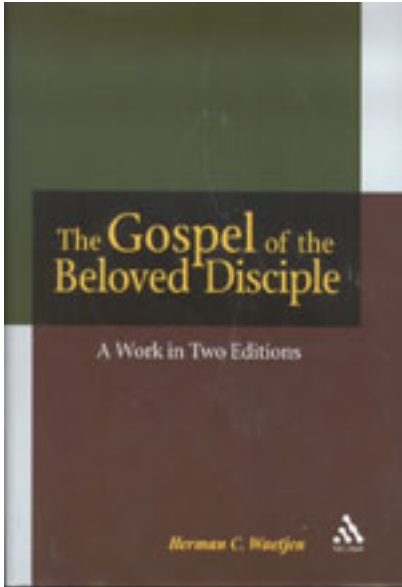


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**Waetjen, Herman C.**

***The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple: A Work in Two Editions***

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Neither the title nor the subtitle of this volume is particularly controversial. The distinctive nature of the book is to be found in the way the title and subtitle are understood. In this case, the title is not understood along traditional lines, and the reference to editions has a more limited scope than is generally the case. There is broad support for the view that John 21 was a late addition to the Gospel, but this is not generally spoken of as a second edition. In this case Waetjen thinks that, when chapter 21 was added to the Gospel, certain modifications were made to chapters 1–20, such as the addition of explanations (for Gentile readers) of Jewish names, customs, rites and festivals. Though I did not call this a second edition, I suggested precisely such additions with chapter 21 in my *The Quest for the Messiah* ([Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], 105 [2nd ed., 1993], 131). Waetjen believes that these and other modifications made the Gospel quite a different book and justifies calling this a second edition. Given that this accounts for the two editions mentioned in the subtitle, there is no discussion of any process of composition in the making of the first edition.

In the preface Waetjen gives a brief foretaste of the approach he has adopted and acknowledges the intellectual resources upon which he has drawn. Then, in the first and longest chapter of the book (3–60) he sets out the detail of his argument concerning the

two editions of the Gospel: where they were written, by whom, for whom, and the character of the two editions. It is crucial for his case to establish that the first edition was produced in Alexandria, because much of his argument depends on reading John in the light of Philo. The Alexandrian origin lends some credibility to this hypothesis. The fact that the earliest fragments of the Gospel were found in Egypt hardly supports his case, because the climate and geographical conditions of Egypt made it an ideal place for the preservation and recovery of ancient manuscripts. The date of the earliest Gospel fragment, a fragment of John 18, which is generally dated somewhere between 125 and 150 C.E., might be useful if the date of Waetjen's first edition could be fixed close to that time. Many scholars date John around 90 C.E., which allows plenty of time for this Gospel to arrive in Egypt and to be used by gnostic teachers there. Given that Alexandria was a major hub for commerce and travel, it is likely that John would have arrived there quickly. Consequently, the Alexandrian provenance of the first edition remains a possibility rather than a probability.

If we allow that Alexandria was the place of composition for the first edition and that the title superscription "According to John" was already present there, to whom was the Gospel attributed? Waetjen argues that, because the only John mentioned in the Gospel is John the witness (i.e., the Baptist), through whom all would come to believe (John 1:6-7), the Gospel was attributed to this John. There is some evidence that followers of John the Baptist were found in Alexandria, but this does not mean that this John was the author of the first edition, even if the title attributed it to him. Then there is the question of the identity of the Beloved Disciple (BD). Waetjen identifies Lazarus as the BD in the first edition. There is some evidence to support this view, but Waetjen has made no new case for this identification in favor of Lazarus over a number of other candidates, and I do not think his book will change scholarly views on the subject. If, however, the case for the identification of Lazarus is accepted, then he could be seen as a source of the Gospel. But, according to Waetjen, the first edition does not identify the BD as the author and, Waetjen does not pursue this line of inquiry. It seems that Waetjen does not identify an actual author of the first edition, only an attributed author.

