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SUMMARY¹

‘We wish to see Jesus’

Re-reading the Gospel of John from a catechetical point of view

When re-reading the Gospel of John, several aspects are standing out:

- The Gospel of John contains numerous repetitions, possibly indicating a didactical way of writing. Various structural exegetes, like D. Moody Smith (1995), Y. Bekker (1995), and R. Chennattu (2006), use those repetitions to explain how the learning element is an integral part of the Gospel.
- It seems that John formulates an educational objective in chapter 20:30 and 31, when he explains why the signs of Jesus are written out: so that the readers should believe that Jesus is Christ (John 20:31). This may be an indication of a catechetical way of writing.
- The Gospel of John contains metaphors, images, signs and symbols that are not named by the other evangelists. That brings up the question if those images have a didactical purpose. Does the evangelist use these metaphors, images, signs and symbols to teach his disciples?
- The fourth Gospel contains strange questions, such as the one by Nikodemus ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ (John 3). The woman at the well does not seem to understand Jesus’ words about Him being living water as she asks: ‘Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.’ (John 4). The disciples react in that same story: ‘Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?’ when Jesus tells them that the dialogue with this woman was food and drink to him. The Pharisees and the Jews quarrelled among themselves: ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’ (John 6) after Jesus words ‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven’. It seems that these questions were intertwined in the narrative with a didactical purpose to help the first readers of the Gospel.

As a practical theologian I presumed a catechetical objective behind these ‘strange’ questions, images, metaphors and signs, and that is how my research of a catechetical track in John’s Gospel began. While rereading the

¹ All bible texts in this summary are from the New King James version.

fourth Gospel another question came up whether a catechetical way of re-reading the Bible - and this Gospel in particular – would be possible.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The research question is:

What contribution can reading the Gospel of John from a catechetical point of view bring to both catechesis and exegesis?

This study

Chapter I explains the concepts of catechesis and hermeneutics, as well as the research pattern, which starts with reading the Bible text. Furthermore, biblical catechesis is compared to the age-old way of learning in the church based on tradition and dogmatism.

Chapter II is an exegetical chapter. The different ways of reading the Scriptures can be helpful in discovering a catechetical trace in the Gospel of John. Different presuppositions ('Vorverständnisse' as Gadamer calls them) are used to read the Gospel

- A. First the theological presupposition where we read:
 - from a historical perspective;
 - from a contextual perspective;
 - from the perspective of the First Testament.
- B. The second presupposition is the literary way of reading, based on the text's structure and its narrative. With an accent on the actual reader, like reading from the feministic perspective and the perspective of psychoanalysis.
- C. The third presupposition is the liturgical way of reading, with an accent on the role of the Jewish feasts that are used in the fourth Gospel.

Those different methods show that the author of this Gospel is probably not one person, but a group of authors, the so-called 'Johannine school' (as shown by Brown, Moody Smith, Culpepper etc.). The third chapter, which describes the learning and teaching in the first centuries, will elaborate further on the form and content of this 'school'.

Rereading from the First Testament gives a new insight in the way that Biblical Semiotics assumes the encyclopaedic knowledge of the implied reader. Many texts of the fourth Gospel can be better understood with knowledge of the First Testament and the Jewish tradition. That is not only important for reading with a catechetical view, but also for writing catechesis. Both need the First Testament as a source.

The demythologizing way of telling biblical stories – that Bultmann started – is very helpful in correlated learning and inspired many writes of children's bibles to actuate the Scriptures.

By splitting the Gospel of John in two parts, various exegetes allow for a catechetical possibility. For many of them (like Brown, Moody Smith, Bultmann, Chennattu, Goulder, Boendermaker and Monshouwer) the first twelve chapters were written for those who enter the Johannine community from the outside and the second part of the Gospel was written for the members of the young church. This division between world (the first part) and community (the second part) has consequences for the way the catechetical curriculum is built.

