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**The Prologue of the Gospel of John Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts. Papers read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013 Der Prolog des Johannesevangeliums. Seine literarischen, theologischen und philosophischen Kontexte. Beiträge vom Colloquium Ioanneum 2013.]. Ed by Jan G. van der Watt, R. Alan Culpepper, and Udo Schnelle Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 359** Tübingen **Mohr Siebeck** 2016. XXII, 342 pages.

In September of 2013, the first *Colloquium Ioanneum* was organized on the holy island of Patmos, inspired by the corresponding *Paulinum*, which has been taking place every two years in the Eternal City of Rome. One of the authors of this review, S. Despotis, had the opportunity as co-organizer (along with Jan G. van der Watt) to be an active participant in the birth of this institution and to gain, apart from knowledge, fruitful experiences from a group of distinguished international Johannine scholars who represent different nationalities, religious traditions and hermeneutical approaches to the Gospel. Ch. Karakolis and Rev. Deacon George L. Parsenios represent the Orthodox hermeneutical tradition in this collection of scholarly research.

This present volume, as the first-born “spiritual child” of these meetings, is only natural to focus on the hymn of the Logos, which as *pro-logue,* introduces the most poetic of Gospels, “according to John”. Moreover, the prologue is one of the many excellent Christological hymnic texts (*Carmen Christo*) which were produced by the First Church and is a key for the comprehension of the Gospel. Furthermore, it should be noted that it is read in the Orthodox Church during the most pivotal moment of worship in the liturgical cycle: the holy Mass of the Easter Sunday wake. Although one would naturally expect an excerpt detailing the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, the Prologue is read instead. Apparently, the spiritual and liturgical climate after the Catechism and the Great Lent, as well as the unique experience of Baptism, constitutes the best context; this particular *fleeting night* is experienced actively as the catalytic creative-energetic presence of the authentic *life* and *light* which awes all those who are born in the grace of God. On Easter Sunday, the Church remembers actively Genesis and Exodus, the two introductory books of the Holy Scripture which are echoed, in theological terms, in the introductory Johannine hymn.

The first part (**Confronting the Challenges of the Prologue**) offers a wide range of assessments of the background, literary, and theological elements of the prologue, while the second (**Reading the Language and Concepts of the Prologue in Their Philosophical Context**) examines presuppositions, methods, and perspectives involved in the philosophical interpretation of the Gospel of John. In general, researchers avoid the pseudo-dilemma of whether the influences are Judaic or only Greek, as the community which produces this work probably lives in the cosmopolitan center of Ephesus and proclaims its faith to an audience of various origins and cognitive / spiritual stances (cf. the visit of the Greeks at the end of the public action of Jesus [12:20-27] and the inscription on the Cross, written in the three languages of the Ecumene [19:20]). This is underlined by **Jörg Frey** (**Between Torah and Stoa: How Could Readers Have Understood the Johannine Logos?**) in his thorough examination of the term and the image of the Logos. **R. Alan Culpepper** (**The Prologue as Theological Prolegomenon to the Gospel of John**) proves convincingly, in our opinion, that the *Pro-Logos* was not added afterwards, but indeed “serves as the theological prolegomenon to the Gospel, introducing the five divine initiatives in the sweeping overview of God’s work in the world” (25). These initiatives are: 1. Creation through the Logos, 2. Law through Moses, 3. Sending of the Baptist, 4. Coming of the Light [= incarnation of the Logos], 5. The birth of the children of God (5). We are not entirely certain whether the Coming of the Light is solely connected with the incarnation (18), as this Light “φωτίζει **πάντα** ἄνθρωπον, **ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον**” (1:9). Moreover, in John, Jesus Christ speaks authoritatively with “Ἐγώ εἰμι” (perhaps, an intertextual echo of the revelation of Yahweh to Moses) and constitutes the object of the vision of Isaiah. These points lead to the conclusion that already, in John, the Light shines before the coming of Christ (cf. the imbuement of the Spirit and the creation of the eyes from clay). **Culpepper’s** discussion of the subjectis comprehensive and offers a concise overview of recent research on the prologue.