In an attempt to distinguish the character of the two editions, Waetjen notes a common textual problem in John 20:31; 19:35; and 6:29 (see xiii, 5-7, 52, 206). In all three texts the verb "to believe" is used in the second-person plural in clauses that require the subjunctive mood. In all three texts textual evidence is divided in support of an aorist or a present tense. Ingeniously, Waetjen authenticates both tenses in all three texts by arguing that the first edition used the aorist tense, which was changed to a present tense in the second edition, thus accounting for the divergent readings. It may be a complication for this approach that the textual evidence in favor of each of these readings is not the same for the three texts.

Waetjen argues that, because the aorist tense is the most difficult reading, it is the reading of the first edition (xiii, 6–7). The first edition was “a *Missionsschrift*, an evangelistic writing, to gain converts to the Christian faith” (6). It was directed to members of the Alexandrian synagogues, seeking to win them to faith in Jesus. The aorist tense in the three texts (but especially 20:31) reveals the purpose of the Gospel in a mission to the synagogues of Alexandria between the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the Jewish revolt of 115–117 C.E. This wide range of time cannot be narrowed on the basis of evidence of the existing Gospel. Indeed, the best we can do is the dating of the earliest fragment, between 125 and 150 C.E. (41). It is from the content of the Gospel that the hypothesis emerges for dating the first edition between 70 and 117 C.E. We cannot tell whether the document to which the earliest fragment bears witness contained John 21 because it contains only a few verses from John 18.

Waetjen argues that the evidence of the addition of John 21, which provides a second ending, supports the view of a modified use of the Gospel. It modifies the relationship of the BD to Peter and identifies the BD as the author of the Gospel. Waetjen thinks that this identification is designed to support the view that the BD is John the son of Zebedee. He argues that the second edition was shaped in Ephesus, where believers experienced the move of the gospel out of the Jewish world of Alexandria into the Gentile world of the Roman Empire. In this context the Gospel is addressed to believers to build them up in the faith. In the second edition the Gospel is no longer a missionary tract, and the present tense of the verb “to believe” in 20:31; 19:35; 6:29 replaces the aorist of the first edition. The Gospel is now concerned with the continuing faith of those who believe.

In the short chapters of the remainder of the book (chs. 2–18) Waetjen deals briefly with the text of the whole Gospel from the perspective of the thesis of the book. Waetjen is widely read, and there is much to learn in the detail of the discussion. But there are weaknesses that seriously detract from the contribution of the book. No attention is given to the form of the tradition underlying the Alexandrian first edition. Is it dependent on the Synoptics in some form or some other stream of Jesus tradition? The dating parameters of somewhere between 70 and 117 C.E. are very wide. What might have been available in Alexandria soon after 70 would have been much more limited than in 117 C.E. The character of the Jesus tradition coming from Judea needs to be considered, and such consideration might impact on the Alexandrian hypothesis of this book.

A particular kind of linguistic argument is used throughout the book. In some instances this is tied to Philonic or Platonic usage. For example, Waetjen argues that the different verbs of seeing used by John have precise and distinct meanings (32, 80, 97–104, 127–29, 132–33, etc.). He seeks to establish this by showing that these same verbs are differentiated in Plato’s allegory of the cave (*Resp.* 7) and that this use was mediated by Philo (128–29,

32, 97–102). Throughout the treatment of the text of John Waetjen seeks to maintain these distinctions. This is rather forced. Bultmann noted the variety of verbs used by John but concluded that they were used without differentiation of meaning. This does not mean that “to see” has only one meaning. Rather, Bultmann differentiated broadly a range of three meanings: (1) seeing empirical objects; (2) seeing supernatural objects; (3) the seeing of faith. At the same time, he argued that all verbs were used across this range of meaning (*Gospel*, 69 nn. 2 and 4 [*Das Evangelium*, 45 nn. 1 and 3]). My Ph.D. research examined John’s use of these verbs in detail, and I concluded that the different verbs were used to provide different grammatical parts of the verb. My thesis provided a summary of my results. That no different meaning is implied by the different verbs is shown by use of different verbs to describe the same action in the same context. For example, in John 1:32–34 John the Baptist reports, “I have seen (τεθέαμαι [first person, singular, perfect, middle deponent, indicative]) the Spirit descending ... and it abided upon him.” This is the sign that the one who sent John the Baptist to baptize foretold, saying, “Upon whom ever you see (Ἐφ’ ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς [second person, singular, aorist, active, subjunctive]) the Spirit descending and abiding on him.” Obviously there is no difference in meaning, because the report is claimed to fulfill the prediction. Any doubt is removed when John the Baptist repeats his initial saying, “And I have seen (έώρακα [first person, singular, perfect, active, indicative]). Thus on the lips of he same character the same event is described by two different verbs without any difference of meaning.

