

Μαρτυρία [witness] in John 1–4: Towards an emerging, missional ecclesiology

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Theological investigation of the μαρτυρία [witness] lexeme in John 1–4 contributes significantly towards an understanding of an emerging, missional ecclesiology. This hypothesis is precipitated by the accelerated pace of change that our society is currently experiencing. The technological developments of the past 50 years have created a society that is dependent on this new technology, leading to the developing of a new cultural paradigm, in which the church is ill at home. The question of an emerging, missional ecclesiology is therefore building on the need for theological research from the perspective of this developing new paradigm. It was proposed that a hermeneutic approach should be taken. It was also argued that ecclesiology serves as the integration point for reflection and practical missional ministry. As such, the church as object of investigation is the ultimate technological praxis, as the faith community serves as the show-case of God's presence in this world.

In search of a hermeneutic for a missional ecclesiology

The shift towards a missional ecclesiology

In every age, the church has had to practice discernment in listening to God through the Bible in a way that is appropriate for that age (McKnight 2008:129). This can also be seen as an ongoing conversation about the stories, concepts and language of the witnesses to God in the Bible, enabling us to connect these witnesses with the people of our time who are yearning for a connection with God (Martoia 2007:39).

Following the contours of the biblical witness, Christians tell the story of God's actions in human history. They testify about God's goodness, goodness that he has made known, revealed and which defines his purposes (Güder 2000:29). The church and its testimony are grounded in a particular history, apart from which Christians has no universal message to proclaim. Moreover, the Christian faith is intrinsically missional, otherwise it denies its reason for existence (Bosch 1991:8–9). The church's adaptability enables her to be part of this mission, starting with the leap from Jewish sect to global religion, as recorded in Acts and through every major paradigm shift in history, including the current challenge. After all, the Bible itself is a testament to the hermeneutical activities of its writers, taking existing faith traditions (verbal as well as written) and interpreting it for new circumstances (Smit 2006:11).

Since the Reformation of the 16th century a church culture was established that was closely aligned with book technology. In this rationalistic scheme, the only criterion for legitimate science was human reasoning, as researchers must be able to critically ask questions so as to enable them to reach conclusions after honest and open-minded investigation (Deist 1994:2). Today, it is obvious that the square peg of modernistic ideology does not fit into the circular hole of the developing postmodernistic context. As mainstream western culture diverts from its spiritual heritage and society becomes increasingly pluralistic, churches also face a missional challenge, one that is increasingly cross-cultural in nature. The quest for an emerging, theological epistemology should therefore be based on the growing insight that the developing postmodern paradigm affects the whole theological encyclopaedia (Osmer 2008:236–240). People increasingly leave the church because of this changing culture as it erodes the influence of modernism and modernistic theology (Jamieson 2002:16).

The Christian faith needs a new theological paradigm that explores the very nature of the church's testimony as shaped by Jesus and his mission (Niemandt 2007:61–144). More specifically, the church needs an emerging, missional ecclesiology, as testimony of her claims about Jesus as the Son of God. A brief must be presented, with arguments being advanced and defending witnesses brought forward under the power of the Holy Spirit, to give the Christian case a proper hearing (Trites 1986:1048–1049).

At the heart of an emerging, missional ecclesiology lays Scripture. Scripture serves as ancient mirror to discern contributions to our continued sharing of the mission of God. Thus, the practice of reading should be construed in a way that can shape human praxis or behaviour (Green 1995:412). As a result, the formation and nurture of Christian communities remains the crucial task when reading the New Testament theologically (Fowler 1995:408). We have a duty to discern and articulate how the church can live up to the gift and responsibility of the gospel in our present situation (Gehring 2004:301).

The different ways in which the church is approached as subject of theological investigation falls under the auspices of ecclesiological investigation (Robinson & Wall 2006:4). Dingemans (1996:218) understood ecclesiology as a theological co-ordinate that integrates the tension between ancient message and contemporary culture. Van der Watt (2000:438) described ecclesiology as the social gathering of the people of God where the church functions as God's family, with everything it implies. For Hirsch (2006:285), missional ecclesiology is the area of theological study that explores the nature of Christian movements and therefore the church, as they are shaped by Jesus and his mission. Ecclesiology can therefore be understood as a hermeneutical theological theory, based on the testimony of Scripture, upon which the church develops and builds its operational practices.

