



The Johannine prologue: A hermeneutical key to the community theme



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As John wrote to a community grappling with incarnating its communalistic values, he furnishes readers with remedies for addressing such sociocultural maladies. However, to appreciate the Johannine response to colossal cultural failure, we must begin from the Johannine prologue because the narrative develops the enigmatic constructs it postulates. Although the community theme is one of such, it has not received attention despite the gamut of academic interests in the prologue and the ubiquitous acknowledgement that it is a compendium of the major themes in Johannine prologue. Therefore, this article aimed to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the major themes in the Johannine prologue and the divine remedy to these challenges – how the believing community can epitomise the eternal community. The study employed a narratological analysis because it analyses and guides the reader to recreate the Johannine theological concept of community, studying the poetics and meaning of what the prologue promulgates. The findings indicated that the Johannine prologue is the hermeneutical key to understand the community theme: it establishes its legitimacy, explicates what it entails and lays the foundation for its narratological development. Thus, no academic autopsy on the community theme should ignore it.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The Johannine characterisation of a community challenges the relational dimension of a community – the anthropological view that defines community by the 'quality relationships' between group members – by redefining a community as a group of people participating in the divine community. This research thus intersects with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology.

Keywords: John; community; social-scientific; Logos; prologue.

Introduction

The Johannine prologue has aroused a gamut of academic interests for its character – genre, content, structure and impact on the narrative. On the relationship between the prologue and the Johannine narrative, scholars ubiquitously agree that the prologue is a repository of the major themes in John: it *tells* what the narrative *shows* (Carson 1991:111; Fay 2022:4; Köstenberger 2013:44; Moloney 1993:24). The ramification is that the narrative elucidates and embellishes the enigmatic philosophical constructs or themes mentioned in the prologue (cf. Köstenberger 2013:44; Moloney 1993:24). Consequently, it is indispensable in any academic autopsy on the Johannine themes.

Therefore, this article studies the function of the prologue in unearthing the substratum of John's theology of community and establishing the legitimacy of the community theme through a narratological analysis. The study employs this method because it analyses how the author conveys a theological message through narratives (Marguerat & Bourquin 1999:8; Osborne 2006:202). It also helps to decode the poetics (artistic dimensions) and meaning (perlocutionary effect) of the narrative (Osborne 2006:203).

The analysis of the community theme in the prologue

The delimitation and structure of the prologue

In modern Johannine scholarship, it is widely acknowledged that the prologue refers to John 1:1–18 (Culpepper 1998:110–111; Moloney 1993:23–25; Voorwinde 2002:28). Thus, the article follows the majority view.

Furthermore, divergent positions exist concerning the structure of the prologue.¹ However, the different proposed structures do not focus on the community theme. Therefore, one is proposed for the analysis as follows:

¹Scholars have identified two typical patterns – synthetic parallelism, the view that the prologue is constituted by a series of parallel themes (cf. Coloe 1997:41; Köstenberger 2004:20–21; Lacan 1957:97; Moloney 1993:25–27), and concentric chiasm or

1. The divine community (Jn 1:1–2).
2. Creation: The divine community's collaborative work (Jn 1:3–5).
3. John testifies about the Light in the community (Jn 1:6–9, Jn 1:15).
4. The human community's response to the Light (Jn 1:10–13).
5. The incarnation and the human community (Jn 1:14–18).

The divine community (Jn 1:1–2)

Beginning the prologue with Ἐν ἀρχῇ [in the beginning], John calls the reader's attention to Genesis 1:1 (Gordley 2018:157; Köstenberger 2004:25; Moloney 1993:27–29; Thomaskutty 2022:36; Vincent 2009:24). By echoing the first words of the Old Testament, John's focus is on what precedes time or eternity before creation (Harris 2015:18; Moloney 1993:28; Ngewa 2003:11). So the purpose is to establish what predates the creation, one of which is ὁ λόγος (Jn 1:1; Borchert 1996:102; Köstenberger 2004:25). It is evident in the use of the imperfect tense (ἦν, the imperfect tense of the verb εἶμι); it shows the continuing existence of a state or situation in the past (Köstenberger 2004:115; Mounce 1993:181; Ngewa 2003:11; Vincent 2009:24; Westcott 1980:5). Thus, it points to the absolute existence of the Logos before creation (Borchert 1996:104; Keener 2003:267; Moloney 1993:31). Therefore, by attributing to the Logos a state of continuous existence before creation (Beasley-Murray 1987:10; Vincent 2009:24), John is affirming the eternity of the Logos (Morris 1995:70; Vincent 2009:24).

