworthy distinctives, most of which come to light when we confront them with accounts of Jesus’ teaching in the Synoptics.⁹ Already the literary form of the elaborate discourses used by the author of the Fourth Gospel stands in general contrast with the Synoptists’ portrait of Jesus’ teaching that predominantly features short, pithy sayings and parables (but cf. several lengthy teaching sections in Matthew). Several of the singular sayings, parables, and metaphorical words in John

⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 384.

⁸ Kierspel, *The Jews*, 138. Others have even more poignantly emphasized the significance of direct speech in the Gospel of John. E.g., Kierspel (*ibid.*, 134) quotes Morna Hooker: “The bulk of the rest of John’s gospel – until we come to the passion narrative – is theological discourse, held together by a slight narrative framework: his material is essentially a brief account of certain activities of Jesus, together with lengthy theological comment on the significance of those activities, usually in the mouth of Jesus himself.” Cf. also Stephen S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist & Interpreter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 129-33.

⁹ As a general introduction to the speeches in the Fourth Gospel, see Johannes Beutler, “Literarische Gattungen im Johannesevangelium. Ein Forschungsbericht 1919–1980,” in *Religion (Vorkonstantinisches Christentum: Leben und Umwelt Jesu; Neues Testament [Kanonische Schriften und Apokryphen], Forts.)*, vol. II.25.3 of ANRW, ed. W. Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984), 2550-58. For a more general overview of Johannine distinctives compared to the Synoptics, see, e.g., Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1987), 153-56; or Brooke F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), lxxviii-lxxxiv.

cannot obscure the fact that the Johannine pattern of extensive speeches is unique among our canonical accounts of the life of Jesus. Within these discourses, Jesus is often in dialogue with different interlocutors, whose misunderstandings further the conversation and enable Jesus to develop his theological teaching in more detail. Differences in vocabulary are obvious as well: distinctive Johannine terms commonly used by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (e.g., light, darkness, eternal life, truth, or witness) do not occur frequently, if at all, in the Synoptics. In addition to this typical Johannine vocabulary, no less conspicuous is that within John's Gospel, it is hardly possible to distinguish between Jesus' style (within direct speech) and the style of the author (within the narrative parts).¹⁰ The distinctive nature of Jesus' words in John's Gospel may also be seen in their theological emphases: while the Synoptics highlight Jesus' announcement of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and the temporal dualism between this age and the Age to Come, the Johannine Jesus focuses on his self-revelation as the eternal son of God (see especially the "I am"-sayings in John) and speaks more in terms of a cosmic tension between the above and the below with life being already imparted to the believer.¹¹

In light of these and other more general differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, John has been charged with "excessive individualism and introspective exclusivism."¹² Consequently, for over two centuries the Johannine discourses have received little attention as valuable contributions among scholars undertaking a quest for the historical Jesus. Norman Perrin probably represents a large part of the contemporary guild of historical Jesus scholars when he explicitly denied the usefulness of the Fourth Gospel for rediscovering the teaching of Jesus.¹³ More than a quarter century later, E. P. Sanders looked back on 150 years of Jesus research saying that scholars "have almost unanimously, I think entirely correctly, concluded that the teaching of the historical Jesus is to be sought in the synoptic gospels and that John represents an advanced theological development (...)"¹⁴ Even those, like N. T. Wright, who do not completely deny

¹⁰ Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 7-8.

¹¹ Cf. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 292-95 et al.

¹² Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, (Oxford: University Press, 1988), 436 (repeating the lament of John A.T. Robinson in his book *The Priority of John*).

¹³ Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, The New Testament Library (London: SCM, 1967), 48-49: "(...) the gospel of John is not a source of knowledge of the teaching of Jesus. (...) we have felt it necessary to ignore the Johannine material altogether."

