

# THE TESTIMONY OF TWO WITNESSES:

Openness and Closure in the Gospel of John



**A Lecture by Michael Wolfe**

Delivered at St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM, on November 4, 2009.

A couple of years ago I was standing in the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan, looking at an exhibit of paintings by the American painter Ellsworth Kelly.

Alongside one of the paintings was the following quotation by the artist:

I think what we all want from art is a sense of fixity, a sense of opposing the chaos of daily living. This is an illusion, of course. Canvas rots. Paint changes color. But you keep trying to freeze the world as if you could make it last forever. In a sense, what I've tried to capture is the reality of flux, to keep art an open, incomplete situation, to get at the rapture of seeing.<sup>1</sup>

As strange as it may sound, this quotation made me think of the Gospel of John. In this lecture I hope to show you why. I hope to illustrate the ways in which the Gospel of John engages in a dialogue between closure and openness, between the permanence of the written word and the transience of the embodied word, in its effort to communicate to us what Ellsworth Kelly calls “the rapture of seeing.”

The importance that the Gospel of John places on the activity of seeing can be indicated by a quick statistical comparison with the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel and Epistles of John combined contain nearly the same number of words as the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> But when we look specifically at the various Greek verbs that mean “to see”—*eido*, *horao*, *theoreo*, *theaomai*—we find that these verbs occur about twice as many times in the Gospel and Epistles of John as they do in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the theme of seeing is of exceptional importance to the Gospel of John.

There's one other verb of seeing to which the Gospel and Epistles of John devote special attention: *martureo*. This verb and its cognates appear about ten times as often

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<sup>1</sup> Ellsworth Kelly, quoted in Holland Cotter, “A Giant of the New Surveys His Rich Past,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> There are 18,230 words in The Gospel and Epistles of John combined; there are 18,345 words in the Gospel of Matthew.

<sup>3</sup> These four verbs occur a total of 188 times in the Gospel and Epistles of John, 93 times in the Gospel of Matthew. A fifth Greek word for seeing, *blepo*, actually occurs about equally often in both cases—16 times in the former and 17 times in the latter; this is the only Greek verb for seeing that is used more frequently in Matthew than in the Johannine literature.

in the Gospel and Epistles of John as they do in the Gospel of Matthew; so if we wish to come to a proper understanding of the Johannine texts, we must inquire into this word's significance.<sup>4</sup> Literally *martureo* means "to be a witness." It's a verb of speaking, insofar as bearing witness or testifying is an act of speech. But it's also a verb of seeing, in the sense of being an eyewitness. This duality of speaking and seeing is repeatedly emphasized in the Gospel of John, as these two examples illustrate:

...we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen.<sup>5</sup>

He who has seen has borne witness...and he knows that he is speaking the truth...<sup>6</sup>

I'd like to suggest that there's a tension between these two aspects of witnessing, and that this tension is a central theme of the Gospel of John. This Gospel entertains two rival perspectives on what it means to be a witness, and it pits these rival perspectives against one another. The first perspective on witnessing prioritizes the act of speaking, the second, the act of seeing. The former perspective commands us to place our faith in the testimony of a person who claims to have seen Jesus; the latter commands us to see Jesus with our own eyes. The former witnessing encourages closure, since a person who gives testimony always speaks of events that have happened in the past and endeavors to give a definitive account of those events; the latter witnessing resists closure because the act of seeing with one's own eyes can only take place in the flux of the present moment. I'm going to label the former kind of witnessing "Petrine witnessing", as I will associate it with the apostle Peter; and I will

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<sup>4</sup> 59 times in the Gospel and Epistles of John; 6 times in Matthew.

<sup>5</sup> Gospel of John 3: 11 (Revised Standard Version)

<sup>6</sup> Gospel of John 19: 35 (This is slightly modified from the New American Standard Bible; all other Biblical citations come from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

label the latter kind of witnessing “Thomistic witnessing”, as I will associate it with the apostle Thomas. (Of course, the adjective “Thomistic” usually refers to St. Thomas Aquinas; but in this lecture it will refer strictly to Thomas the apostle.)

In addition to treating these two apostles as exemplary of the two aspects of witnessing, I’ll speak of the relationship that each of these disciples bears to a third disciple, the one known by the epithet “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

Now why do I associate the testimony of closure with the apostle Peter? To answer this question, I’ll begin at the end, with the closing verses of the Gospel of John. In these last verses, Peter is walking along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias with the resurrected Jesus, who tells him,

“When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death [Peter] would glorify God And when He had spoken this, He said to [Peter], “Follow Me!”<sup>7</sup>

So the Gospel ends with Jesus giving Peter a special mission: he is to become a martyr. The word martyr, of course, is related to this Greek verb that we’re considering, the verb for bearing witness, *martureo*. The primary focus here is on preaching one’s testimony, and sticking to that testimony until death. For the martyr, death represents the victory of fixity over fluidity; by dying, the martyr defeats any temptation to recant, revise, or enlarge his testimony. The martyr vanishes into death, but what he leaves behind is a stable, unchanging affidavit that we are called upon to embrace in faith. This is the testimony of closure.

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<sup>7</sup> Gospel of John 21: 18, 19

In the succeeding verses, Peter's mission of martyrdom is pointedly contrasted with the mission of another disciple:

Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them... So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die...<sup>8</sup>

Whereas Peter has been commanded to follow Jesus into death, this latter disciple, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", has been commanded to remain behind. Peter is called to glorify God by dying; the Beloved Disciple is called to glorify God by living. We can begin to see that Peter and the Beloved Disciple dramatize the antithesis of closure and openness.