John's Gospel as hermeneutical source for a missional ecclesiology

The question of a Johannine ecclesiology is a critical field of study within Johannine research (Brown 1966:cv). Not only is classic ecclesiological terminology absent from the Gospel, it also shows signs of an individualised Christianity (Beasley-Murray 1991:102). The word ἐκκλησία [assembly, congregation or church] doesn't even appear in John's Gospel (Beasley-Murray 1991:102; Van der Watt 2000:438; Potgieter 2000:2). Yet, John's Gospel has been successfully depicted as a "two-level drama", in which the Gospel simultaneously tells the story of Jesus and of the Johannine community' (Koester 1991:52). It tells about Jesus as the manifestation of a cosmic struggle between light and darkness (Lindars 1990:13): The historic circumstances of Jesus' ministry form the stage on which the cosmic drama is played out with Jesus' victory as the act in which the light finally overcomes the darkness.

It is exactly why this two-tiered narrative presents the possibility of an ecclesiological hermeneutic within a missional epistemology. The Johannine Christology confesses Jesus in a distinct way as the Christ that was proclaimed by the church (Thompson 1996:21). In the Fourth Gospel, all other theological issues are brought in direct connection with the Christology, necessitating a study of the distinctive ecclesiology of the Gospel (Beasley-Murray 1991:15; Bailey & Vander Broek 1992:172–173).

The power of the oratory in John's Gospel is largely determined by its ability to create a linguistic, textual,

imagistic world that addresses the needs and yearnings of a concrete religious community. It is in the encounter of tradition and community, story and theology that the Fourth Gospel finds its voice (O'Day 1995:345). John's depiction of Jesus' life and ministry unfolds pictorially in the two-tiered world of contrasts. These contrasts form the theological presupposition for John's message (Van der Watt 2007:30) and provide the backdrop for his theology. The explicit use of symbolism in John's Gospel is a unique characteristic and differentiates it from the use of parables in the Synoptic Gospels (Dodd 1953:133). We are able to learn some crucial things about being missional church to people living in a time of transition from this unique voice of John.

Different hermeneutical methods are needed for reading the Johannine text (Van der Watt 2007:2–3). These cover a variety of questions related to the literary and theological structure, origin and meaning of the concepts used, origin of the Johannine group and social-historical framework, amongst others. This utilising of different exegetical approaches helps to solve textual problems typical of the Johannine Gospel. The Gospel of John is, after all, a multi-story phenomenon calling for a multi-disciplinary narrative methodology (Stibbe 1992:1).

The reflexive double-ring of theory and practice is compelling enough to take the next step to consider the research-implications and ask the practical, 'what next?' questions as well. An important aspect of theological reflection is the ability to identify and analyse real problems and formulate theories that strive to provide adequate and valid solutions (Van Huyssteen 1987:187). This framework includes: A textual hermeneutic pertaining to the research question at hand, an ecclesiological hermeneutic to facilitate theories of ministry practice and an epistemological metaphor to integrate these into a comprehensive union. For this purpose, narrative criticism is deemed the most adequate vehicle to conduct the investigation.

Narrative criticism, or narratology, is based on the assumption that certain universal characteristics are found in all narrative texts (Tolmie 1999:1). Three basic principles, upon which narrative criticism is founded, can be distinguished (Powell 1995:240–244): Implied Author, Implied Readers and the Normative Process of Reading. Narratives presuppose a storyteller, a story and an audience and between the author and the reader stand the text of this story. Narrative criticism makes certain assumptions about a normative process of reading in exploring the expected effects of texts on their implied readers. These assumptions include (Powell 1995:242–244): A narrative is to be read sequentially and completely with all its parts being related to the work as a whole; readers desire consistency and make connections necessary to resolve apparent tensions within a text in favour of the most consistent interpretation; it must be assumed that readers know certain things referred to in a text. On the other hand, it must also be assumed that readers of a text do not know certain things, forcing researchers to

take their own assumptions about extra-textual knowledge into account and normative reading also expects readers to accept the dynamics of the story world that are established by the implied author. Thus, when a biblical narrative includes miracles, audible communication from heaven by God and so forth, narrative criticism opposes the ‘demythologising’ of these elements by trying to determine what actual historical occurrences might have inspired the narrative.