¹⁴ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 71. Cf. also, among others, Marcus Borg, "Seeing Jesus: Sources, Lenses, and Method," in *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, ed. Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright (New York: Harper-

the historical authenticity of the Gospel of John, have voluntarily limited themselves to the usage of only the synoptic accounts of Jesus' words.¹⁵ Generally speaking, only a minority of gospel scholars would agree with Pope Benedict XVI., who has confidently included the Fourth Gospel among the reliable sources in his latest books on *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹⁶ Only recently, however, in two volumes containing their deliberations from the years 2002–2004 and 2005–2007, the John, Jesus, and History Study Group of the Society of Biblical Literature re-opened the case by reconsidering the prevalent critical views that have led to the modern dehistoricization of the Gospel of John as well as the de-Johannification of Jesus.¹⁷ Despite the

Collins, 1999), 12: "John's gospel is very different from the synoptic gospels and is not a primary source for the historical Jesus;" James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 165: "Few scholars would regard John as a source for information regarding Jesus' life and ministry in any degree comparable to the Synoptics." Although John P. Meier, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, vol. 1 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 45, is able to say that the "'tyranny of the synoptic Jesus' should be consigned to the dustbin of the post-Bultmannians," he later insists regarding the words of Jesus (53n22): "In the quest for the historical Jesus, the former [i.e., the narrative part of the Fourth Gospel] is much more useful than the latter [i.e., the sayings tradition]." Cf. also below chapter 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), xvi; contrary to Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die Person Jesu Christi im Spiegel der vier Evangelien*, HTKNTSup (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 24-27, who is skeptical about the historical value of John, yet uses the "fourfold gospel" for his reconstruction of the life and teaching of Jesus.

¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger [= Pope Benedict XVI.], *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 218-86, esp. 235: "It [i.e., the Gospel of John] shows us the real Jesus, and we can confidently make use of it as a source of information about him." See now also the sequel *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week – From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011). But cf. Jörg Frey's criticism in "Historisch – kanonisch – kirchlich. Zum Jesusbild Joseph Ratzingers," in *Das Jesus-Buch des Papstes. Die Antwort der Neutestamentler*, ed. Thomas Söding (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 43-53. Very few scholars would integrate the Johannine portrait into their representation of Jesus as unhesitatingly as Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), esp. 17, 407-08 (but see also those scholars mentioned in chapter 1.2.3 and 1.2.4). Gerd Theissen and Anette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 36, maintain that the Gospel of John "clearly presents the Jesus of the Gospels who is most stylized on the basis of theological premises," yet they also affirm that it is "not worthless" as a source. Cf. also Matthias Kreplin, *Das Selbstverständnis Jesu*, WUNT 2/141 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 74, who states that the Gospel of John has a "ergänzende Funktion" in the quest for the historical Jesus.

¹⁷ The 2002–2004 papers of this Study Group are now published in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisal of Critical Views*, eds. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, SBLSymS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). The terms "dehistoricization" and "de-Johannification" were coined by the chairmen of the Study Group to describe the critical consensus. The 2005–2007 essays appear in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2:*

broad spectrum of perspectives represented, the findings of the scholars involved in this project generally testify to a growing trend in Jesus studies to question the absolute hegemony of the Synoptics and to recognize the historical value of John with its discourses not necessarily excluded.¹⁸ And despite some methodological uncertainty about how to further an effective critical analysis, Paul N. Anderson, member of the group's steering committee, can summarize the "sense of the meeting," saying that the scholarly perspectives presented in the first volume "[call] for a more sustained focus on aspects of historicity in John."¹⁹

It is such a focus, albeit somewhat narrowly adjusted, that this study seeks to capture. Despite some postmodern voices more interested in the

Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel, eds. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, *Early Christianity and Its Literature 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁸ See, among others, the essays of Paul N. Anderson, "Why this Study is Needed, and Why It Is Needed Now," 13-70, and Mark Allan Powell, "The De-Johannification of Jesus: The Twentieth Century and Beyond," 121- 32, esp. 132 (both essays published in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1*), as well as Anderson's earlier work *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: T&T Clark, 2006). These kinds of contributions have been labelled as being led by a "neoconservative interest" by Jörg Frey, "Grundfragen der Johannesinterpretation im Spektrum neuerer Gesamtdarstellungen," *ThLZ* 133 (2008): 744. For an interesting discussion of the significance and limits of the critical majority view on Johannine reliability from a more philosophical perspective, see C. Stephen Evans, "The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: From What Perspective Should It Be Assessed?," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 91-119.