According to the rumor that circulates around the Beloved Disciple, he will live a life of extraordinary open-endedness, remaining on earth until the second coming of Christ. Admittedly, the Gospel refuses to confirm or deny this peculiar rumor; in fact, it warns us that Jesus did not actually say that the disciple would not die (21: 23). But for the purposes of this lecture, I'm going to take the rumor seriously, to see where it leads. Simply by reporting the rumor, the Gospel has already captured my imagination with a vivid image that's hard to revoke: the image of the deathless disciple patiently holding his post, or perhaps wandering the earth restlessly, waiting through the centuries for Jesus to come back. This image has in fact captured the imaginations of generations of believers, both Christian and non-Christian. I know of a thirteenth-century Muslim author who alludes to multiple and persistent reports in his own day of a still-living

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<sup>8</sup> Gospel of John 21: 20-23

disciple of Jesus. According to one of these reports, Muslim troops encountered an eccentric mountain hermit who “had been commanded by Jesus, whose ‘representative’ he was, to remain in that place until the day at the end of time when the son of Mary would descend again to earth.”<sup>9</sup> So, given the curious appeal of this image, let’s not be too hasty to dismiss the rumor. Let’s just say that the Gospel’s reluctance to confirm or deny the rumor is a symptom of its resistance to closure.

Here’s the last word that the Gospel gives us regarding the Beloved Disciple:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the Beloved Disciple is both a character in the Gospel and the Gospel’s ostensible author. Thus he provides an especially significant focal point for our question of what it means to be a witness; so we should seek to get to know him better. He’s traditionally identified with the Apostle John, the reputed author of the Gospel and Epistles of John. While I agree that both the Gospel and the Epistles of John should be attributed to the Beloved Disciple,<sup>11</sup> I’m going to call into question the assumption that this disciple is John; later in the lecture, I’m going to propose an alternative identification for the Beloved Disciple.

But for the time being, I want to make explicit a few of my own assumptions about the authorship of these texts. First, I assume that the author has complete creative freedom to shape his narrative any way he wishes. That is, the Gospel of John is a work of art. In line with this, I assume that the Beloved Disciple is a fictional

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, paraphrased on page 78 of Michael Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī*. Translated by Liadain Sherrard. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Gospel of John 21: 18-24; in this instance the translation comes from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>11</sup> As far as I can perceive, the distinctive terminology and concerns of the Gospel of John show a strong enough resemblance to those of the three Epistles of John to justify the assumption that these four texts all come from the same author (either the same actual author, or the same ostensible author, or both).

character; he's the ostensible author of the Gospel, not the actual author. I have no idea who the actual author is. But whoever he is, I assume that he has chosen to portray his Gospel as an eyewitness account in order to dramatize and explore the question of what it means to be a witness. By creating the Beloved Disciple as his exemplary witness, he has proposed one possible answer to that question.

I'm going to set the Beloved Disciple aside for now. At the moment, I'd like to talk about the apostle Thomas. I started out by calling the open-ended version of witnessing "Thomistic witnessing", and I'd like to make my reasons for this clear by reminding us of the story for which Thomas is best known. The story takes place on the day of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has just presented Himself, fresh from the grave, to the gathered apostles.

But Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came...and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."<sup>12</sup>

In the centuries since this Gospel was written, this apostle has been memorialized and censured as "doubting Thomas," and it has generally been assumed that this story is intended to portray Thomas in a negative light. It is assumed that when Jesus tells Thomas, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed," the implication is that Thomas himself is not blessed, or at least less blessed than those

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<sup>12</sup> Gospel of John 20: 24-29

who have not seen. But this implication seems implausible to me. Thomas' most poignant desire is to see and touch his resurrected Lord, and his desire is fulfilled. Thomas is blessed—more blessed, I would say—than those of us who have never seen or touched Jesus. The fulfillment of Thomas' desire is to be celebrated, rather than scorned, as is clear when we compare his story with the exultant opening verses of the First Epistle of John:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also.<sup>13</sup>

This fragmentary sentence spills over with the blessedness of seeing and touching the incarnate Word of Life, a word that appeals not only to our sense of hearing, but to all of our senses. The author of these verses boasts of this blessing, and he rests his authority as an eyewitness upon this seeing and touching. Thomas too would boast of this blessing, and he will insist upon being an eyewitness himself.

It's worth noting that in this Gospel Jesus never reprimands those who equate seeing with believing. Rather, Jesus reserves His condemnation for those who *have* seen, but do not believe. We can see this in the Gospel's sixth chapter, when Jesus scolds the hard-hearted Galileans with these words:

But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.<sup>14</sup>

A few verses later, He says,

For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> First Epistle of John 1: 1-3

<sup>14</sup> Gospel of John 6: 36

<sup>15</sup> Gospel of John 6: 40 (the NASB has “beholds” rather than “sees”; the verb is *theoreo*)

My point in defending Thomas is to suggest that the Gospel of John takes his perspective seriously. The Gospel gives due consideration to the Thomistic answer to what it means to be a witness, just as it gives due consideration to the Petrine answer, throwing these two answers into dialogue with one another. I'd like to amplify the discrepancy between these two answers, to throw their distinctiveness into relief.

One way to highlight the difference between the Petrine and Thomistic perspectives is to observe the alternative answers that they give to this question: Why did the Word become flesh? Before looking at these answers, I'd like to underscore the importance of the question, because I think there's a temptation when reading this Gospel to emphasize the spirit at the expense of the flesh. In its opening chapter, the Gospel boldly declares:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.<sup>16</sup>

The Word that became flesh is Jesus. Jesus not only *dwelt* among his disciples in the flesh; we learn later that He also died in the flesh—and, perhaps most importantly, that He was resurrected in the flesh. The incarnation of the Word is given added weight in the Epistles:

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the Spirit of the antichrist.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Epistle of John expresses the same concern:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gospel of John 1: 14

<sup>17</sup> First Epistle of John 2: 2, 3

<sup>18</sup> Second Epistle of John 1: 7

Having noted the gravity of this doctrine, let's look at the answers Peter gives to the question of why the Word became flesh.