The only verb used in the future tense is ὀψέσθαι, though the present tense of θεωρεῖν is used proleptically, with a future sense in 14:19 (2x) and 16:17, 19. In chapter 16, first Jesus says and then the disciples ask what he means when says, “A little while and you will not see (οὐ θεωρεῖτέ) me, and again a little while and you will see (ὄψεσθέ) me.” Clearly the seeing involved with these two verbs is the same, and the point is the temporary withdrawal of Jesus from the sight of the disciples, which will be overcome when they see him again.

The present tense is found only with θεωρεῖν and βλέπειν, which appear to be used without difference of meaning or grammatical significance except that βλέπειν is not used with a future sense. The great concentration of the use of βλέπειν is in John 9, which deals with the giving of sight to the man born blind. In this chapter thirteen of the twenty-three uses of the simple or compound forms of the verb are to be found. βλέπειν is used nine times, with a further four uses of the compound form ἀναβλέπειν, the latter all in the aorist tense. Although the latter implies the restoration of sight, the chapter makes clear that the man was blind from birth, so the verb here has the sense of giving sight. It is the compound form that gives the verb this sense. In John 9 βλέπειν was chosen because it is appropriate to the problem of physical blindness and the restoration of physical sight.

However, in 9:39–41 βλέπειν is used four times to describe spiritual sight as opposed to spiritual blindness.

Another compound is used in John 1:36, 42. When John the Baptists first sees Jesus (1:29) the simple verb is used (βλέπει). In the narration of the events of the next day (1:36) John the Baptists again sees Jesus (ἐμβλέψας) and repeats a summary of his witness from the previous day. The compound form might indicate some difference. What follows puts that possibility in question. As a result of John the Baptist's witness, two of his disciples follow Jesus, who turns and having seen (θεασάμενος) them following him, he asks.... However, when Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, Jesus, having looked (ἐμβλέψας) at him, says.... Each is an aorist participle, and no discernible difference of meaning is apparent. In this case there is evidence of a stylistic variation without distinction of meaning.

In this review there is no room to lay out all of the evidence to demonstrate the complex use of these verbs with no apparent difference in meaning. Enough has been said to show that the evidence puts in question John's dependence of Philo's practice, following Plato, to give a distinct meaning to each of these verbs.

In a similar way Waetjen argues that, at least in John 21, each of the two verbs for love (ἀγαπᾶν and φιλεῖν), have a distinct meaning (12–13). Waetjen apparently allows that in John 1–20 they are used interchangeably even though there is a strong preference for ἀγαπᾶν (36 to 13). I agree that the Gospel uses the two verbs without distinction of meaning, but what of chapter 21? Waetjen's case is built on two observations. First, 1 John, which has a highly concentrated use of ἀγαπᾶν and ἀγάπη, does not use φιλεῖν. Second, John 21 has linguistic similarities to 1 John and might have been composed and added to the Gospel in the community that produced 1 John (12 n. 37). There seems to be a problem with this argument. How can it be said that the failure of 1 John to use φιλεῖν shows that the meaning of this verb in John 21 is different from ἀγαπᾶν? Arguing for distinct meanings in John 21, Waetjen joins some older commentators and preachers in asserting that, having challenged Peter to a higher level of commitment (ἀγαπᾶν), Jesus finally settles for the level that Peter can make (φιλεῖν). Does this exegesis work within John 21? Or does the evidence suggest that John 21, in the narrative of this incident, varies language without changing meaning?