Another aspect that Moody Smith points out is the fact that John uses the language of his time in his narrative. This has consequences for correlated learning in the catechesis and for the connection of the story of the people with that of the Scripture. A connection that is very useful for both pastoral care and catechesis.

Another way of reading is that in which Jesus equals Moses. Sahlin (1950) is the one who uses this way of reading. It gives us a possibility to use bibliodrama as a form of exegesis.

Nieuwenhuis, Kumlehn and Schneiders point out the importance of the word 'seeing' in the Gospel of John, which could have far-reaching consequences for the didactics because it connects with esthetical and observed learning.

Structural reading (like Bekker shows us) helps to name and recognise the different repetitions in the Gospel of John as a catechetical curriculum, and to use them as such in a possible catechesis according to John.

Celebrating the Jewish feasts and reliving the stories is something that the liturgical way of reading offers us. This will have consequences for the methodology of both teaching and celebrating, be it in the group, the community or in the church.

Rereading the Gospel from different angles bring many catechetical aspects in the fourth Gospel to light. Apart from the theological, the literal and the liturgical way, a catechetical way of reading the Gospel of John is clearly possible. Some exegetes, like Kumlehn, Griffith-Jones, Culpepper, Chennattu and even Ashton, point in that direction. Others like Boendermaker and Monshouwer even go as far as calling the Gospel catechesis, but none of

them uses didactics and catechesis to elaborate on this. This research is the first to do so.

Chapter III is a historical chapter. It uses the history of learning in the first centuries as a method to search for a catechetical trace in the Gospel and compares it with the educational methods of that time.

By comparing those early catechetical methods we discover that the way of learning and teaching in those days was through sermons and lectures. The opinion of Elderenbosch and others that John's Gospel is a collection of sermons could fit this form of education. Of all the great church fathers only their sermons remain, which makes sense, as it was the preferred teaching method in those days. This sermon-model as teaching method can easily be identified in the fourth Gospel: John almost always seems to start his answer to a catechist's question with an image or metaphor and to end it with a sermon. Take for example the story of Nikodemus (John 3) where after the question about being reborn (from above) a Pharisee in the Easter night is put on stage, but the image is left alone and what follows is a sermon by John about being born from water and spirit. From the 'Didache' and the 'Traditio Apostolica' we can conclude that this Eucharistic and baptismal catechesis took about three years. That could possibly correspond with the structural way of reading John in three parts, like Elderenbosch and Bekker propose. There remain no teaching methods other than allegories and lectures from that period, so we have to guess about a curriculum. Apart from stories about the life of Jesus and the calling to follow Him, the catechesis included the teaching of the stories of the First Testament and the rules for living like Christians in society.

Chapter IV is an educational chapter. In this chapter current teaching methods are compared to the Gospel, in order to verify through this discipline if the Gospel contains a catechetical trace.

This educational literary research shows that the fourth Gospel contains many of our modern teaching methods. The form may vary because of the different context, but the teaching and learning principles are very recognizable. Some teaching methods could be found with other evangelists too, but that is out of this research's scope.

Recognition through didactical methods

Esthetical method

The author of the fourth Gospel uses a lot of images, which could indicate a focus on esthetical learning. However, most images only have a symbolic and

transcendent character. Sometimes the evangelist uses learning by seeing (esthetical learning) as a learning method. John the Baptist becomes a witness when he *sees* what is promised: The spirit as dove descending on the one he didn't know (John 1:34). The disciples of John were called to come and see. Jesus himself tells that he learned through seeing, because he saw the Father doing so (John 5: 16). Thomas learns from seeing as well (John 20:29). Many other forms of observation and experience are found in this Gospel, which can all be regarded as learning elements. Those experiences are taken from the social environment of the listeners/readers, but also from the common history of the Scriptures and the Jewish tradition.

Symbolic method

Those common experiences refer to a larger whole, a larger reality, which is part of symbolic learning. The Gospel as a whole refers to a larger (religious) reality that doesn't equal our reality. Referring to this other reality is one of the most important didactical elements in the Gospel.