Peter would emphasize the claim that the Word became flesh in order to serve as a human sacrifice for the expiation of sins. That is, he echoes John the Baptist's declaration from the Gospel of John's first chapter:

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!<sup>19</sup>

This image of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb is repeated in the First Epistle of Peter, which I take to be a kind of commentary on and magnification of the Petrine strand of the Gospel of John. Here, Peter, the ostensible author of the epistle, writes:

...you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere, the author of this epistle strikes upon other distinctively Johannine themes, such as the preincarnate existence of Jesus (1: 20), and the exhortation that we be "born again" (1: 3, 1: 23). Most noteworthy for our purposes are his reflections on the relationship between the flesh and the living Word:

For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For,  
"All flesh is like grass,  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls off,  
but the word of the Lord endures forever."  
And this is the word which was preached to you.<sup>21</sup>

Here the author, ostensibly Peter, challenges the close association between the living Word and the flesh. Here, the Word of God is that which endures after the flesh fades away. From the Petrine perspective, the incarnation of the Word of God is merely a

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<sup>19</sup> Gospel of John 1: 29

<sup>20</sup> First Epistle of Peter 1: 18, 19

<sup>21</sup> First Epistle of Peter 1: 23-25

transitory state, one that has only provisional necessity as part of the work of expiation. The epistle seems to imply that, as soon as has Jesus fulfilled His expiatory mission by bleeding to death on the cross, He returns to the state of a disembodied spirit:

For Christ also died for sins once for all...having been put to death in the *flesh*, but made alive in the *spirit*.<sup>22</sup>

From this point of view, the crucifixion is the fulfillment and completion of the work of the incarnate Word. According to the Gospel of John, the last words spoken by Jesus on the cross were “It is finished!” (19: 30). The Epistle of Peter seems to seize upon this sense of closure at the crucifixion, even at the expense of the bodily resurrection.

From the Petrine perspective, what remains after the crucifixion is a spoken word, a word that is preached. Another way of putting this is that what remains is a name: we complete the work of expiation in our own lives when we hear the testimony preached to us and respond to it by calling upon the name of Jesus. The Gospel of John tells us:

...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.<sup>23</sup>

And the Book of Acts recounts a sermon preached by Peter that culminates in this claim:

...there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.<sup>24</sup>

When Peter says there is “no other name”, he’s identifying the incarnation of the Word as a unique, extraordinary, and indispensable solution to a radical problem. Apart from

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<sup>22</sup> First Epistle of Peter 3: 18, with emphasis added

<sup>23</sup> Gospel of John 20: 31

<sup>24</sup> Acts of the Apostles 4: 12

the blood sacrifice of the embodied Word, there was no way to atone for our sins, no way that we could be reconciled to the Father. The incarnation is a temporary but inevitable stage in the task of expiation.

For Thomas, too, the incarnation of the Word is a unique, extraordinary, and indispensable solution to a radical problem. But Thomas is focused on a different problem. While Peter focuses on the expiatory function of the incarnation, Thomas seems to focus on its epistemological function. For Peter, the central problem to be solved is the sin that stands between us and God; for Thomas, the central problem to be solved is the ignorance that stands between us and God. The central question for Thomas is: How can we know a God whom we cannot see? This problem, as well as its solution, is plainly stated in the Gospel's opening chapter:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [i.e., Jesus], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.<sup>25</sup>

Let's look first at the problem: "No one has seen God." The Gospel and the Epistles of John make us feel the urgency of this problem by stating it from the outset and reminding us of it over and over again:

And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.<sup>26</sup>

Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God [i.e., Jesus].<sup>27</sup>

No one has seen God at any time.<sup>28</sup>

The First Epistle goes on to expose the ethical depth of this problem:

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<sup>25</sup> Gospel of John 1: 18

<sup>26</sup> Gospel of John 5: 37

<sup>27</sup> Gospel of John 6: 46

<sup>28</sup> First Epistle of John 4: 12

...the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.<sup>29</sup>

The soft way of reading this verse is to say that the sort of person who does not love his brother cannot love a God whom he has not seen. A stronger way of reading it is to say that none of us can love a God whom we have not seen—that we, as human beings, require a concrete object for our love.

The solution to this problem is the incarnation. Prior to the incarnation, we could not see the Father; with the arrival of the Word in the flesh, we can see Him, know Him, and love Him. The uniqueness and indispensability of this solution is asserted in the words that Jesus addresses directly to Thomas at the Last Supper.

Responding to Thomas' anxious inquiries, Jesus tells him:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.<sup>30</sup>

When Thomas is told, “no one comes to the Father but through Me,” he doubtless understands this to mean, “no one can see the Father, except in the incarnate Word.” Just as, for Peter, the *name* of Jesus is the only way to come to a reconciliation with God, for Thomas, the *body* of Jesus is the only way to come to a *knowledge* of God.

Of course, one might object, against Thomas, that we had other ways to know God prior to the embodied Word. We had the written word. Initially inscribed on tablets, and diligently preserved by later generations of Israelites, the Scriptures provided Israel's primary point of contact with a transcendent and invisible God.

The Gospel and Epistles of John call into question the adequacy of this point of contact. When adopting the Thomistic perspective, they display a suspicion of the

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<sup>29</sup> First Epistle of John 4: 20

<sup>30</sup> Gospel of John 14: 6-7

written text, which veils the reader from the immediacy of the divine presence. This suspicion is, of course, reflexive: the Gospel is itself a written text. In the person of Thomas, the Johannine texts rebel against the limitations of their own textuality. Three of these four texts end by confessing these limitations. For example, the final verse of the Gospel tells us:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.<sup>31</sup>

Here, the divine presence overflows and threatens to break down the walls of the written text. In more personal terms, the Second Epistle ends with this verse:

Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face...

The Third Epistle ends with nearly identical words.<sup>32</sup> We can see these texts straining to overcome the fixity and finality of their own inscription.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus attempts to pull the attention of the religious scholars away from the written word and turn it toward the embodied Word. He tells these scholars:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.<sup>33</sup>

In the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, which I take to be a commentary on and magnification of the Thomistic strand of the Gospel of John, Jesus sharpens the point:

His disciples said to him, “Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of you.”

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<sup>31</sup> Gospel of John 21: 25

<sup>32</sup> “I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.” (Third Epistle 1: 13-14)

<sup>33</sup> Gospel of John 5: 39-40

[Jesus] said to them, “You have disregarded the living one who is in your presence, and have spoken of the dead.”<sup>34</sup>

Here the contrast is quite clear: the embodied Word is living but the word of the prophets is dead.

