Antonianum C (2025) 663-681

THE FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVE AND RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF JOHN 2,13-25

Summary. Going beyond the conventional perspective of most commentators, this paper argues that John 2,13-25 should not be interpreted solely in terms of its symbolic function, particularly through the lens of the motif of replacement. Situated within the larger section of the Gospel of John, the section commonly referred to by scholars as 'From Cana to Cana' (John 2,1–4,45), this episode serves a twofold foundational narrative purpose. First, through the creative and dynamic presentation of key characters—particularly οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (the Jews), οἱ μαθηταί (the disciples), and πολλοί (the crowd)—the text advances the central rhetorical objective of the Fourth Gospel: to persuade the reader to embrace belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Second, it introduces the crucial theme of the opposition of the Jews (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) to Jesus, a fundamental narrative thread that shapes the overarching narrative plot of the Johannine Gospel. In this way, John 2,13-25 not only symbolizes the renewal of the Temple in the Person of Jesus, but also lays the groundwork for a key narrative theme and the primary rhetorical intent of the Gospel.

Resumen. Más allá de la perspectiva convencional de la mayoría de los comentaristas, este artículo sostiene que *Jn* 2,13-25 no debe interpretarse únicamente en términos de su función simbólica, en particular a través del prisma del motivo de la sustitución. Situado dentro de la sección más amplia del evangelio de Juan, comúnmente denominada por los estudiosos "De Caná a Caná" (*Jn* 2,1-4,45), este episodio tiene un doble propósito narrativo fundamental. En primer lugar, a través de la presentación creativa y dinámica de personajes clave – en particular οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (los judíos), οἱ μαθηταί (los discípulos) y πολλοί (la multitud) –, el texto promueve el objetivo retórico central del cuarto evangelio: persuadir al lector de que abrace la creencia en Jesús como el Mesías y Hijo de Dios. En segundo lugar, introduce el tema crucial de la oposición de los judíos (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) a Jesús, un hilo narrativo fundamental que da forma a la trama general del evangelio joánico. De este modo, *Jn* 2,13-25 no solo simboliza la renovación del templo en la persona de Jesús, sino que también sienta las bases para un tema narrativo clave y la intención retórica principal del evangelio.

Introduction

The majority of the exegetical studies and commentaries on John 2,13-25 have primarily been focused on the symbolic dimension of

the event narrated in this pericope, particularly regarding the thematic significance of Jesus' actions, especially in relation to the question of his authority[1]. However, little attention has been given to its literary function as an introduction to a fundamental narrative thread within the broader rhetorical framework of the Gospel. This paper, employing narrative-rhetorical analysis, argues that John 2,13-25 is not only an episode of symbolic significance, but rather a section with a foundational narrative-rhetorical function. Through this function, the text introduces the essential narrative theme of Jewish opposition (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) and the rhetorical aim of leading the reader toward belief in Jesus[2]. The central thesis of this paper will be supported by a critical analysis of the immediate literary context of John 2,13-25, as well as

---

[1] As Köstenberger succinctly puts it: "In prophetic style, the temple clearing therefore represents a symbolic act conveying the inner meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and bodily resurrection, by which he becomes the temple's replacement in the life and worship of his people." See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, (BECNT) Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 2004, p. 102. R. E. Brown also understands this section from the perspective of the theme of replacement, suggesting that Jesus' actions introduce a key aspect of Johannine theology— Jesus as the "new temple." See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, (AB 29) Double Day, Garden City (NY) 1966, p. 125. C. K. Barrett likewise underlines that in this pericope, Jesus is presented as the "fulfillment" of the temple. See Charles K. Barett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, SPCK, London 1978, p. 196. C. H. Dodd also adds to this interpretative tradition, framing the episode of Jesus' cleansing of the temple as part of the broader Johannine motif of a "new beginning." He argues that Jesus' action of cleansing the temple point to the foretelling of a new temple with Jesus himself as the center of this renewed focus of worship. See Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) 1978, p. 297.

[2] In this paper, the term "foundational" is understood as referring to the literary function by which a scene or specific pericope introduces a narrative theme or motif that plays a critical role in shaping the overall dynamics and development of the plot of the Gospel narrative. This paper aligns with Bultmann's argument that the two symbolic narratives in John 2 introduce and anticipate the major narrative themes that permeate the entire Gospel. According to Bultmann, the wedding feast at Cana at the temple incident symbolically represent the beginning (ἀρχή) and the end or purpose (τέλος) of John's entire Gospel narrative. See Ronald Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*: *A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches, Blackwell, Oxford 1971, p. 129.