Mystagogical method

Searching for this 'other reality' or 'religious dimension' is part of mystagogic learning. This is a way of learning that not only transcends but also searches for the mysteries that are hidden and need to be found. The author wants his implied readers to develop an eye for God's mysterious presence. They do this with head and heart knowledge of the Scripture and are thus initiated in the sacraments and traditions of the Johannine community.

Biblical method

In chapter III we discovered that learning the biblical way, like learning from questions, recounting God's great deeds and knowledge of the Tora and the prophets was common for John. The author himself bases his biblical reflection mostly on psalms and the Jewish tradition, especially the Jewish feasts.

Anamnestic and biographical method

Going back to the Jewish tradition is a form of anamnestic and biographic learning. Anamnestic learning means bringing the words of Jesus or those of the Scriptures into your own personal situation, where choices have to be made. Biographical learning focuses not on the collective, but on the individual memory. The latter, learning from your own personal experiences, is considerably less used than learning from tradition.

Gender concerned method

Even though 'Son of the Father' and 'Son of Man' are frequently used in the Gospel of John, its style is not explicitly masculine. The way of learning, looking from a feministic point of view, resembles what Socrates calls 'teaching as a midwife': helping his readers 'give birth to' new spiritual insight.

Ethical method

By using the Tora as direction or instruction for life, ethical learning becomes an important part of the Gospel of John. This ethical learning has to be seen in the light of the practice of the young church and the choices those following Jesus were confronted with. It includes discussions with Scribes and Pharisees on interpretations of the Tora, but also practical rules for living as Christians in this world. The way Jesus acts (with the adulterous woman and the man born blind) brings new perspectives to interpreting the Tora in daily life.

Correlating method

This method, connecting the story of the people to that of the Scriptures, can also be found in the Gospel of John. It is mostly recognizable in the symbols of daily life that John uses to explain who Jesus is, such as the 'I am' sayings. Correlated learning is not a stand-alone method in the Gospel, but is used in connection with symbolic, anamnestic, and mystagogic learning. As the author himself writes: 'these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.' (John 20:30).

Project method

This method of student-directed learning is not explicitly present in the Gospel of John unless you want to see the whole Gospel as a project of travelling to Jerusalem and back, as Bekker suggests.

Conclusion

By comparing the Gospel to the modern educational and didactical methods, we can draw the conclusion that looking from a catechetical point of view there are definitely catechetical traces or signs in the Gospel according to John.

Chapter V explains the catechetical way of reading, and it shows that this can give new insight not only to catechesis but also to exegesis.

The research question was:

What contribution can reading the Gospel of John with a catechetical point of view bring to both catechesis and exegesis?

After rereading the Gospel in various ways we can conclude that:

1. The text of the Gospel of John appears to be aimed at catechesis and community building. This is evident from the special keywords the author uses, such as: believe, do, seeing, signs, images, etc.
2. The fact that John writes so much about the Jewish feasts gives us a possibility to build a catechetical curriculum using these festive occasions, in the way Boendermaker and Monshouwer do.
3. The Gospel's strange questions and didactical 'asides to the reader' are very characteristic for John. None of the other evangelists uses a similar way of asking questions. Some exegetes like Ashton, Culpepper, Schneiders and Griffith-Jones explain those questions as to be aimed at the implied reader (or listener). Their conclusion is that the so-called riddles are a part of the initiation process of the young church. However, none of them has elaborated on those questions, riddles and 'asides to the reader' in a catechetical and didactical way like this research does.
4. The frequent use of water in the stories of the fourth Gospel could indicate an instruction for the catechumens who were going to be baptised in the Easter Virgil. Structuring the Gospel in three parts could also be an indication of a three-year catechesis preceding the baptism.
5. In the Gospel of John a large part (John 13-17) appears to be written as equipment for believers and for building the young church. That fits the pattern of a mystagogical catechesis in which the catechumens were taught after the baptism in the Easter Virgil what the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion – which they experienced – meant.
6. Through John's concealed way of writing it becomes evident that there is a deeper layer to be explored in the story of Jesus, especially in the stories about the (holy) communion. The various elements of the Eucharistic meal can be found throughout the Gospel: the wine in John 2, the bread in John 6:22-59, and the Pesach meal in the breaking of five loaves and two fishes at lake Tiberias (John 6:1-15). However there is no mention of a 'last supper' or of the Words of Institution in John's Gospel. John 6:54 offers a complete instruction of the Eucharistic meal but is told in the discussion with the Scribes and Pharisees while Jesus was learning in the synagogue of Kafernaum.