This devaluation of the prophetic word marks a severe contrast between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew’s portrait of Jesus is filtered through the Hebrew prophets; Matthew endeavors to persuade us of Jesus’ legitimacy through His conformity to Messianic prophecies. This narrative of Jesus’ ministry is interrupted at every turn with Scriptural quotations, accompanied by reminders that “all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.”<sup>35</sup>

But John reverses the Scripturalism of Matthew in a remarkable way. Whereas Matthew holds that faith in Jesus is induced by the Scriptures, John holds that faith in the Scriptures is induced by Jesus. As this verse from the second chapter of John tells us, the disciples understood and believed the Scripture only after they witnessed the resurrected Jesus:

So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture...<sup>36</sup>

As this verse suggests, the intrusion of Jesus’ bodily resurrection into the events of His disciples’ lives provided a key—perhaps *the* key—to an insightful encounter with God and His written word.

But what about the spoken word? What status does the spoken word have as an alternative to inscription and incarnation? For Peter, the spoken word, the word that is

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<sup>34</sup> Secret Gospel of Thomas, Saying 52; the translation is by by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 1: 22

<sup>36</sup> Gospel of John 2: 22

preached, is highly valued. Nonetheless, I think that Peter would grant the spoken word a secondary status next to the written word. For him, it would seem that preaching is merely the gestation of a testimony that reaches its full maturity in paper and ink. The spoken word is evanescent, but the written word endures.

For Thomas, the spoken word is hardly more revealing than the written word. When the Gospel says that the Word became flesh in order to explicate God to us (1: 18), I think that Thomas would understand this explication not as an act of speech, but as the act of dwelling among us, tangibly, visibly, and concretely. And though he would hardly deny that the spoken word is more intimate and alive than the written word, Thomas would insist that even oral testimony cannot communicate the living reality of the resurrection. He will accept no substitute for the abrupt, unscripted appearance of his Lord in the flesh.

So we now have two distinct answers to the question, “Why did the Word become flesh?” Each answer posits a solution that claims to be unique and indispensable; each answer represents a perspective that refuses to be subordinated to the other. I’ve suggested that these are rival perspectives, in competition with one another. But can’t these perspectives coexist? Can’t we say that the embodied Word elegantly fulfills two functions at once, one expiatory and the other epistemological?

The incompatibility of these two perspectives emerges when we follow the Gospel narrative all the way through to its conclusion. As I’ve noted, the expiatory mission of the embodied Word reaches its conclusion on the cross, when Jesus speaks his last words from the cross, “It is finished.” The crucifixion is the climax and fulfillment of this mission. But the crucifixion is a profoundly disturbing turn of events

for the epistemological mission of the embodied Word. Far from fulfilling that mission, the cross undermines that mission and threatens to unravel the work Jesus has done in making God known to us. If our knowledge of God is dependent upon Jesus' dwelling among us in the flesh, His disappearance from the earth throws us right back into the state in which we lived prior to the incarnation: we now have only the written word; we no longer have the living image of the invisible God. This is the inevitable parting of the ways between Peter and Thomas: for the former, the end of Jesus' earthly life is a resolution; for the latter, it is a crisis.

While Thomas senses the threat of this crisis most acutely, he's not the only disciple to sense it. On the Eve of the Last Supper, Jesus troubles his disciples by telling them repeatedly of his imminent departure:

...I go to the Father and you will no longer see Me.<sup>37</sup>

Nor do the disciples take much comfort from Jesus' reassurance that they will see Him again:

Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me?...We do not know what He is talking about.'"<sup>38</sup>

Yes, they will see Him again. But He will appear only briefly after the resurrection; after that, years of absence stretch forth between His ascension to heaven and His second coming. How will the disciples fill in those years of absence, when they can no longer see God? And what about those of us living now, who never had the chance to see Him in the first place? If we've missed out on the limited-time offer of God's embodied presence, what hope do we have of coming to know God?

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<sup>37</sup> Gospel of John 16: 10

<sup>38</sup> Gospel of John 16: 17, 18

Jesus does offer a way to maintain God's presence among us during His physical absence: He offers the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.<sup>39</sup>

But Thomas will not be satisfied with this solution. From his perspective, the incarnation is a unique and indispensable solution to a radical problem. Now if Jesus is telling us that God can be made known to us in the spirit just as well as in the flesh, the incarnation seems to have become an unnecessary and superfluous solution to a problem that could have been solved some other way. Because of this, the epistemological work of the incarnate Word now seems less essential than its expiatory work. Surely Thomas will not accept this outcome.

Perhaps Thomas is starting to sound a little too stubborn. But I want to stay true to his perspective for a little while longer, to see where it takes us. I will persist, along with Thomas, in avowing that the incarnation is the only real solution to the problem of God's transcendence. If this is true, can the Gospel offer us any solution to the problem of Jesus' disappearance at the end of the book?

I think that the answer is yes. The Gospel presents a startling solution to this problem, a solution that maintains openness in the face of apparent closure, while staying true to the indispensability of the flesh. The solution to this problem arrives in the form of a rumor: the rumor that the Beloved Disciple will not die, but will remain on earth until Jesus comes back. If we're open to this rumor, we can recognize it as an artful response to the crisis posed by Jesus' ascension. The Beloved Disciple fills the

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<sup>39</sup> Gospel of John 14: 16, 17

empty gap that Jesus leaves behind, taking over, in his own flesh, the epistemological work of the embodied Word. In order to understand this strange rumor, and the even stranger claim that the work of the embodied Word can be translated to this disciple, we have to make clear who this disciple is.

Let me begin by reviewing the appearances of the Beloved Disciple. Altogether, there are five instances in which the epithet, “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, is used in the Gospel: once during the Last Supper (13: 23); once at Jesus’ crucifixion (19: 26); once when Jesus’ tomb is found empty (20: 2); and twice when the risen Jesus appears to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (21: 7; 21: 20). In four of these five instances, the Beloved Disciple is paired with Peter in such a way as to bring out the disparity between these two disciples. I’ve already noted the antithesis between these two in the Gospel’s last chapter. Now let’s take a look at the Beloved Disciple’s first appearance, in the Gospel’s thirteenth chapter.