Another communicative intent or illocutionary force of Ἐν ἀρχῇ is to demonstrate that the Logos co-existed with God eternally (Barrett 1978:156; Ngewa 2003:12; cf. Borchert 1996:104). The argument of the eternal co-existence of the Logos and God can be made when it is established that there are two distinct persons in John 1:1. Without that, we can only speak of the eternal existence of the Logos (Keener 2003:369; Ngewa 2003:11; Vincent 2009:24) and not the co-existence of the Logos with a distinct personality. Thus, John establishes this distinction by the preposition πρὸς (καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν), which denotes that the Logos did not eternally exist alone but with God (Harris 2015:18; Moloney 1993:28) the Father (Harris 2015:18; Kanagaraj 2013:2; Ngewa 2003:12). Therefore, the Logos is distinguished from the Father (Borchert 1996:106; Harris 2015:18–19; Mounce 1993:27; Ridderbos 1997:24; Voorwinde 2002:32).

Even though John does not give us details on the character of the relationship (Ridderbos 1997:25), the preposition (πρὸς) furnishes the reader with some information on this eternal relationship (see Harris 2015:18; Ngewa 2003:12; Vincent 2009:33–34). In this context, to be 'with God' is not merely communicating the co-existence of two separate individuals (Behr 2019:259; Vincent 2009:34). Rather, it denotes two distinct persons in communion, association, intimacy, fellowship or union (Behr 2019:259; Borchert 1996:103; Harris 2015:18; Keener 2003:369; Morris 1995:70; Vincent 2009:34; Voorwinde 2002:32).

(footnote 1 continues...)
 chiasmic structure (cf. Boismard 1957:76–77; Culpepper 1980:2–3; Lund 1931:42–46; Voorwinde 2002:23).

Finally, the third statement concerning the Word reveals that the Logos shares the same nature with God (Borchert 1996:103–104; Harris 2008:70, 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:34–35). This is evident in the use of the anarthrous (θεός) and the emphatic position of θεός (see Harris 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:34–35). The absence of the article in John 1:1c (καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος) suggests that θεός is in a predicative position; therefore, John's focus is on the Word's nature or quality (Harris 2008:68, 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:34–35). By this construction, John ascribes to the Logos all the attributes of the divine essence (Borchert 1996:103–104; Harris 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:35). Furthermore, the emphatic position of θεός is John's way of stressing and strengthening the argument that the Logos enjoys unity of essence with God (Harris 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:34–35).

For these reasons, we can describe this relationship as a 'divine community'. Generally, there are two broad categories identified with the idea of community: territorial and relational (Gusfield 1975:xv–xvi).² By demonstrating that the Logos and the Father are one in essence (Borchert 1996:104; Harris 2015:19; Mounce 1993:27; Vincent 2009:34–35) and have co-existed eternally (Harris 2015:18; Kanagaraj 2013:1–2; Vincent 2009:33–34) in union and communion (Harris 2015:18; Kanagaraj 2013:2; Keener 2003:369; Morris 1995:70; Vincent 2009:34), John is expressing the quality of relationship that exists between God and the Logos (the relational dimension of community). John is therefore postulating a divine community (cf. Borchert 1996:106; Harris 2008:68). Borchert (1996:106) perspicaciously and aptly observes: community and unity are two compatible sides of the eternal God (cf. Grenz 2000:112; Harris 2008:68). The reference to this relationship (and creation) indicates that in John, community is always a starting point (Kunene 2012:188).

It is pertinent to observe that John establishes this foundation (the unity and community of the divine essence) before discussing the creation. The idea is that creation is the product of the outflow of the eternal relationship (Grenz 2000:112). Grenz (2000:112) succinctly puts it as follows: 'Just as the triune God is the eternal fellowship of the trinitarian members, so also God's purpose for creation is that the world participates in "community"' (Grenz 1998:49; cf. Kanagaraj 2013:2). Similarly, Moltmann (2008:375) affirms that the perichoretic unity of the divine Trinity is an open, inviting and integrating unity within which the whole world can find room. So in John, there is a human community because God, the eternal community, has created the world and invites us to participate in the community of God. As a result, having established the concept of the divine community, he discusses the community motif embedded in creation (Kanagaraj 2013:2) and how it reflects the work of divine collaboration.