7. Learning through, for and with experience is evident in the above-mentioned mystagogical catechesis, where experience comes before reflection. But it can also be found on the focus the author gives to doing the words, signs and commandments. This surely has consequences for the way in which catechesis could be taught.
8. The author of the fourth Gospel uses concepts and words taken from his own context, such as 'logos' and 'children of the light', but gives them a quite different meaning, which indicates a correlated form of learning. However, this correlated aspect is not found in the images the evangelist uses but in the form in which he presents his message.
9. For the exegesis, reading from a catechetical point of view is complementary to the various ways of reading the Scriptures. It can shed a different light on issues that arise when using one of the other reading methods and thus advocate a more catechetical way of reading of the entire Scriptures.

Chapter VI is an exegetical study of John 12. Because this chapter seems to be the centre of the gospel in a catechetical way. The content and structure of the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John appears to be a key chapter for catechesis and community building. I do not agree with Culpepper (1983) who calls it 'a chapter in between'. After the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11), a repetition and clear instruction for community life arises.

Chapter VII is a practical chapter in which all the previous chapters are brought together to show how the catechetical trace in the fourth Gospel is able to help today's catechesis and catechists. It tries to answer the question 'Which directions for today's catechesis can be deduced from the knowledge acquired with this research regarding reading with a catechetical point of view?'

The Gospel's narrative storytelling techniques, as well as the images the author uses, give today's catechists the possibility to stay close to the Scriptures while using contemporary methods.

The Gospel of John provides ample opportunities for correlated, symbolic and participatory learning, because it clearly has an eye for the context of the implied reader. The choices pupils of today have to make equal those of the disciples, even though today's catechist will sometimes have to clarify the context of the Gospel.

The first advantage of the Gospel of John as a base for catechesis for confirmation is the possibility to extensively address the connection between the First and the Second Testament.

The second advantage is the narrator's use of different characters similar to the different styles of being a pupil. Both men and women may feel called upon by using these characters. By using John's method, the catechist closely follows the demand for perception and participation.

The third advantage gives the Gospel of John, containing many hidden elements, the possibility to speak with the catechumens about the mystic part of believing: the things we can't explain, such as believing in a God we can't see and the Spirit who inspires us.

The fourth advantage is that catechesis based on the method of John helps both the catechist and the catechumen to be open to other ways of learning than a pure cognitive one.

The fifth advantage is that the Gospel of John shows us a good look on the way Jesus teaches. He is a teacher with a lot of patience and willing to repeat the message constantly. He teaches by doing and tells the students/disciples that they can do the same (John 13:1-20). He uses a lot of symbols and signs and tells stories in a way that both practical and intellectual student are directed.

Some aspect may be more or less present in other gospels. But that is for others to explore. It proves that catechesis that start with the Scriptures is a necessity.

In the first chapter I defined catechesis as follows:

Catechesis is a learning process within the congregation. This ecclesiastical learning is based on the Scripture and focused on the development of the pupils, the initiation into the traditions of the congregation, and the community's role of serving and bearing witness in society. Catechesis takes place in a congregation with a desire to be a community of permanent learning.

Now that through this research I have been persuaded by John's method, the last sentence should perhaps read:

Catechesis takes place in a congregation, which in its celebrating, teaching and serving continues to explore the mystery of the invisible God, whom Jesus showed us. A congregation with a desire to invite others to help seek in the Scriptures the words that the Spirit will bring us, so that we can do them.