The setting is the Last Supper, and Jesus has just announced that one of his disciples will betray him. Amidst the confusion, suspicion, and offended feelings that ensue, Peter turns to Jesus’ closest confidant:

There was reclining on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.”<sup>40</sup>

From the outset, the allusion to this unnamed disciple marks him as privileged. He occupies a privileged place at the table, reclining at Jesus’ breast; he seems to enjoy greater intimacy with Jesus than the other disciples; above all, his designation as Jesus’ beloved would seem to highlight his special status in Jesus’ affection.

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<sup>40</sup> Gospel of John 13: 23-24

Tradition tells us that this disciple is the apostle John, though there's nothing to suggest this in the Gospel itself, apart from the name on the Gospel's title page. I would contend that, if we were unprejudiced by the Gospel's traditional title, and listened with fresh and attentive ears to what the Gospel tells us, most of us would conclude that the Beloved Disciple is Lazarus of Bethany, the disciple whom Jesus raised from the dead. The Gospel describes Lazarus in such a way that we will readily make this identification.

In Chapter Eleven, two chapters prior to the Last Supper, we are first introduced to Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. This chapter opens with the following words:

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha...So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."<sup>41</sup>

It's instructive that the messenger need not name Lazarus; he simply describes him to Jesus as "he whom you love", and the message is understood. This fact alone would seem sufficient to mark Lazarus as a candidate for the Beloved Disciple. But the Gospel drives the point home. Two verses later, we are informed that:

...Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and Lazarus.<sup>42</sup>

Although this Gospel describes Jesus as the manifestation of God's love to the entire world (John 3: 16), these are the only three people, anywhere in the Bible, who are singled out by name as having been loved by Jesus. The singling out of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus would be redundant if Jesus' love for them were not somehow distinctive and exceptional; and if repetition constitutes emphasis, then Jesus' love for Lazarus is

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<sup>41</sup> Gospel of John 11: 1-3

<sup>42</sup> Gospel of John 11: 5

emphasized above that for his sisters. For we are told only once that Jesus loved Martha and Mary, but this is the second time in rapid succession that we've been told that he loved Lazarus, and the Gospel will go on to remind us two more times before the chapter's end.

The third occurrence comes a few verses later, where Jesus himself calls Lazarus "beloved":

Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, Jesus' love for Lazarus is underscored a fourth time at the latter's funeral:

When Jesus therefore saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"<sup>44</sup>

Chapter Eleven reaches its climax when Jesus manifests His exceptional love for Lazarus by raising him from the dead—a singular and unprecedented miracle in this Gospel, matched only later by Jesus' own resurrection.

The following chapter, Chapter Twelve, commences with a description of a supper at Lazarus' home, six days prior to the Last Supper. We're told incidentally that:

Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.<sup>45</sup>

This would at first seem to be a throwaway detail; but on closer inspection it appears to prepare us, along with the repeated avowals of Jesus' love for him in the previous chapter, to recognize Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple who "was reclining on Jesus' bosom" at the Last Supper.

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<sup>43</sup> Gospel John 11: 11 (slightly revised from the NASB translation to bring out the meaning of *philos*)

<sup>44</sup> Gospel of John 11: 33-36

<sup>45</sup> Gospel of John 12: 2

What are the consequences of this identification? How do we read the Gospel differently as a result of it? One surprising outcome is that the rumor that the Beloved Disciple would not die suddenly makes more sense. As the Epistle to the Hebrews states, “it is appointed for men to die once” (9: 27). Given the fact that Lazarus has already died once, and has already been granted a resurrection like that promised to all believers, it is hardly surprising that questions would arise regarding his susceptibility to a second death.

Another incident that takes on fresh colors takes place at the crucifixion. As Jesus looks down from the cross upon his grieving mother, he directs her attention to the Beloved Disciple, telling her:

Woman, behold, your son!<sup>46</sup>

Jesus seems to have more than one purpose in mind when He instructs His mother to regard the Beloved Disciple as her son. In part, He’s simply making sure that His mother has someone to provide for her when He’s gone. But when we imagine that this disciple is Lazarus, we unearth an additional depth in Jesus’ words. There is a strong indication here of Lazarus’ close identification with the risen Jesus. Lazarus has already served as visible proof of Jesus’ power to overcome death:

And they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead...On account of him, many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

Lazarus is the fullest and most immediate expression of the resurrection, prefiguring Jesus’ own emergence from the grave. Thus we might hear in Jesus’ command—

“Woman, behold your son!”—a powerful consolation to his mother as she watches her

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<sup>46</sup> Gospel of John 19: 26

<sup>47</sup> Gospel of John 12: 9, 11.

son perishing on the cross. Jesus is telling her, in effect, “Take comfort. Just as this man has risen from the dead, so too will I, your son, rise from the dead.”

Thus the Beloved Disciple serves a distinctive, dual role, as an eyewitness to and a visible testimony of the coming of Christ. Lazarus has seen and touched the risen Lord; and we can see and touch the risen Lord in the body of Lazarus. This peculiar formulation of the role of witness has decidedly Thomistic overtones.

To illustrate how successfully the testimony of Lazarus responds to Thomistic demands, I’d like to conclude by quoting from another apocryphal Gospel. In fact we have only a small fragment of this otherwise lost Gospel; it was translated from Coptic into English and published in 1896. In the century since its publication, this forgotten text, known only as “Sahidic Fragment III”, has received almost no attention; but I find it vividly relevant to the question at hand. It reads like a revised draft of the Gospel of John. We may perhaps take it as an early commentary on the Gospel of John, as well as a satisfying literary invention in its own right. I’d like to focus on the way it creatively revisits and revises the story of “doubting Thomas”:

Thomas says to Jesus, “My Lord, behold, You have shown all favors to us in Your goodness. There is one thing in which we wish that You should assure us. We wish, my Lord, to see dead men sleeping in the tombs raised by You, for a sign of Your resurrection which shall take place...