Reconstructing the text can also be aided by the use of a diachronic approach. Also called source criticism (Stibbe 1994:1–2), this investigative technique looked at the flaws in a narrative and the interruptions to the flow of the story, providing evidence of more than one author. By utilising the insights provided by studies that followed this approach, we are able to better understand the different back-stories that function subconsciously in a text.

A third approach that will enable the development of a hermeneutic framework towards a missional ecclesiology is the study of metaphoric theology. According to Joubert (2007:84), the wider theological discourse of the past decades turned its attention more and more towards metaphorical theology. This grew from the realisation that metaphors provide a key to understanding general religious language. It is also realised that the core symbols of the Christian religion are expressed through metaphors (Koester 1995:6).

Μαρτυρία [witness] and The Gospel of John

The Fourth Gospel demonstrates how people are drawn to Jesus and God through testimony (Koester 1995:2). For John, this testimony is carried by symbolic language, theological application of historical fact and metaphoric discourse. It is all the more significant that the primary Greek word-group pertaining to testimony is used extensively in the Gospel of John. Some 43 of the 73 occurrences of μαρτυρέω [to testify, to depose; to give evidence] appear in the Johannine corpus, and 21 of the 37 occurrences of μαρτυρία [witness] appear (Schnackenburg 1972:227; Coenen 1986:1042). According to Hendrikson (1959:76) the use of this word group is ‘almost confined to the writings of John.’ Thus, it seems obvious that the concept of witness has a central theological significance to John (Schnackenburg, 1968:251; Coenen 1986:1044).

Yet, it would seem as if research restricted itself to understanding John’s use of the lexeme in an exclusively legal sense, as the word group found its origins in the realm of justice (Strathmann 1933:479). Beutler (1972:43) argued that the lexeme played a subordinate role in John, as he was borrowing and applying the meaning of the word from Jewish and extra-biblical Greek judicial literature. According to Maccini (1996:32), the entire sweep of John’s narrative drama takes the form of a cosmic trial between God and the world with the μαρτυρία [witness] lexeme playing a central role in this trial. Thyen (2005:76) agreed with Beutler and called the lexeme a peculiarly heaped presence that is almost always used in a strict juridical sense.

However, this view is not shared with all commentators (cf. Barrett 1978:159; Ridderbos 1987:56–57). Strathmann

(1933:480) also noted that the lexeme has a more general application. Moulton (1978:18, 218, 258, 382, 388, 441) provides the following possible translations:

- μάρτυς, υπος, ὁ a judicial witness, deponent; in general: a witness to a circumstance; in the New Testament: a witness, a testifier to a doctrine; or a martyr
- μαρτυρέω, ὦ to testify, to depose; to give evidence; to bear testimony, testify; to bear testimony in confirmation; to declare distinctly and formally; passive: to be the subject of testimony, to obtain attestation to character; or to make a solemn appeal
- μαρτυρία, ας, ἡ judicial evidence; testimony in general; testimony, declaration in a matter of doctrine; attestation to character; or reputation
- μαρτυρίον, ἰον, τό testimony, evidence; testification; testimony, mode of solemn declaration or testification; or testimony, matter of solemn declaration.

According to Louw & Nida (1988:418), μαρτυρέω μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον and ἐπιμαρτυρέω are similar in meaning: ‘to provide information about a person or an event concerning which the speaker has direct knowledge – “to witness”’. A second meaning of μαρτυρέω exists, namely ‘to speak well of a person on the basis of personal experience – “to speak well of, to approve of”’. As noun, μαρτυρία has the meaning, ‘the content of what is witnessed or said – “testimony, witness”’ (Louw & Nida 1988:418). A different meaning for μαρτυρία is also ‘that which is said about a person on the basis of an evaluation of the person’s conduct – “reputation”’ (Louw & Nida 1988:418–419).

This overview necessitates an investigation of the lexeme against the background of the clearly stated theological motif of the Gospel of John: ‘... these are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that believing you will have life in his name’ (Jn 20:30–31) (Brown 1971:lxviii; Morris 1971:39; Lindars 1972:24; Barrett 1978:134; Schram 1990:25; Stibbe 1994:6; Zumstein 2004:32; Van der Watt 2007:6).