²Whereas the former encompasses the context of location, physical territory and geographical continuity, the latter points to the quality of relationships (Gusfield 1975:xv–xvi).

Creation: The divine community's collaborative work (Jn 1:3–5)

The narrative flow demonstrates further the partnership exhibited by the divine community during the creation of the world. To emphasise this collaboration, John states the contribution of the Logos in the work of creation positively (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο) and negatively (καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν)³ (Jn 1:3; Carson 1991:118; Köstenberger 2004:29; Ridderbos 1997:36). Recognising that the Father is the source of all that is (Grenz 2000:102; Morris 1995:71), the Logos is identified as God's agent⁴ in creation by the expression δι' αὐτοῦ or 'through him' (Grenz 2000:104; Vincent 2009:37).⁵

Furthermore, John demonstrates the relationship between the Logos and creation, revealing that the Logos is the life-giver and light-giver of God's creation (Jn 1:4). The first section (Jn 1:4a) ascribes life-giving prerogative to the Logos (Carson 1991:119; Harris 2015:23; Köstenberger 2004:30). Thus, whatever was created exists because of the self-existing life of the Word that was dispensed at creation (Carson 1991:119; Morris 1995:73). The second part shows that this life (the Logos) is also the Light that enlightens the world (Harris 2015:23). It is critical to observe that the continuance of this role of the Logos is implied in the linear sense of the present tense (φαίνει), which indicates continuous shining of the Light (Vincent 2009:40; Waetjen 2001:272). And the darkness could not overpower it (Brant 2011:30; Waetjen 2001:272).⁶ The transition from the present tense (φαίνει) to aorist (κατέλαβεν) has stunned many. Considering what a punctiliar aorist represents, some have proposed that John had in mind an event in the past (Moloney 1993:33; Waetjen 2001:272). However, some disagree for two reasons: firstly, John mentions no event and secondly, the conjunction that connects the two statements has a constative sense – it states as a single fact a continuous struggle between the Light and darkness and the former's unceasing victory over the latter (Waetjen 2001:272).

Finally, Barrett (1978:158) takes the argument of the role of the Logos further by arguing that although Jesus (the Logos) was both life and light in himself, he was also the agent by whom God bestowed life and light upon the world (Barrett 1978:158; cf. Jn 5:21, Jn 5:26; Carson 1991:118).⁷ It means that

3. There are unresolved arguments whether the word γέγονεν should end the sentence (Jn 1:3) or begin the next sentence (Borchert 1996:107; Metzger 1971:195–196). Metzger (1971:195–196) argues that it is more constant with the Johannine repetitive style and doctrine to punctuate with a full stop after ὃ γέγονεν (cf. Brown 1966:6).

4. The term (agent) should be interpreted considering what John has said already about the Logos (Jn 1:1–3). The Logos is God and not a mere ambassador (Carson 1991:224–225; Harris 2015:113).

5. This Johannine disclosure about the Logos's involvement in the creation of 'all things' unveils the community motif embedded in creation (Kanagaraj 2013:2). According to Kanagaraj (2013:2), the community-oriented nature of creation flows from the fact that God created 'all things' as families according to their kinds (cf. Gn 1–2).

6. Scholars are divided on how to apply the double meanings of κατέλαβεν in this context (Keener 2003:387; cf. Brown 1966:8). Some think that applying both meanings (apprehend and comprehend) are legitimate (Barrett 1978:158; Harris 2015:23). Whereas few scholars translate the word as comprehend (Beasley-Murray 1987:11; Ridderbos 1997:40), the majority choose 'apprehend' as the appropriate interpretation (Brant 2011:30; Köstenberger 2004:31; Waetjen 2001:272).