Jesus says to Thomas, “Thomas My beloved...I will hide nothing from you...Full well did you seek after a sign of the resurrection...

If you do not see with your eyes, your heart is not assured. Did not I say to you, Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed, rather than they that have seen, and have not believed?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sahidic Fragment III, in J. Armitage Robinson (translator), *Tests and Studies: Contributions to Biblical Literature*. Volume IV: *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896. I have revised Robinson’s translation, which uses archaic English, to make it more contemporary and to make it uniform with the other translations used in this lecture.

Note that in this retelling, Jesus explicitly endorses Thomas' request for a sign of the resurrection, as well as his equation of seeing with believing. This is merely a magnification of the Thomistic dimension of the canonical Gospel. The real twist to the story is its chronology; the story takes place much earlier than the canonical story of doubting Thomas, reaching its climax, not in the resurrection of Jesus, but in the resurrection of Lazarus:

Now therefore, brethren, you know Lazarus the man of Bethany, who is called My beloved. Today is the fourth day since Lazarus died...

Come with Me, Thomas, that I may show you the bones, which have been dissolved in the tomb, gathered together again.

Come with Me, Thomas, that I may show you the eyes of Lazarus, which have been hollowed out, sending forth light.

Come with Me, Thomas, unto the mount of Bethany, that I may show you the tongue of Lazarus, which was wasted away...and that I may make it speak with you again...

Come with Me, Thomas, to the tomb of Lazarus—today is the fourth day since he died—that I may raise him up alive again. You have sought after the sign of My resurrection, O Thomas. Come that I may show it to you in the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>49</sup>

This is a provocative reworking of a familiar story. In the canonical account, Thomas' request for proof of the resurrection is fulfilled when he is confronted with the risen Christ; in the apocryphal version, Lazarus stands in as a substitute for the risen Christ. As Jesus asserts in this apocryphal retelling, Lazarus is “the sign of My resurrection.”

This unique signficatory power of Lazarus provides the key to solving Thomas' crisis at the end of the Gospel of John. From the Thomistic perspective, the glory of the

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<sup>49</sup> Sahidic Fragment III.

incarnate Word cannot be translated to the spoken word, much less to the written word. Nor can that glory be translated from flesh to spirit. But perhaps it can be translated from flesh to flesh—from one resurrected body to another. Perhaps it can be translated to Lazarus, who remains as an eyewitness and a visible testimony to the coming of Jesus, long after Jesus has departed from this world.

Now this is an odd solution, to say the least, especially for those of us who can't claim ever to have seen Lazarus in the flesh. Those of us in this room are still stuck with the written text rather than a firsthand encounter with the embodied Word. But perhaps we can appreciate the inventiveness of this narrative twist. Perhaps we can admire the Gospel's bizarre and paradoxical struggle to overcome its own textuality. We can wonder at the way it strives to unwrite itself, to transcend its own fixity, and to postpone the end of its story. It's an artistic leap that captures our imagination by suggesting that Lazarus is still out there somewhere, and that we might come face-to-face with him when we least expect it. That possibility, even if it's never actualized, even if it's merely fictional, staves off closure and keeps the narrative in suspense. In the end, this imaginative endeavor offers a poignant testimony to our pervasive, stubborn, and insatiable yearning to return to the immediacy of the incarnate Word—to be blessed with the same blessing as Thomas and to get at the rapture of seeing.

## Appendix 1 Two Witnesses: The Beloved Disciple and Peter

In my lecture, I looked closely at two moments in the Gospel of John in which the Beloved Disciple is contrasted with Peter: at the Last Supper, where the Beloved Disciple's intimacy with Jesus is contrasted with Peter's distance, and at the Sea of Tiberias, where the Beloved Disciple's mission of prolonged life is contrasted with Peter's mission of death. I briefly indicated that there are a few other incidents in which the Beloved Disciple and Peter are set off against one another. One of these incidents takes place at Jesus' empty tomb (20: 2); another takes place earlier in the episode at the Sea of Tiberias, when the risen Jesus first appears to the disciples (21: 7). My lecture did not permit enough time to look more closely at these latter two incidents; I'd like to take a closer look at them now. It seems to me that both of these incidents portray the Beloved Disciple as more keenly perceptive than Peter. That is, they portray the Beloved Disciple as a superior eyewitness.

The former of these incidents depicts the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb on the morning of His resurrection. After Mary Magdalene<sup>50</sup> finds that the tomb is empty, the first two disciples she tells are "Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved."<sup>51</sup> Both men rush to see the tomb for themselves:

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<sup>50</sup> This is probably Lazarus' sister, Mary of Bethany—though there is some ambiguity about the identities of the various Marys in this and the other Gospels.

<sup>51</sup> Gospel of John 20: 2 (All Biblical quotations in this appendix come from the Revised Standard Version.)

They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.<sup>52</sup>

If Lazarus is “the other disciple,” there is a lot of room to speculate about the symbolic meaning of his reaching the tomb first, about his hesitation at the mouth of the tomb, and about his allowing Peter to enter the tomb before him. But the primary point I would like to highlight here is the superiority of Beloved Disciple’s insight: while Peter only “saw,” the Beloved Disciple “saw and believed.”

Similarly, it’s worth noting that, when the risen Jesus appears to seven disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the Beloved Disciple is quickest to recognize Him. The Gospel informs us that the disciples didn’t recognize Jesus at all (21:4) until the Beloved Disciple announced to Peter, “It is the Lord” (21:7).<sup>53</sup>

Peter’s response to this bold announcement is telling; having been stripped down for the work of fishing, he recoils from Jesus, throwing clothes onto his naked body and jumping out of the fishing boat into the sea. The First Epistle of John speaks to this reaction and its correlation with Peter’s inability to recognize Jesus:

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.<sup>54</sup>

Two verses later, the Epistle comes to the main point:

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<sup>52</sup> Gospel of John 20: 4-8

<sup>53</sup> The keenness of the Beloved Disciple’s perception can also be contrasted with that of Mary Magdalene, who, like the other disciples, is slow to recognize the risen Jesus:

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). (Gospel of John 20: 15, 16)

<sup>54</sup> First Epistle of John 2: 28

We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.<sup>55</sup>

Notice the logic of these verses: there is a connection between our likeness to Jesus and our ability to see Jesus “just as He is.” Lazarus can recognize the risen Jesus because he uniquely resembles the risen Jesus—thus uniting the dual functions of eyewitness and visible testimony of the resurrection.