The Gospel seems to have an incomprehensive way of developing the themes and characters of this motif (Van der Watt 2007:25). The same themes appear throughout the Gospel and return in a spiral fashion, or an *inclusio*, giving the impression of the story coming to full circle (Stibbe 1994:1). Thus, it would help our investigation if we look at the logical flow and content of the narrative. The Gospel’s overall structuring follows a thematic-pictorial building-block pattern. It presents one theme after another and then returns later to an earlier argument to expand on it again. The text should be read synchronically, reading it sequentially from verse to verse and chapter to chapter (Moloney 1993:2). For the purposes of this article, our investigation was restricted to John 1–4.

Investigating the prologue

John 1:19–4:54 forms a narrative unit themed around the ministry of John the Baptist (Staley 1986:251). The Prologue, John 1:1–18, is an integral part of this as it intentionally introduces his testimony. The Prologue must, however, be

seen as a confession of faith, a vision of the world from the perspective of faith arising from the manifestation of glory by the Word who became flesh (Painter 1997:579). It provides a rational basis for the positions taken in the rest of the Gospel (Lindars 1990:96) and tells of the coming of God into human history through Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus is only called 'The Word' in this pericope and never again this way in the rest of the Gospel (Philips 2006:73). Accordingly, in John 1:15, testimony is presented through the historical present tense (μαρτυρεῖ), helping us to see the Word becoming Jesus as an event that happened in history, where John was present and he can not keep quiet about (Brown 1971:4).

The impression is strengthened by the use of the perfect tense in κέκραγεν [call or cry out] (Brown 1971:15), having the value of a present tense, although appearing as something that has already happened and need to continue. Immediately, this enforces the notion that John was not thinking along legal lines when he used μαρτυρία [witness].

Investigating the Baptist (John 1:19–51)

This scene is opened with the suggestion that the Baptist's previously referred to testimony is now being continued: 'καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου ...' (Lindars 1971:102) [and this is the witness of John]. To underscore the idea that this is an opportunity to explain his testimony, John used ὡμολόγησεν [witness] tautologically (Brown 1971:45), placing it on either side of its semantic opposite, ἡρνήσατο [refuse or deny], emphasising the contrast he created. The word means either 'to profess one's allegiance' or 'to acknowledge a fact publicly, to admit or to confess' (Louw & Nida 1988/1:419–420). John wanted to emphasise the Baptist's acknowledgement of his non-identity, leaving his readers with a clear picture of the identity of the Christ (Morris 1971:130).

In this narrative sequence the depiction of the Baptist and his disciples forms a striking contrast to the delegation from Jerusalem. Their questions centred on Jewish messianic expectations and how the Baptist fit into this scheme. He 'negatively confessed' that he is not the Christ, prophet or Elijah. The delegation then challenged him on his baptism practice, once again falling back onto their messianic theological paradigm. Against this backdrop, the Baptist's suggested that the delegation's messianic paradigm didn't adequately prepare them to recognise Jesus, raising the question of how someone recognises Jesus as the Coming One (Koester 1989:329).

We also find an indication of an implied ecclesiology where μαρτυρία [witness] plays a central role (Koester 1989:330): The Baptist's answer to the Jewish delegation acknowledges that he also did not know who Jesus was, but he was able to do so only after God spoke to him. The words spoken to the Baptist by God were confirmed when he saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus. In John 1:34 the μαρτυρία [witness]-lexeme

appears again (here as μεμαρτύρηκα [translation]). In this instance, the Baptist presented his testimony as a conclusion to what he saw and heard, thereby confirming the fact that John uses the lexeme to indicate the Baptist's attestation that he was personally involved and can guarantee the truth of the event. In the rest of the narrative (Jn 1:29–51), John implied that, through the testimony of John the Baptist, the true identity of Jesus was revealed (Lindars 1972:112). People believed the Baptist's testimony and got personally involved with Jesus. Through this relationship and the more intimate knowledge of Jesus, they made their own conclusions that He is indeed the Son of God.

Of miracles and testimony

John 2 describes the miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the temple, where the chapter's concluding remarks in John 2:23–25 utilise the μαρτυρία[witness]-lexeme, by means of a narrator's statement, thereby presenting the statement that believing in Jesus should be based on seeing and hearing him and the testimonies about him. Koester (1989:327–348) examined the juxtapositioning of faith and signs in the Gospel and said the issue is whether people respond with belief or unbelief to Jesus' revelation through signs or words and which of the two is more important to faith formation. Maccini (1996:107) concurred with this argument. The interesting wordplay with ἐπίστευεν [believe] should be noted: It is used both in John 2:23 and John 2:24 (meaning trust), in an imperfect tense, denoting Jesus' habitual attitude. John wanted his readers to understand that nothing was wrong with Jesus' miracles, but the focus is on his knowledge of what was wrong with humankind (Nicol 1972:132). Jesus was looking for genuine conversion and true faith and not just enthusiasm for the spectacular (Morris 1971:206–207). This unusual knowledge of Jesus is used to show how it stems from the fact that he actually is God, given that the Old Testament showed only God is able to know what is in the thoughts of humankind (Morris 1971:207).