7. Even though John uses the term 'life' predominantly in a soteriological sense, what we have in the prologue is the cosmological aspect (Barrett 1978:158).

the Logos exercises these divine prerogatives because the Father bestowed them upon him (Barrett 1978:158; cf. Jn 5:21; Morris 1995:279). Consequently, creation and its continuance are products of divine collaboration between the Father (source) and the Logos: the agent of creation (Grenz 2000:104; Morris 1995:71).⁸

John's testimony in the community (Jn 1:6–9, Jn 1:15)

John introduces the Baptist into the narrative. Unlike the Logos, whose eternity is established by the imperfect tense (Ngewa 2003:11; Vincent 2009:24), John changes the tense to aorist and describes the witness as ἄνθρωπος – to denote the humanity of John and the historicity of his assignment (Köstenberger 2004:32; cf. Morris 1995:79). Indeed, John (the witness) testifies to the pre-existence and pre-eminence of the Logos (Jn 1:15; Harris 2015:36; Köstenberger 2004:45).

Moreover, even though he is distinguished from the Light (Barrett 1978:150; Vincent 2009:41), his significance is revealed by the references to μαρτυρία and the sophisticated literary introduction that indicates that he is a man *sent from God* and known by name (Jn 1:6–7; Jn 1:15; Morris 2015:79; Vincent 2009:42). Being a witness serves to mark his unique place in salvation history as the one who pointed to the coming of the Light (Ridderbos 1997:42). Through the privilege of the divine assignment, he participates in God's mission for creation – the social life of the divine community (Grenz 2000:112). Therefore, like every other Johannine witness, he must be someone who has experienced the divine community to be a true witness (Brant 2011:31; Keener 2003:392; cf. Jn 1:6; Jn 15:26–27).⁹ 'To witness', according to Brant (2011:31), 'preserves the emphasis on one who identifies Jesus for others by virtue of what the witness has seen and heard' (cf. Keener 2003:392; Jn 15:26–27). Thus, he is introduced as a man sent from God (Jn 1:6).

Concerning the fruit of the witness of John – the man sent from God – Carson (1991:121) and Barrett (1978:159) suggest that it does not reflect the purpose of his witness (that all men might believe through him). They base their argument on the community's response to the ministry of John (cf. Barrett 1978:256; Carson 1991:121). Although the gospel gives no evidence for a counter position that all believed through him, determining the result of John's witness numerically is problematic because it can easily culminate in missing its qualitative impact. For example, Carson (1991:121) admits by mentioning in passing and citing John 1:35–37 as an instance when John's witness yielded fruitful results (Jn 1:35–37). However, when placed in its proper context, the example

8. Although John does not include the Spirit, the third eternal distinction, creation is primarily a Trinitarian act (Grenz 2000:101). In the Genesis account, the Spirit is part of the divine collaboration that resulted in the creation of the world (cf. Gn 1:1–2; Grenz 2000:101–106).

9. Morris (1995:80) lists seven who bear witness to Jesus in John – each of the three Persons of the Trinity, scripture, the Baptist and a variety of human witness (cf. Köstenberger 2004:32–33). Apart from scripture and Jesus, all these witnesses have experienced the Logos in one way or another. Jesus' statements attest to this (Jn 15:26–27). He tells his disciples to testify about him because they have been with (experienced) him from the beginning (Jn 15:27). He instructed them to testify after telling them that he will send the Holy Spirit (who has co-existed with him eternally) to witness about him (Jn 15:26).

cited by Carson (1991:121) reveals the qualitative impact of the ministry and mission of John. Firstly, it presents John as the first to testify about Jesus (the Light) to the Jewish leaders (Jn 1:19–28). Secondly, he is the first to publicly endorse and introduce Jesus to the community and witness to the community about him (Jn 1:29–34). In addition, the gathering of the members of the community of God starts by the instrumentality of this witness. Two of his disciples became the first members of the community of God through his testimony (Jn 1: 35–39). Thus, the negative response must not be the standard for measuring the fruitfulness of his witness.

Against this background, John demonstrates how the human community responded to the Light, the object of John the Baptist's testimony. The prologue describes two responses that characterised the people's attitude towards the Light: the positive (Jn 1:12–13) and the negative (Jn 1:10–11).

The human community's response to the Light (Jn 1:10–13)

The Light came into the created world inhabited by humankind (Harris 2015:30; Köstenberger 2004:36; Morris 1995:85),¹⁰ but the world, alienated from or hostile to God (Carson 1991:123–124; Köstenberger 2004:36; Ridderbos 1997:44), did not recognise the identity of the Light (Köstenberger 2004:36; Ridderbos 1997:44). John's comment also denotes the rejection of the right relationship with the Logos (Morris 1995:85; Ridderbos 1997:44) or response to the Logos (Barrett 1978:162).