Note the further logic of the Epistle: insofar as we abide in Jesus, “we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.” The resurrection body is a glorious body, and Lazarus does not hesitate to display his risen body publicly as a spectacle to be marveled at for the glory of God. Peter, who has not yet attained to the resurrection, abides in a body of shame. Like Adam, he shrinks away when the Lord walks in his presence, and hastens to conceal his nakedness. Thus he abides in darkness, and can neither see nor be seen as clearly as the Beloved Disciple.

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<sup>55</sup> First Epistle of John 3: 2

## Appendix 2 Two Witnesses: The Beloved Disciple and Andrew

In my lecture, I framed the trope of two witnesses as a kind of rivalry, exemplified by the contrast between Thomas and Peter as well as by the tension between the Beloved Disciple and Peter. But at times the Gospel points to the idea of a cooperative rather than competitive relationship between two witnesses. Consider the terms in which Jesus presents two witnesses in the following verse:

In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true.<sup>56</sup>

Jesus is pointing to the legal requirement that two witnesses give concordant testimony in order for their testimony to be accepted as valid in a criminal case. If these witnesses are not in agreement, they undermine one another's authority.

Here, Jesus formulates this requirement as belonging to "your law"; but elsewhere He seems to adopt the requirement as His own, subjecting Himself to its rule:

If I [alone] bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true; there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true.<sup>57</sup>

The Gospel plays with the image of two witnesses, taking it up as a literary theme and spinning it out in competitive representations of what it means to be a witness. By

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<sup>56</sup> Gospel of John 8:17. This seems to be an allusion to Deuteronomy 19: 15, which says, "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (compare Deuteronomy 17: 6). It's noteworthy that the two or three witnesses of Deuteronomy are narrowed to two witnesses by Jesus. The First Epistle of John 5: 8, however, seems to play with the image of three witnesses: "There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree." (All Biblical quotations in this appendix come from the Revised Standard Version.)

<sup>57</sup> Gospel of John 5: 31, 32

dramatizing this bifurcation of testimony, the Gospel combats the narrowness of the singular perspective and the monological voice.

But in addition to engaging playfully with this theme, the Gospel also takes it seriously. That is to say, it subjects itself to its own standards. The Gospel offers itself to the reader as an eyewitness testimony, and so—by its own articulated criteria—it must offer itself as the testimony of two witnesses. The Beloved Disciple cannot be the sole author of the book; there must be a second author, a second eyewitness. Moreover, these two witnesses must be collaborators, lending support and validity to one another’s testimony. They cannot be rivals.<sup>58</sup>

With this expectation in mind, can we find any evidence that the Gospel actually presents itself to us as the testimony of two witnesses? The evidence is slender, but I think there are some indications that the Gospel frames itself in these terms. These indications are most apparent in the Gospel’s first and last chapters—the chapters that bracket the whole and encapsulate its claims to authority.

The first and last chapters are the only places in which the Gospel speaks in the first person. It’s important to notice that in both of these places, the Gospel speaks in the first person *plural*. For example, in the opening chapter of the Gospel, one of the key declarations on which I focused in my lecture—

And the Word became flesh...

—culminates in a first-person-plural claim of eyewitness authority:

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<sup>58</sup> A word of reminder: when I speak of the “author” here, I am speaking of the ostensible author, not the actual author. I regard the Beloved Disciple as a fictional character. If there is second witness validating the word of the Beloved Disciple, he is also a fictional character. When I say that the Gospel takes the legal criterion of two witnesses seriously, I simply mean that, in adopting the form of a legal testimony, the book conforms to the rules of its own game. But I would like to underscore the fact that I regard the Gospel as a work of art rather than some kind of legal document.

...and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.<sup>59</sup>

The one other time that the Gospel's narrator addresses us in the first person plural is at the end of the Gospel's last chapter. Here too the word "we" arises in the context of a claim of testimonial authority:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.<sup>60</sup>

As noted in the lecture, the disciple alluded in this latter verse is the Beloved Disciple; he is the Gospel's ostensible author and primary witness. In light of Jesus' repeated assertion that only the testimony of two witnesses is valid, this verse appears to allude, in addition, to a secondary witness validating the testimony of the primary witness. If this is the case, "we know that his testimony is true" should be read as "he and I know that his testimony is true."<sup>61</sup> By parallel interpretation, we might understand the statement in the first chapter, "we saw His glory", as meaning "the two of us saw His glory."

The theme of two witnesses is manifest not only in the voice of the narrator, but also in the events that are narrated. Both the first and the last chapters of the Gospel introduce us to a pair of anonymous disciples. In the first chapter, these are two disciples of John the Baptist; we meet them just as they're being converted into disciples of Jesus:

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<sup>59</sup> Gospel of John 1: 14

<sup>60</sup> Gospel of John 21: 18-24; in this instance the translation comes from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>61</sup> Compare this with Gospel of John 19: 35, where the Beloved Disciple appears to speak alone. There, he refers to himself in the third person singular: "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe." Compare also the language of Gospel of John 5: 32, cited above, in which Jesus Himself says, "I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true."

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.<sup>62</sup>

The Gospel places great emphasis upon John the Baptist's role as witness. The Gospel and Epistles of John employ the verb *martureo* and its cognates a total of fifty-nine times; in thirteen of these instances, the word is used by or to describe John the Baptist. Given this emphasis, it may not be too much of a stretch to imagine the two disciples of John inheriting the role of witness from him. As the first disciples of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel (and perhaps Jesus' first disciples ever), they are in a privileged position to bear witness to His entire ministry. Thus we might imagine that these two disciples of John are in fact the Gospel's two ostensible authors.<sup>63</sup> That would make one of these two disciples the Beloved Disciple, and the other his secondary witness.