¹⁹ Paul N. Anderson, "Getting a 'Sense of the Meeting': Assessments and Convergences," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1*, 289. Cf. the concluding comment by the same author in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2*, saying that "all the essays in this volume argue that *Johannine historicity remains an important object of ongoing critical research*. If there is a single point of consensus within the present collection, this is it." (Paul N. Anderson, "Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel: Consensus and Convergences," 380 [*italics his*].) Although the Fourth Gospel seems to be slowly drawn back into the picture and despite some noteworthy proponents of a more positive view towards the authenticity of John, overall, Köstenberger's estimation that "John's Gospel stands today widely rehabilitated as a reliable witness" has to be considered as an overstatement (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 2). Note the cautious words of Anderson, who refers to the critical consensus perspectives of the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus, still being "[happy] to grant them privileged status as prevalent modernist views" while the question is simply "how well they stand up to critical scrutiny as predominant platforms for conducting further critical investigation" ("Why This Study Is Needed," 13n1). Cf. also Gilbert Van Belle, "The Return of John to Jesus Research," *LS* 32 (2007), 33, who concludes a historical survey of views regarding the historical reliability of John saying: "We conclude (...) with the assertion that in recent exegesis the Gospel of John has indeed been used as a source for the reconstruction of the life of Jesus. Nevertheless, I am not so confident that we can speak of a 'Return of John to Jesus Research,' as D. M. Smith (2003) claims."

readers' perspectives and ready to lay the historical task to rest (or at least to banish it to the back room of Johannine Studies),²⁰ we frankly concede, right at the outset, that we consider the historical questions worthy of being asked.²¹ As our title suggests, the question of whether the typical Johannine discourses provide us with an authentic account of the historical teaching of Jesus looms in the background of this present inquiry. To what extent does the author of the Fourth Gospel take us back to Jesus' original teaching? Would there be any warrant for including the Johannine discourses into a serious portrayal of the historical Jesus?

When talking about authenticity, we are thus asking whether the Fourth Gospel is a reliable witness to what Jesus has actually communicated. In this regard, our methodological considerations in chapter 2 will reveal that the ancient source material necessitates a differentiation between an authenticity of wording and an authenticity of content. In addition, *it is important to note that, within the framework of the more comprehensive questions mentioned above, we are not dealing with the authenticity of the Johannine discourses as such. Rather, we are choosing one particular access route to the matter at hand. This is to say that we will analyze and discuss only one single aspect of a much broader historical question.* To state it clearly, we are evaluating Jesus' speech material in the Fourth Gospel as compared to his synoptic teaching, since it is our contention that a preliminary examination of the relationship between the Johannine and the synoptic words of Jesus can shed light on the historical problem of the authenticity of Jesus' discourses in the Gospel of John. The following history of research (chapter 1) will help us to identi-

²⁰ See now, among many others, especially (indeed as a member of the *John, Jesus, and History Study Group*) Robert Kysar, "The Dehistoricizing of the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1*, 75-101; also his essay "What's the Meaning of This? Reflections Upon a Life and Career," in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 163-77. Cf. also as a representative of the growing field of "ideological criticism" Fernando Segovia, "Johannine Studies and the Geopolitical: Reflections upon Absence and Irruption," in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning*, 281-306 (with references to several of his earlier pertinent works).

²¹ In this we agree with John Ashton (although disagreeing significantly on how to answer historical questions pertaining to John) who concludes his contribution to Tom Thatcher's recent anthology, by saying that "I was then and remain still an unrepentant advocate of historical criticism" ("Second Thoughts on the Fourth Gospel," in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning*, 17). On the legitimacy of a historical "Rückfrage" to Jesus, see also Jörg Frey, "Der historische Jesus und der Christus der Evangelien," in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung*, ed. Jens Schröter and Ralph Brucker, BZNW 114 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 287, 293-94; as well as David Wenham, "Paradigms and Possibilities in the Study of John's Gospel," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman, WUNT 2/219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 2: "The history versus theology question remains as interesting and important as ever, so far as John's Gospel is concerned."

fy more precisely the connection between the Johannine-Synoptic relation and verdicts of authenticity and thus provide the basis for setting out the main objectives of our study of the Johannine discourses (cf. 1.3.2).²²

²² For an exhaustive review of the Fourth Gospel's history of interpretation with scattered remarks pertaining to our particular topic, see now Seán P. Kealy, *John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 2002). The earliest period of interpretation (see our chapter 1.1) is covered in the first volume (19- 95); the Johannine scholarship of the 19th and 20th century (see our chapter 1.2) is reviewed in the second volume (361-544).