Similarly, the Logos encounters rejection even within his own people – a *relational* term referring to Israel (Carson 1991:122; Keener 2003:398; Vincent 2009:47). John is intimating that some from 'his home' – the covenant community (Carson 1991:125; Köstenberger 2004:402), which should have known and accepted him or had a proper relationship with the Logos – rather did not give him the reception he deserved (Carson 1991:122; Köstenberger 2004:37; Morris 1995:85–86). 'God's chosen people who celebrated Torah rejected Torah in the flesh' (Keener 2003:399). It suggests that he is unwelcomed in his own home (Harris 2015:30; Vincent 2009:47), that is, the covenant community (Carson 1991:125; Köstenberger 2004:402).

The comments about the response of these groups – the world and Israel – indicate the refusal of the human community to align itself to the purpose of the divine community for it, that is, participating 'in the life of the social Trinity' (Grenz 1998:49, 2000:112; cf. Bauckham 2015:48).

Conversely, despite the general rejection, there were remnants who 'went against the current, who broke with the general pattern by which the world thinks, lives and acts' (Ridderbos 1997:45) and gave the Logos the expected

reception (cf. Köstenberger 2004:37; Morris 1995:85). These are people who duly and truly recognised the Logos (contradistinctive to those who did not recognise him; Keener 2003:399) and accepted him for what he was and manifested (Carson 1991:125–126; Köstenberger 2004:38; Ridderbos 1997:45). Hence, 'accepting' or 'receiving' the Word is equated with 'believing in his name' (Harris 2015:31; Köstenberger 2004:38; Ridderbos 1997:45), given that 'the name' is a periphrasis or circumlocution for God (Brant 2011:33).

Furthermore, whereas rejecting the Logos is tantamount to a rejection of the social life of the divine community (Grenz 1998:49, 2000:112; cf. Kanagaraj 2013:2), accepting or believing in his name is an acceptance of this life (cf. Harris 2015:31; Ridderbos 1997:45–46; Van der Watt 2000:166). Therefore, those who receive him are given the privilege (Brant 2011:33; Carson 1991:126) or authorisation (Keener 2003:403; Köstenberger 2004:39) to become τέκνα θεοῦ but not υἱοὶ θεοῦ (Harris 2015:31; Köstenberger 2004:39). John makes this distinction while discussing the relationships between the Son and the Father and believers and the Father by using υἱός only for the Son (Köstenberger 2004:39; Morris 1995:87; Ridderbos 1997:45). As Harris (2015:31) rightly notes, God has one Son by nature and many adopted sons. This authorisation ushers them into a new status (Morris 1995:87) or identity (Van der Watt 2000:182) – a relationship centred on community of *nature* (Morris 1995:87; Vincent 2009:49). This means that they participate in the divine nature (see Morris 1995:87; Vincent 2009:49). And their participation in it secures them a place as members of the community of God, thereby enjoying an intimate familial relationship with God (Van der Watt 2000:182; Westcott 1980:16). Nonetheless, this is not limited to the Johannine community but extends to the believing communities after the incarnation (cf. Ngewa 2003:17). Ngewa (2003:17) thus stresses that 'those who believe' 'is an inclusive class of persons living in the past, present and future' – 'believing in this sense recurs at different times for different people throughout the ages'.

John further explicates the substratum of this new identity by defining what it is and what it is not. Three different expressions that focus on human procreation (οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρῶς)¹¹ are used to demonstrate that they did not become God's children through this medium (Köstenberger 2004:39; Ridderbos 1997:47; Van der Watt 2000:183). And they are contrasted with divine procreation (ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν) to authenticate their new identity as God's children (cf. Brant 2011:33–34; Köstenberger 2004:39; Van der Watt 2000:183). As Harris (2015:32–33) affirms, 'the four uses of ἐκ may point to the agency (by) or source (from) or cause (a result) or any combination of these'. Consequently, the expression (ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν) points to God as the source or cause of the procreation (Harris 2015:32–33).

10. There are scholarly deliberations concerning how John employs the term (see Carson 1991:123; Köstenberger 2004:36). Morris (1995:85), for instance, opines that the first two examples of κόσμος are about everyone, while the third refers to those who met Jesus. Carson (1991:123) shows that κόσμος is never used positively in John, and Barrett (1978:162) envisions only one sense of the word (Jn 1:10).