A different approach is adopted by **John Ashton** (**Really a Prologue?**), who proposes that the “Prologue was added to the Gospel just before (or at the same time as) the new material of the second edition, notably ch[apter]s 6 and 17” (40). The concern of the author of the Hymn of the Logos is not creation, but the plan of God (42) and what astounded him was his vision of wisdom in the flesh”. We agree that “ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο” (1:17) reflects the polemics between the Church and the Synagogue when the Gospel was written. This can be seen in chapters 9 and 16. We believe that in 1:1 the emphasis is placed on the Logos; moreover, this occurs by means of an antithetical parallelism to the Wisdom/Torah as **William R. G. Loader** (**The Significance of the Prologue for Understanding John's Soteriology**) concludes, who believes that the Hymn of the Logos is a necessary *Pro-Logos* to understanding the text. “In terms of soteriology, what John offers is not something different in kind from what his dissenting fellow Jews offered in Torah; namely, a relationship for life. But it is different in that it claims now to offer in fullness at a higher level of the Spirit what Moses and Torah offered as the gift of God at the level of the flesh. John never disparages that gift, but sees it as pointing forward to the fulfillment which renders it redundant except as witness to what has” (52). The canvas on which soteriology is placed is that of the Judaic feasts and their symbolism; however, it is doubtful whether the Greek audience had any knowledge of those symbolic nuances.

**Jan G. van der Watt** (**John 1:1 – A “Riddle”? Grammar and Syntax Considered**), influenced by the article which he authored along with Ch. Karagounis[[1]](#footnote-1), argues that the first verse does not constitute a problem in regards to grammar; it has, however, riddle-like qualities in terms of syntax, as it negates any attempt to read it authoritatively. **Catrin H. Williams [(Not) Seeing God in the Prologue and Body of John's Gospel]** proposes that Isaiah in 12:41 (= ὅτι εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλάλησεν περὶ αὐτοῦ) did not see in the Lord of Hosts (revelation of the Temple) the glory of Jesus, but foresaw the incarnated Logos (cf. John 8:56 “Αβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη”). She focuses on the contrast of Moses and Jesus, which continues in 1:18. On the contrary we believe that in John there are many suggestions regarding the fleshless preexistence of Logos[[2]](#footnote-2). Of course, it is not stated directly that Jesus sees the Light of the Father. However, it is implicitly inferred by the reader, since Jesus at the end of the *Pro-Logos* is “ὁ ὤν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῡ Πατρός” (1:18). **Ruben Zimmermann [John (the Baptist) as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: The Narrative Strategy of a Witness Disappearing]**, based on narratology and character study, underlines that John, the voice of the Logos, the cradle of the Light, “in every scene he fades more and more into background” (114). He aptly remarks that “taking up a Johannine Metaphor, one could say that he is the gatekeeper (ὁ θυρωρός), who –as we discover in 10:3- opens the door so that only he may hear the voice of bridegroom, but all sheep may hear the voice of the shepherd and following” (113). At the end of his presentation (10:41), “the testimony of John is not repeated, rather his testimony is testified to. And it is not the mouth of the evangelist that does so, but rather the mouths of those who followed Jesus. Now we understand why John is no longer needed as a witness. […] John has fulfilled his mission. He can exit the scene. His example as witness has found followers and in this way has called into life the community of witnesses” (115). It is remarkable that, in John, the Baptist’s martyrdom is completely absent; furthermore, it should be taken into account that his role in the second part is taken by his beloved disciple, the one who is in the bosom of the incarnated Logos. **Michael Theobald [Eine Gemeinschaft von “Zeugen” (von Joh 1:7, 15 bis 3 Joh 12): Beobachtungen zur Genese des Corpus Iohanneum auf der Basis des Prologs]** considers the prologue as the basis of the Johannine corpus, focusing on the “witness” terminology, which constitutes one of the prevalent patterns of John; the center of the Gospel is construed by the testimony of a collective “we”. In our opinion, this testimony refers to the disciples who witnessed and not all of the followers. Moreover, the beloved disciple is hidden and is implicitly presented as a basic witness. In the prologue of 1 John (second stage of genesis), the emphasis is placed not on the creation narrative, but on the confession of the incarnation; the collective “we” of the eye-witnesses is directly juxtaposed to those who doubted the incarnation of the Logos. It is our opinion that in 1 John the theme in question is the incarnated and resurrected Jesus, and not just the incarnation *per se*. In the interpolated epilogue of John (third stage of genesis), a person is presented (the beloved disciple) who is authorized by the resurrected Jesus to be the principal witness as well as the author of the book. Finally, in the epilogue of the *corpus* the elder himself, when addressing Gaius, reiterates that our testimony is true (v. 12). The editors of the Johannine works want to stress that the testimony of the beloved disciple is survived by the testimony of the others. **Christos Karakolis(The Logos-Concept and Dramatic Irony in the Johannine Prologue and Narrative**) argues that through the Prologue the listeners know more than the protagonist of the Gospel, while they identify with those who (in the Prologue) appear as eye witnesses of the incarnated Logos. Moreover, they regard positively persons, such as Nicodemus, who are slowly reborn. This does not mean that they are regarded as enemies of the “Jews”, since they also “οὐκ **ἠδύναντο** (not οὐκ ἠβούλοντο) πιστεύειν” (12:39 “epilogue of the public action”). We believe that the dramatic irony does not apply that much to the Prologue as to the rest of the text, on the basis of the Prologue. In John, the door of penance is left open for the “Jews”; this can be seen through the prophecy “*ὄψονται εἰς ὃν ἐξεκέντησαν”* (19:37 cf. Zech. 10:12) which is accompanied by a shift in action.