The question Jesus asks Peter *three times* is, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” The second and third askings compress the question to, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” The first two questions use ἀγαπᾶν, while the third uses φιλεῖν. Throughout his three answers Peter uses φιλεῖν. The first two answers are identical, “Yes Lord, you know (οἶδας) that I love you.” But his third answer reflects his grief at being

asked *the same question* three times. The third reply is extended, “Lord, you know (οἶδας) all things; you know (γινώσκεις) that I love you.” That the two verbs “to know” are used together in the third answer in a way that suggests no difference of meaning, especially as the verb used in the first two answers is replaced by γινώσκεις in the comparable part of the third answer. After the three affirming answers by Peter, Jesus responds with a commission: (1) “Feed (βόσκει) my lambs (ἀρνία)” (21:15); (2), “Shepherd (ποιμαίνε) my sheep (πρόβατά) (21:16); (3) “Feed (βόσκει) my sheep (πρόβατά) (21:17). Thus there is a variation of the language about love, knowledge, and the commission. The commission concerns feeding or shepherding, the lambs or the sheep. The first commission is to feed, as is the third and final commission. But lambs are mentioned only in the first. Feeding, which was used in the first, returns in the third commission, but it is sheep that are to be fed, not lambs, as in the first commission. The third picks up sheep from the second commission, but there they are to be shepherded, not fed, as in the first and third commissions. The threefold question, answer, and commission is repetitive with variations of language at every level: questions, answers, and commissions. The variation of language adds a little color to a potentially boring, repetitive dialogue. The repetition is not to allow a concession to the degree of Peter’s commitment but to provide a threefold absolution for his threefold denial. If this is not sufficiently clear already, then we note the way the (same) question is said to be put to Peter three times and the third time the narrator says that “Peter was grieved that he (Jesus) said to him the third time, do you love me (φιλεῖς με;)?” But this is the first time that Jesus had used φιλεῖς in this context! The question has hardly changed, especially if the three questions can be summed up in the terms of the third.

Waetjen also displays a rather mechanical interpretation of the prepositions πρὸς and εἰς. He persistently translates πρὸς as “towards,” for example in 14:12; 17:11, so that Jesus speaks of going towards the Father (126, 154). To go “towards the Father” is obviously not what is meant, but to go to the Father. Then there is a problem in translating πιστεύειν εἰς as to “believe into” (6, 59). It is useful to draw attention to this unusual idiom in John, but the rigid translation of the verb and preposition obviously misses the resulting idiom. The idiom is unusual enough to require discussion along the lines of believing in the person of Jesus as distinct from believing what he says or believing things about him, of believing as commitment and trust. In the Johannine context such commitment and trust might well involve a recognition of who Jesus is so that believing Jesus and believing things about him might well be assumed in πιστεύειν εἰς. The same sense is given to εἰς in 1:18, where Waetjen asserts that the one who will make the Creator known is the Logos, who is “into the bosom of the Father (84–85, 134). Here he also argues that ὁ ὦν in 1:18 and 6:46 “is the other half of God’s self disclosure in the LXX Ex 3:14, ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὦν” (134). But John does not have ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὦν. He writes ὁ ὦν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς (1:18) and ὁ ὦν

παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (6:46). Elsewhere he claims that the use of ἐγὼ εἰμι in John is the revelation of the divine name (89, 126, 134, 142, 175, 253–55). Bultmann (*Gospel*, 225 n. 3, 327 n. 5) notes that reference to the revelatory formula of Exod 3:14 requires a repetition of the verb to be, as Waetjen notes (134). Waetjen recognizes that the man cured of blindness also uses the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula (9:9) and notes that “This is the only instance in the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel that someone other than Jesus employs this phrase” (253), but this does not give him cause to hesitate in his claim concerning the revelation of the divine name in the use of ἐγὼ εἰμι.

While I remain unpersuaded by the argument concerning the Alexandrian origin of the first edition and fail to be persuaded about Philo’s influence on John, it may be time to revisit the relationship of John to the language and thought of Philo. As to the Ephesian origin of the second edition, this too is less than certain, because the Ephesian tradition is not without its problems and is not early enough to be decisive for the Ephesian case. Probably more needs to be said about the process of development of what Waetjen calls the first edition. Even if his hypothesis of Alexandrian origin is correct, there has to be a Judean connection and a process of development. While I think it is unlikely that this book will lead to a broad acceptance of its thesis, it may stir other scholars to struggle with the uniqueness of this Gospel in a way that illuminates further our understanding of it.