11. The three expressions are human ancestry, choice and initiative (cf. Carson 1991:126; Harris 2015:33; Köstenberger 2004:39).

Against this background, John demonstrates in the section that follows that the Word also assumed a 'community of nature with humankind' through the incarnation (cf. Vincent 2009:51).

The incarnation and the human community (Jn 1:14–18)

The statement (καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) demonstrates two forms of incarnation in the prologue. The first is the incarnation of existing concepts in a specific cultural context. The notion that John used oral and written traditions has received scholarly validation (Barrett 1978:45–47; Borgen 2014:148; Dodd 1963:180). The Logos concept is one of such traditions present in John's religiously pluralistic milieu (cf. Keener 2003:339–347; Morris 1995:102–108). Scholars have therefore proposed possible backgrounds of John's Logos, which include Hellenistic philosophy (Stoicism and Philo), Jewish wisdom literature (personification of wisdom) and the word of God in the Old Testament (Gordley 2018:157–162; Köstenberger 2004:26–27; Morris 1995:102–108). However, scholars argue that traditions are usually applied uniquely by John (Dodd 1963:180). Similarly, scholarly analyses and juxtapositions of John's Logos concept to its parallels indicate its idiosyncratic application (Keener 2003:339; Morris 1995:108; Waetjen 2001:226–271). Indeed, the applications of traditions are associated with the establishment of new meanings (Labahn 2007:61). Likewise, John employs it to enculturate or incarnate his Logos Christology within a cultural context (Keener 2003:339).

Moreover, the statement denotes that the Logos entered a new mode of existence in time without ceasing to be what he was in eternity (Harris 2015:35; McHugh 2009:53; Vincent 2009:50–51) – the Logos became genuinely human (Carson 1991:127; Harris 2015:35; Keener 2003:408; Köstenberger 2004:40), thereby assuming 'a community of nature with humankind' (Vincent 2009:51). However, it is critical to observe that as the Word entered a new *mode* of being, all essential properties were retained (Harris 2015:35; Vincent 2009:51). Consequently, the incarnate Word is a being who is fully divine and fully human – a theanthropic person (Harris 2015:35; Morris 1995:91; Vincent 2009:51). Besides this, John never refers to him as the Word because he has become audible and visible (Bauckham 2015:45).

Moreover, to explicate the relationship that existed between the incarnate Word and the historical context of the incarnation, John chooses a word (ἐσκήνωσεν, dwelt or 'pitched his tent') that immediately reminds the reader of the Old Testament wilderness wanderings, where God tabernacled among the children of Israel (Carson 1991:127; Moloney 1993:42). Thus, Barrett (1978:165) avows that ἐσκήνωσεν is chosen because of the word which follows it: δόξα. According to him, it recalls in sound and meaning the Hebrew word used to denote the dwelling of God with Israel (Barrett 1978:165; cf. Morris 1995:91). The argument is based on the 'divine dwelling' in the Old Testament wilderness wanderings with its concomitant glory and the apparent

replication of these motifs by John (Barrett 1978:165; Morris 1995:91). As God dwelt within the community of faith in the wilderness, the bright cloud that settled upon the tabernacle was considered the tangible expression of God's abiding presence – his glory (Barrett 1978:165). Thus, John evokes both motifs ('dwell' and 'glory') to indicate that through the incarnation, God's glory takes up residence amid his people once again (Köstenberger 2004:42).¹²

Furthermore, it is pertinent to state that the reference to δόξαν αὐτοῦ is the only moment in which the 'we' of the human community enters the narrative, supporting the μαρτυρία of John with her μαρτυρία (cf. Ridderbos 1997:51). As the first witness (John) testified about the Son's pre-eminence (Jn 1:15; Jn 1:27), the community testifies about his pre-eminence, observing that his glory corresponds in nature to the glory of the uniquely begotten (Keener 2003:416; Morris 1995:93; Ridderbos 1997:53) or only begotten of the Father (Brant 2011:35; Harris 2015:35; Morris 1995:93). Nonetheless, what is expressed during the incarnation is glory 'revealed under human limitations both in Himself and in those who beheld Him' (Vincent 2009:52; cf. Moloney 1993:43) – the apostles (Keener 2003:411; Köstenberger 2004:42) and eyewitnesses (Carson 1991:128; Ridderbos 1997:52), and it was manifested through his works or signs (Carson 1991:128; Köstenberger 2004:42), death and resurrection (Carson 1991:128; Morris 1995:93).