**Part 2: Reading the Language and Concepts of the Prologue in Their Philosophical Context.**

**Udo Schnelle (Philosophische Interpretation des Johannesevangeliums: Voraussetzungen, Methoden und Perspektiven)**, in an exceptionally extensive introduction, highlights the interaction between philosophy (i.e. art of life, action not theory) and theology in the ancient world. He underlines that New Testament literature, and hence Johannine literature, belongs to a higher, and not a base literary production of its time, a fact which requires and presupposes the existence of educated writers, while at the same time is indicative of the existence of Schools (Johannine, Pauline) in the First Church. Of course, there are objections to this argument, as the language used in John is not that of the Prologue of Luke and the influence they had on their environment is small. **Craig R. Koester: [“Spirit” (Pneuma) in Greco-Roman Philosophy and the Gospel of John]** focuses mainly on the importance of the Spirit in monistic Stoicism since it bears no significant role in Platonism. It mostly examines Its presence in chapters 3 (Nicodemus), 4, 7, (the Feast of Tabernacles in the Temple, where water played a part mainly in the seventh “great” day) and 14 (Paraclete) He disproves the approach of Buch-Hansen[[3]](#footnote-3), “who attempts to trace the Stoic Interpretation of the *pneuma* through the Gospel” (244), as the *pneuma* in John is an external factor (opposed to the *pneuma* of the Stoics) while it also does not identify with the mind, but, rather, with the rebirth and metamorphosis of existence. He especially focuses on the correlation between the *pneuma* and the water of life (which was also linked to divination) and points out that “ἐν ***Π****νεύματι* καὶ ἀληθείᾳ” should be capitalized (Πνεύμα = Holy Spirit). **George L. Parsenios (Confounding Foes and Counselling Friends: Parrēsia in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Philosophy)** argues that the term Parrēsia (< pan [everything] + rhēma [what it is said]) in passages 7:4 and 16:25,29 (where it is found) does not just mean “overtly”. Indeed, the term *parrēsia* in Greek literature is intertwined with the knowledge of truth, the criticism of one’s self or/and of the interlocutor and the danger to the *parrēsiastēs* stems from this specific public “struggle”; moreover, it should be distinguished from *ἀθυρογλωσσία*. In fact, in the 1st century B.C. *On Frank Criticism* (Περὶ παρρησίας, Peri parrhēsias) is written by the epicurean Philodemus (110-40 B.C.), while *parrēsia* is practiced by the Cynics and, amongst others, the *parrēsiastēs* becomes the spiritual guide to the souls[[4]](#footnote-4). The author focuses on the stance of Jesus towards Pontius Pilatus, and parallelizes him to Frankness (Parrēsiadēs) in the work *Piscator* (Fisherman) by Lucian of Samosata (2nd century B.C.), as well as Socrates the “prōtoparrēsiadēs”. All these figures have control over the truth, especially over the expert wise men, who are hypocritical and whose words are inconsistent with their actions). They are put on trial, because they allegedly do not follow the teachings of the ancient philosophers. However, at that point they are turned from accused into judges. According to Plutarch's *Quomodo Aducator Ab Amico Internoscatur* (How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend), *parrēsia* instead of flattery is manifested in the context of friendship. However, in our opinion, irony is used in John 16: the disciples / friends, while they discuss about their teacher’s *parrēsia*, they, in fact, ignore that the absolute truth of their teacher’s words will be revealed only when the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth arrives and provides context to everything (14:26).