Μαρτυρία [witness] in John 3

In conversation with Nicodemus

In the first part of John 3, Nicodemus is depicted as part of a group of Jews who only partially and somewhat inadequately believes in Jesus (Barrett 1978:208). The conversation makes the following apparent: A person has to be born a second time (or from above) to be able to receive (or experience, enter, see) the kingdom of God (Barrett 1978:206; Newman & Nida 1980:78). Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus and thought that he referred to being born again physically (Brown 1971:130; Van der Watt 1986/1:105). John characteristically uses words with a possible double meaning to serve as a transition in thought (Newman & Nida 1980:78). Here, the misunderstanding was an opportunity to explain the necessity to be born through the Spirit as well as through ordinary human birth. This act of salvation depends on God's initiative and the agent of salvation is God, through a rebirth by the Spirit (Morris 1971:213; Van der Watt 1986/1:110; Lindars 1990:78).

John succeeds to bring together two worlds, the Jewish expectation of the coming Kingdom and the Gospel's world that expresses salvation in terms of eternal life (Van der Watt 1986/1:107). The dynamic sense in which Jesus uses the concept of God's Kingdom shows that he understands it as God's reign and not God's realm (Morris 1971:214). The example of the blowing wind is used as a parable to explain the inexplicable nature in the argument.

The stylistic change to the plural tense of the μαρτυρία[witness]-lexeme (Jn 3:11) in contrast to the singular tenses of the surrounding verses and the repetition of the theme of eternal life also appearing in John 3:36, connects this pericope to the story of the Baptist's testimony of the identity of Jesus. Through it Jesus refers his and his disciples' collective testimony (Morris 1971:221). This shows how Jesus associates his disciples who have seen, believed and known with himself (Barrett 1978:211). By deliberately using this lexeme, John's Gospel reminds us of the ongoing story of the testimony about Jesus that started with the Baptist, continued through his disciples and is now aimed at the collective of half-believing Jews.

This is underscored by the fact that the final assertion in John 3:11 (τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἡμῶν οὐ λαμβάνετε) [you do not accept our witness] refers both to the ministry of Jesus and to the witness of the church (Barrett 1978:211–212). In this way, Jesus gradually changes from speaking about himself to speaking about the testimony of the church (Nicol 1972:127), including the author's theological school, the community for which he writes or every other Christian to which the Gospel would reach out (Moloney 1993:115; Hägerland 2003:320–321).

Through this wordplay, the possibility is opened up to read the text from the perspective of John's instruction, or general teaching, addressed to the faith community (Lindars 1972:155). Thus, the narrative is seen through the lens of teaching about believing, because a person knows Jesus on a personal level, through the testimony of those who actually were with him and can personally attest to the truth of his words. The story of the calling of Jesus' disciples should always be kept in the back of the mind (Jn 1:29–51), because this could help to show how a person's testimony, based on what has been seen and heard, can be the catalyst for somebody else's personal discovery of who Jesus is.

Jesus expanded the argument by showing how people can become part of God's world. Jesus provides the context for his words by stating that the nature of his remarks refers to earthly things, yet Nicodemus does not understand it. All the more will the incomprehension be if he speaks about heavenly things, or higher teaching (Morris 1971:222). As μαρτυρία [witness] is used in the plural, alluding to his disciples, it should also be understood that they can only testify about their ongoing and developing relationship with the man Jesus, who came from heaven, as this is who they knew and saw. The only way to become part of God's world

is by believing the Son of man and receiving spiritual birth through this faith (Morris 1971:224).

Returning to the testimony of the Baptist (John 3:22–36)

The narrative returns to the story of John the Baptist. The theme of this passage shows how people turn to Jesus and become his disciples, whilst establishing the superiority of Jesus over John the Baptist (Newman & Nida 1980:95). This passage represents a synopsis of the narrative that started in John 1:5, where the Baptist was first introduced (Newman & Nida 1980:100–101). Moreover, the same themes that formed the content of the larger section are repeated in this paragraph to provide a bridge to the rest of John's Gospel.