In addition, John declares that the Son is 'full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14d). The term is a combination that indicates an evocation of the Old Testament concept of God (Köstenberger 2004:44; Ridderbos 1997:54; Vincent 2009:54) – a designation by which Yahweh makes himself known in his glory (Ridderbos 1997:56). It also symbolises the faithfulness of God to God's people (Köstenberger 2004:44). Consequently, the elementary ramification is that the faithfulness of God finds ultimate expression in the community through the incarnation (Köstenberger 2004:45). The incarnate Word becomes God's revelation to the community (Barrett 1978:167; Vincent 2009:54; Westcott 1980:24), and the believing community receives continuous grace out of his (the incarnate Word) fullness (Ridderbos 1997:56; Vincent 2009:57).

John further explicates the significance of the incarnation to the human community (Jn 1:17; Köstenberger 2004:48; Ridderbos 1997:57). By way of contrast, he reveals that whereas Moses served as an intermediary for the reception of the law, Jesus Christ brought grace and truth – his intrinsic possession (Harris 2015:37; Ridderbos 1997:58).

The prologue concludes with an important task accomplished by the Son in the human community. John emphatically states that no man has seen God (Harris 2015:38; Köstenberger 2004:48; Morris 1995:100) – not even Moses (Köstenberger 2004:48; Ridderbos 1997:58–59). Nevertheless, the theanthropic Jesus – although truly man (Harris 2015:35; Morris 1995:91) – is exempted. Being God uniquely begotten or μονογενῆς θεός

¹² See Pang (2022:54–99) for an extensive discussion on the glory theme.

(Carson 1991:139; Harris 2015:38; Metzger 1971:198; Voorwinde 2002:31),¹³ he enjoys unparalleled and timeless intimacy with the Father (Köstenberger 2004:49; Voorwinde 2002:32).

Most importantly, this eternal relationship makes the Son the only legitimate and authoritative expositor of the Father and the community he represents (Voorwinde 2002:32). Consequently, John presents him as the exegete of the Father and (by extension) the divine community (Brant 2011:37; Vincent 2009:61). And the incarnation was the vehicle through which the Son exegeted (revealed or explained) God to the human community (Vincent 2009:61; Wuest 1983:210). Harris (2015:39) rightly affirms that ἐξηγήσατο encompasses in a single glance the whole span of Christ's earthly life, including his death and resurrection. Thus, by concluding the prologue with the summary of Christ's earthly life, John is indicating that what follows (the entire gospel) 'should be read as an account of Jesus 'telling the whole story' of God the Father' (Köstenberger 2004:50). In other words, the narrative (the rest of the gospel) 'shows' what the prologue 'tells' (Moloney 1993:24).

The perlocutionary effect of the prologue on the theme

The community of God in the prologue

Generally, scholars employ the term community with territorial or relational connotations. Whereas the former encompasses the location, physical territory and geographical continuity, the latter points to the quality of relationships (Gusfield 1975:xv–xvi). However, the prologue establishes that the community concepts – the territorial and relational dimensions – are divine initiatives. For instance, it reveals that God created the world; therefore, geographical locations and their inhabitants are parts of creation (Jn 1:3, 10). It also presents God as a community constituted by God (the Father) and the Logos in a co-eternal, intimate union (cf. Borchert 1996:106; Harris 2008:68). This characterisation redefines what a community entails. It reveals that although belonging to a community requires quality interpersonal relationships, the eternal community is the paradigm; consequently, a community of God is a group of ontological co-equals participating in the *modus vivendi* of the ideal community (cf. Grenz 2000:112; Kanagaraj 2013:2). Thus, the nature of the relationship demonstrated by the eternal distinctions defines the character of the relationship ('quality relationship') that participants of the community of God must demonstrate.