 **Marianne Meye Thompson: [“Light” (φῶς): The Philosophical Content of the Term and the Gospel of John]** examines the multifaceted and important symbol of Light, which in Greek philosophy is intertwined with knowledge-wisdom and life. Starting from the fact that Greek philosophy regarded the world on the basis of duality and applying the known parable of the Cave from the Republic of Plato, she focuses on the fact that Light is not only an object, but also a medium of vision. While the claim that “the Jews are a people of hearing, whereas the Greeks are of sight” is well-known, Philo aligns himself with Heraclitus and considers that the sight of God is more important than the hearing of Him (hence the etymological root of the word “Israel”). The aforementioned sight is achieved via the mind; one does not see God, but, rather, His Light. In John, the antithesis of darkness (the diabolical kingdom) to the light is asymmetrical, as there is no dualism (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia – Isis and Osiris*, 369D-F). Moreover, the light, in history, is constantly depicted as personified in the Logos and, more specifically, as the incarnated Logos. There may be no direct references to the light in the second part of John, but we should not forget that the whole background (cf. John 13:30) is built upon the alternation of darkness and light, in conjunction with the symbol of the garden. As evidenced by the miracle of the blind man in chapter 9, vision in John is physical as well as metaphorical; moreover it is not related to *what*, but, rather, to *who* is the truth. Finally, **Jean Zumstein [“Zeichen” (σημεῖον): Philosophischer Inhalt und Gebrauch des Begriffs im Johannesevangelium]** points out: “Es gibt kein unmittelbares objektives Sehen des Objekts des Zeichens. Nur ein Sehen, das die Qualität des Glaubens besitzt, löst einen echten Verweis aus” (297). „Die sachgemäße Interpretation der Zeichen wird erreicht, wenn die als christologische Offenbarung der Herrlichkeit Gottes verstanden werden” (301).

The scholarly research in this volume is of high caliber and the only remarks to be made are in regards to some oversights: the interpolation of German and English texts (which are word-for-word translations of the German original) in Schnelle’s article. Moreover, an index of scriptural references would be very helpful. In conclusion, these minor oversights do not negate the fact that the volume is a contribution to the scholarly research of Johannine literature.

1. Chrys C. Caragounis - Jan Van der Watt, A Grammatical Analysis of John 1,1,*Biblica* 21 (2008) 91-138. See also Chrys C. Caragounis, The Concept of Logos, http://www.chrys-caragounis.com/Studies.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Chr. Karakolis, «Jesus as Yahwe of the Old Testament Epiphanies in the Gospel According to John», Δελτίο Βιβλικών Μελετών 21/22 (2002/2003) 55-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It is the Spirit that Gives Life". A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also Michel Foucault, Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia, Oct-Nov. 1983, <https://foucault.info/doc/documents/parrhesia/index-html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)