John returns to the Baptist's ministry of baptism as framework for this conclusion. The tense in which baptizw is used suggests repeated or habitual action (Newman & Nida 1980:96; Moloney 1993:122–123). Jesus is drawn into a heated argument (suggested by the use of ζήτησις) [investigation or controversy] about ritual cleansing between his followers and those of John the Baptist. The narrative intentionally uses the μαρτυρία [witness] word group to show how the Baptist only testified positively about Jesus, yet suddenly Jesus is in competition with him. The perfect tense (μεμαρτύρηκας [translation]) indicates a continuing effect of the Baptist's testimony (Newman & Nida 1980:98). This creates the impression that it was not a once-off event, as would have been the case in a court case, but something he did frequently and continuously.

Moloney (1993:125–126) asserts that the narrative is moved here into the context of revelation, through the use of ἀπεκρίθη ... καὶ εἶπεν (John) answered and he said]. By referring to heaven, John refocuses the disciples' question from the greater authority on baptism to the source of all true gifts. The emphatic accent of αὐτοὶ ὑμεῖ [translation] should be read in conjunction with the use of μαρτυρεῖτε, as its use here can also be rendered as 'you yourself heard me say' or perhaps more appropriately, 'you can confirm with absolute certainty what I said as you were there' (cf. Newman & Nida 1980:99).

To further explain the Baptist's role, John introduced another comparative metaphor, thereby providing more instruction about the character of testimony. The phrase, ὁ ἑστὴκὼς καὶ ἀκούων αὐτοῦ [he that stands and hears him], is the Greek translation of a Semitism (Newman & Nida 1980:99) and possibly relates to the Jewish wedding practice where the groom proceeds to the bride's house on the wedding day, accompanied by his friends with tambourines and a band (De Vaux 1973:33). The function of the friend would be to announce the arrival of the groom, indicating the start of the festivities. John tries to convey how the Baptist's testimony announces the Messiah in a joyous way and simultaneously, exhorts the faith community that they should testify accordingly.

John departs from the Baptist to provide his own commentary on the events that have transpired thus far (Jn 3:31-36). He expands on the concluding thoughts of John 3:30 and refers to the conversation with Nicodemus (Barrett 1978:224), focusing on a person's ability to only enter the world of God's kingdom through birth from above. This is achieved, once again, through the use of ἀνωθεν [from above]. The metaphor of heaven and earth, as it was described in the first verses of the chapter, is taken up again. The double meaning of ἀνωθεν [from above] seems to expand the reader's growing understanding of Jesus' identity and humankind's relationship with him.

Jesus' testimony here mirrors the remark Jesus made to Nicodemus in John 3:11-12 and is used here to build forth on the argument of John 3:16-20, that stated anyone who accepts the testimony will be saved. The use of μαρτυρία [witness] in these verses connects directly with the idea that a person was actually present at the events. The difference in the tenses in ἐώρακεν [see', perfect tense] and ἤκουσεν [hear', aorist tense] suggest that the emphasis should be on seeing rather than hearing (Newman & Nida 1980:102). The passage focuses on the one sent from above who speaks, bears witness, gives authentic testimony, utters the words of God and thus reflects a renewed interest in the message rather than the person of Jesus (Moloney 1993:128). This suggests a possible post-ascension focus on the ongoing testimony of the faith community who is continuing the ministry that Jesus started and is based on the example of the Baptist's demonstration of authentic belief (Moloney 1993:129).

Through accepting Jesus' testimony, a seal is put on the belief of the one who accepts the testimony that God, in fact, exists. The use of the aorist participle shows John thinking of a decisive act whereby a person decides once-off to accept Jesus and his witness instead of it being a continuous process. The person thus sets his or her seal on the proposition that God is true (Morris 1971:245). Here, we can see how the interplay of metaphors through the testimony of the Baptist helps to identify what God really said (Newman & Nida 1980:103).

In conversation with the Samaritan woman

With a masterful sense of drama and various techniques of stage setting, John succeeded in forming this narrative into a superb theological scenario and one of the most vivid scenes in the Gospel (Brown 1971:176). Lindars (1990:79) argued that this passage presents Jesus as mediator of the living water of divine Wisdom, as qualified to be the fulfilment of Samaritan hopes and by implication, those of the whole world. John 4:1-4 serve as a transition from chapter 3, linking the passages into one another as one thematic whole.