Two anonymous disciples also appear in the Gospel's last chapter, in what might otherwise have been regarded as a trivial detail:

Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, *and two others of his disciples* were together.<sup>64</sup>

This is the scene in which the risen Jesus appears to the disciples while they are fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. A few verses later (21: 7) we learn that Beloved Disciple is among them. If I'm right in identifying him as Lazarus, he must be one of the "two others of his disciples" (since Lazarus isn't one of the five named disciples). It seems likely, then, that the other unnamed disciple is his secondary witness.

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<sup>62</sup> Gospel of John 1: 35-37

<sup>63</sup> Incidentally, this is my best guess as to where this Gospel got its name. I speculate (wildly) that the Gospel may have originally circulated under the title, "The Gospel according to the Disciples of John", a title that was later contracted to "The Gospel according to John." But John the Baptist could never have been considered the author of the Gospel, as he died long before the completion of Jesus' ministry. Thus the John in the contracted title would have been mistaken for the apostle John.

<sup>64</sup> Gospel of John 21: 2

Who then is this secondary witness? Based upon the argument in my lecture, we might have expected him to be the apostle Thomas.<sup>65</sup> But in fact he turns out to be an apostle I haven't previously mentioned: Andrew, the brother of Peter.

I make this identification on three bases:

1) The Gospel's first chapter eventually tells us outright that Andrew is one of the two disciples of John the Baptist:

One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.<sup>66</sup>

2) The Gospels of Matthew and Mark<sup>67</sup> tell us that Jesus recruited four fishermen from the Sea of Tiberias to be His apostles: the brothers Peter and Andrew, and the brothers James and John. (The latter two are known as the sons of Zebedee.) In the fishing scene on the Sea of Tiberias at the end of the Gospel of John, the list of five named disciples includes three of the four fisherman-apostles: Peter, James, and John. Andrew is the sole fisherman-apostle not among those named in the fishing boat. His name is conspicuous by its absence; we would expect him to be there with the other three fishermen. It's likely, then, that he's one of the two unnamed disciples in the boat (and hence the secondary witness).

3) For the last piece of evidence, I'm looking outside the Gospel of John to an important document from the early history of the church. This document, known as the Muratorian Fragment, is usually dated to about A. D. 170, and includes the following account of the writing of the Gospel of John:

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<sup>65</sup> Among other problems with this reasonable guess, Thomas is already listed among the five named disciples.

<sup>66</sup> Gospel of John 1: 40.

<sup>67</sup> Gospel of Matthew 4: 18-22; Gospel of Mark 1: 16-20.

The fourth of the Gospels was written by John, one of the disciples. When exhorted by his fellow-disciples and bishops, he said, 'Fast with me this day for three days; and what may be revealed to any of us, let us relate it to one another.' The same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John was to write all things in his own name, and they were all to certify.<sup>68</sup>

Clearly, by the time the Muratorian fragment was written, this Gospel was regarded as the work of the apostle John. But, strangely, the role of Andrew as a secondary witness seems to have been preserved. In any case, Andrew is singled out and given an active role, leading the other disciples in certifying John's work. I take this to be a relic of his original role as the secondary witness.

If this identification is correct, what is the significance of depicting Andrew as Lazarus' collaborator? I think that the importance lies in the fact that he is Peter's brother. The relationship between Andrew and Peter may represent a kind of sibling rivalry. This is, of course, an old and familiar theme that can be traced back to the book of Genesis: two brothers end up in a kind of competition with one another, and the younger brother typically ends up trumping the elder (as, for example, in the case of Jacob and Esau). The Bible doesn't tell us the birth order of Peter and Andrew; but because Peter is commonly represented as the leader of the Twelve Apostles, I think it's safe to assert that Peter holds seniority in terms of rank, and is thus implicitly the elder brother.

While the New Testament usually represents Peter as a far more important disciple than Andrew, the stark exception to this rule is the Gospel of John, which turns the relationship between the senior and the junior brother upside down. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark portray Peter and Andrew as becoming disciples of Jesus at the

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<sup>68</sup> Translation from Official Church Teachings, Biblical Interpretation, McGrath Publishing Co. 1978.

same time, and otherwise put Peter in the leading position. By contrast, the Gospel of John puts Andrew in the leading position by giving him first contact with Jesus, ahead of his brother. In the Gospel of John, it is Andrew who leads Peter to Jesus:

[Andrew] first found his brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

By giving Andrew this priority over Peter, the Gospel reenacts the theme of the younger brother trumping the elder. By depicting Andrew as endorsing the testimony of Lazarus rather than that of Peter, this sibling rivalry reduplicates and reinforces Lazarus’ rivalry with Peter. As Lazarus’ partner and Peter’s brother, Andrew is in a unique position to represent, in a single figure, the notion of witness-as-collaborator and witness-as-rival.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Gospel of John 1: 41, 42

<sup>70</sup> I’m suggesting that the opening and closing chapters of the Gospel of John we are to imagine Lazarus and Andrew testifying in harmony. But I would further suggest that the chapters in between are written in the voice of *either* Lazarus or Andrew—not both. I don’t have the space to develop this point fully here; but, roughly speaking, I regard most of the episodes in Galilee as written from Andrew’s point of view, and most of the episodes in Jerusalem as written from Lazarus’ point of view. This rough account is based upon the question of who was actually present to witness those events.

The division of the Gospel into episodes written from Andrew’s perspective and episodes written from Lazarus’ perspective provides a solution to one of the difficulties of my main thesis: why would Lazarus sometimes be named in the Gospel, but at other times alluded to only obliquely, as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”? The answer is that Lazarus is plainly named in episodes written from Andrew’s point of view (such as the funeral of Lazarus, where Lazarus himself could not have served as eyewitness); but the self-effacing epithet of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is employed in episodes written from Lazarus’ own point of view (such as the Last Supper, where Lazarus was in the privileged position at Jesus’ breast, or at the empty tomb, where Lazarus and Peter were the only disciples present).