The prologue indicates that only people who receive the Son by believing in his name become participants in the life and mission of the eternal community, because he gives them authorisation that ushers them into a new status or identity

13. Harris (2008:74–83, 2015:38) lists four variant readings as follows: ὁ μονογενής, ὁ μονογενής υἱός, ὁ μονογενής θεός, μονογενής θεός. It is generally accepted, however, that μονογενής θεός has better attestation than the others (Carson 1991:139; Harris 2008:74–83, 2015:38; Metzger 1971:198; Morris 1995:100; Vincent 2009:59; Voorwinde 2002:31). Some also avow that there are compelling reasons for taking μονογενής as equivalent to (ὁ) μονογενής υἱός and translating the phrase as 'the only Son, who is God' (Carson 1991:139; Harris 2015:38). However, Vincent (2009:59) argues that the sense of the passage is not affected whether we read the only begotten Son or God only begotten.

as children of God (Jn 1:12–13; cf. Morris 1995:87; Van der Watt 2000:182). The implication is that the community is a family of God; it enjoys a familial relationship with God (Van der Watt 2000:182; Westcott 1980:16). The imagery creates awareness and anticipation for the family of God motif in the narrative (Van der Watt 2000:182). Finally, the character of birth portrayed by the Greek construction suggests that it is a universalised community, thereby laying a foundation for the reader to expect in the narrative an inclusive community constituted by both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Jn 1:12–13)

The role of the Logos

The study indicates that the Logos' relationship with God makes the concept of the eternal community meaningful. The pre-incarnate Word's (Logos) co-eternal relationship with the Father is the origin of the Johannine community concept: it defines what a community entails (cf. Jn 1:1–5). The values characterising this eternal relationship – union, intimacy, fellowship, reciprocal love and functional and ontological unity – legitimise the characterisation of the relationship as a community, furnishing the reader with an idea of what constitutes a community in John (Kanagaraj 2013:1; Keener 2003:369; Vincent 2009:34).

The narratological significance of this characterisation is that it presents the prologue as a hermeneutical key for an academic autopsy on the community theme, given the impact of the prologue on the themes in John: it *tells* what the narrative *shows* (see Carson 1991:111; Köstenberger 2013:44; Moloney 1993:24). Thus, the Logos guides the reader to understand the Johannine definition of a community, laying a foundation for the narrative development of the theme.

The prologue also introduces the role of the Logos as the only authoritative exegete of the eternal community (Jn 1:18; cf. Jn 3:13). It ties this peculiar assignment to his identity as the only begotten Son of God who enjoys unparalleled intimacy with the Father and his entire life on earth, signalling the anticipation of his exegesis on the eternal community in the narrative (Jn 1:18; cf. Harris 2015:39; Köstenberger 2004:50).

Moreover, John links the incarnation to the conception of the believing community, making it one of the roles the Logos played in the contextualisation of the community. The invitation to the human community that culminated in the conception of the believing community is the product of the incarnation (Jn 1:12–13; 35–42). The gathering of the first community affirms the entry requirements of the community of God stipulated in the prologue, allowing subsequent believers to understand how to become members of the community (cf. Jn 1:12). It also introduces the theme of witness in John.

The role of the community of witnesses

The prologue lays a foundation for the witness theme. In John, an individual must experience Jesus or the eternal

community to be a genuine witness. Thus, the prologue presents John the Baptist as a man sent from God to testify about the Light (Jn 1:6–9, 15). As the first witness, John testified about the Son's pre-eminence (Jn 1:15). Furthermore, the 'we' of the human community who support the μαρτυρία of John with their μαρτυρία by testifying about the pre-eminence of Jesus as the Son whose glory corresponds in nature to the glory of the only or uniquely begotten of the Father are also genuine witnesses – people who have experienced the eternal community (Jn 1:14; cf. Harris 2015:35; Keener 2003:416; Ridderbos 1997:53). Most importantly, Jesus also meets the same criterion for measuring genuine witnesses because he is a member of the eternal community. The only difference between him and the other witnesses is his origin and identity as the preincarnate and incarnate Logos (Jn 1:1–5, 14).

The given concept – the prologue's portrayal of witnesses – prognosticate what to expect as the characterisation of witnesses in the narrative development of the community theme. Firstly, it forecasts how the narrative will decipher the genuine from spurious disciples. Secondly, it indicates that there will be an inseparable connection between Christian discipleship and witness, making the disciples a community of witnesses. Finally, it predicts that witnessing will feature prominently in the narrative as a means of expanding the community of God (cf. Carson 1991:159).

Conclusion

This analysis indicates that the prologue establishes the legitimacy of the Johannine community concept as one of its major themes and introduces its interrelated subjects. It also gives the reader clues on what to expect in the narratological development of the community theme. Therefore, it is a hermeneutical key for understanding the community theme in John.

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