The theological point of the passage is this: The Samaritan woman is unaware of the gift that God is giving the world and she doesn't know Jesus' true identity, otherwise she would have asked for water that provides life (Jn 4:10). This

water is never-ending and is in itself similar to a spring that continually wells up with water, but providing eternal life (Jn 4:14). This eternal life causes the believer to worship God because he or she knows who she or he is worshipping. Jesus intentionally tries to draw the woman into a deeper level of understanding of his person and role (Moloney 1993:150). The remark in John 4:22 about salvation coming from the Jews, must be placed against the back-drop of the early church's Jewish origin and the fact that the Messiah is most definitely a Jew (Morris 1971:270), as well as the fact that John wants to remind us that this is an encounter between Jesus and the non-Jewish world (Moloney 1993:151). By the intentional ignoring or transcending of ancient cultural expectations regarding gender roles, the rhetoric illustrates that no person is excluded from kinship with Jesus because of gender, ethnicity or social status (Neyrey 2003:117).

The Messiah is somebody who will proclaim everything about God's spiritual world and how to worship him in Spirit and truth. He is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament can offer by way of worship, a fact that the woman recognised and acknowledged (Barrett 1978:228). In this, we follow the Samaritan woman struggling to understand who is speaking to her, progressing in her understanding of who Jesus really is (Moloney 1993:155-156; Steyn 2008:148). The impact of Jesus' self-revelation to the woman is of such a nature that John tells us that she left her water jar at the well to immediately return to the town (Morris 1971:275). There, she proclaimed to her fellow townspeople that she met a man who has explained her personal history, leaving her to wonder if he could be the Christ. John explicitly repeats the wording of John 4:25 here, reframed as a question (Moloney 1993:157). Her message had such an impact on the townsfolk that they went out of the town to the well to meet Jesus for themselves.

John told how the people of Sychar came to faith, based on what the woman said (ὅτι εἶπέν μοι πάντα ἃ ἐποίησα [that he told me everything that I did]). In this, along with the Baptist, she precedes the apostles as one of the witnesses to Jesus (Barrett 1978:243). The Sycharites eventually asked Jesus to stay with them, to which he complied and John reported that πολλῶν πλείον [a great many] believed in Jesus because of his word (lit. διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ', through his words). Finally, the Sycharites spoke to the woman and told her they do not believe because of her testimony any longer, but because of what they heard and they know Jesus is indeed the saviour of the world. The greater significance of this narrative can be found in the remark, ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου [that this is truly the saviour of the world']. It indicates a definite global and wider-than-Jewish scope to John's intention of introducing Jesus as the Messiah (Barrett 1978:246; Moloney 1993:151).

In conversation with the Royal official

John now continues the story of Jesus' journey to Galilee (Jn 4:43), picking it up from John 4:3. The sign described here interconnects with the first miracle in Cana and presents an explanation of the authentic faith that is described

throughout John's Gospel. The word order in John 4:50b seems to confirm this, as ἐπίστευσεν [he believed] opens the sentence (Moloney 1993:186) and the absolute use of the word means 'he became a Christian' (Barrett 1978:248). The information provided regarding the exact time of the son's healing also affirms that the outcome of authentic faith and the fact that, as the Samaritans' belief led them to knowledge of Jesus, the official's belief in Jesus' words was based on the word only (Moloney 1993:187). John intentionally repeated ὁ υἱὸς σου ζῇ [your son lives] three times, in John 4:50, 51 and 52, as the basis of the miracle (the boy living) came through these spoken words alone.

This is further confirmed by the off-the-cut-remark on Jesus' thoughts (Jn 4:44), as in John 2:23-25. Both passages have a similar function in the Gospel, that is, to introduce into the narrative the story of someone with inadequate understanding of Jesus' real power (Brown 1971:188). In this verse, μαρτυρία [witness] is used in a similar argument as John 2:25 and if linked together, the seemingly incomprehensible character of the remark here gets significance. Finally, the remark made by Jesus in John 4:48, Ἐάν μὴ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἴδητε, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε [If you do not see signs and omens, you will not believe], seems to confirm the idea that these miracles could be seen as some sort of instruction on the nature of authentic, or life-giving word-based, faith (Koester 1989:336), hence the negative comment on the side about the inadequacy of the Jewish people's ability to put their trust in Jesus.

Some more consideration seems to underscore the point: The official came from Capernaum to Cana because he heard Jesus came to Galilee. This presupposes some belief in Jesus' prophetic abilities or reputation. The use of κύριος [lord] in John 4:49 seems to suggest that the official saw Jesus as an ordinary person with special powers (Steyn 2008:149). Even after Jesus put him off with a sharp rebuke (Stibbe 1994:19), he persisted in a way similar to the persistence of Jesus' mother in John 2:5 (Moloney 1993:185). It should be noted that τέρατα [omen] is used in John's Gospel in John 4:48 only and then in a negative sense, thus strengthening the idea that John viewed an overemphasis on wonders as a blinding factor in revealing who Jesus is (Brown 1971:191).

The outcome of the narrative is depicted as the coming to faith of the official's whole household, who only heard the official's testimony of his encounter with Jesus. The reference to ὁ βασιλικός [royal, of the kingdom] shouldn't be misread. The title can refer to any of the following: A person from royal blood, a servant to a royal household, a soldier of the Herodian king or the Roman emperor or a royal scribe (Brown 1971:190).

References to the world of Judaism gradually disappears (similar to the progression in the story of the Baptist's testimony moving from him to his disciples to Jesus) with increasing references to the Samaritan world and finally the reference to a royal official in Capernaum, a Judean border town where a Roman garrison was located. Taking

this into account, it can be assumed that the weight of this circumstantial evidence suggests that the man was a Roman soldier in the service the emperor (Moloney 1993:182–183).

The plural use of ἴδητε [you will see] suggests a wider audience than only the official (Morris 1971:290). John seems to continue describing the move away from Judaism to a global perspective on believing in Jesus. Lindars (1972:205) noted that the word, οἰκία (Jn 4:53), is a word from the vocabulary of Christian mission, confirming the idea that John was also instructing his faith community on their missional identity. By bringing the repetitive and often unusual use of the μαρτυρία [witness]-lexeme into the discussion, it would seem that John wanted his community members to see a pattern of testimony developing, enabling them to become proficient witnesses to the reality of Jesus living inside them and that is based on receiving the faith through the testimony of people who knew Jesus personally (as they don't).

Conclusion

Reconstructing an ancient future

We need to remind ourselves that the end of hermeneutical investigation is not a tidy system in a book to be available as a 'correct answer', but '... the life of witness to the love of God, through all of which the church is built up and energised for mission ...' (Wright 2009:40). As such, we should bear in mind that the Gospel of John is a living writing. It evolved from an original oral tradition and its development was necessitated by the history of the community, alive with interest in the life and ministry of Jesus (Westermann 1998:75). We still share in this interest today. The question, therefore, is how we are able to share the testimony of this faith community in a manner that we ignite the same interest in the life and ministry of Christ. Perhaps we could take our cue from ancient Mediterranean culture itself: The future was experienced in the present; tomorrow is tackled when it arrived; the past thus served as a mirror held up to the present and problems were solved in the light of the past (Malina, Joubert & Van der Watt 1996:105).

An attempt can made to create a sustainable theological theory from the insights gathered in the investigation, knowing full-well that no simplistic leap between text and current context should be made or principles should be deduced. We can take our cue from John's introduction of the μαρτυρία [witness]-lexeme into the different stories and the instructional scope it opened up to the way he communicated its meaning within each section. This effort, however, is preliminary in scope and should be more thoroughly developed by investigating the occurrences of the μαρτυρία [witness]-lexeme in the rest of John's Gospel as well.

Finally, a theological theory of practice can be proposed that includes four inter-related missional purposes, each with its own resulting ministry practices as the ecclesiological undergirding for the investigation into the μαρτυρία [witness] lexeme in John 1–4. The first missional purpose would be

to worship God through knowing Christ and the praxes resulting from this would include ministries of corporate, public worship and testimonial preaching and ministries of facilitating personal and public prayer. The second missional purpose centres on the faith community being open and inviting. The praxes growing from this purpose are member-driven ministries of hospitality to all and ministries of caring, kindness and compassion. The third missional purpose is to love one another as Christ did. The resulting praxes would be small group ministries and ministries of faith development. Finally, the fourth missional purpose is to share the ministry of God through leadership development and intentionally engaging the community through testimony.

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