A Religious-Theological Dialogue Formed in a Series of Challenge-and-Riposte (7:1–52; 8:12–59)

The section 7:1–8:59 (excluding 7:53–8:11) is one of the largest discourse units in John’s Gospel. The first exchange, i.e., 7:1–9, plays a significant role as that connects the Judean ‘dialogue turned monologue’ section (5:1–47), and the Galilean signs (6:1–21) and the bread discourse (6:22–71) with an array of Temple discourses (7:10–10:21; cf. Keener, 2003: 703–74). The dialogue of the present episode work within a well described narrative framework. We will understand the dialogue of John 7:1–52/8:12–59 comprehensively through a polyvalent analysis of the text.

Setting of the Dialogue

The dialogue section in 7:1–52/8:12–59 develops in the form of a seven-tier exchange episode (see 7:1–9, 10–13, 14–36, 37–44, 45–52; 8:12–20, 21–59). As in the case of the previous chapters, the expression μετὰ τὰ ταῦτα (7:1; cf. 5:1; 6:1) appears to be a connecting link with the previous episode (cf. Haenchen, 1984: 2:6). Exchange one (7:1–9) is placed both as a conclusion to the previous events in the Galilean context and as an introduction to the anticipated events in the Judean provinces. At the outset of the episode, the narrator explains in detail the reason for Jesus’ going about (περιεπάτει) in Galilee, his unwillingness to go about (περιπατεῖν) in Judea, the reason for his stay back in Galilee, and

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1 Talbert (1992: 143) has a different view about the narrative structure as follows: "John 7–9 is a large thought unit composed of discourse material in dialogue form (chaps. 7–8) linked with a sign (chap. 9), just as chaps. 5 and 6 are. Unlike chaps. 5 and 6, but like chaps. 10–11, John 7–9 gives the discourse material first and the sign last."

2 Refer to Dodd, 1960: 345–6; Culpepper, 1983: 72; Stibbe, 1993: 89.

3 Ridderbos (1987/1997: 256; cf. Morris, 1995: 348–9; Moloney, 1998: 232) says that, “About the transitional phrase (‘after this’) there is a difference of opinion. Some scholars infer a change of locale from v. 1a, namely from Judea [Jerusalem] to Galilee; in that case 7:1 does not link up with chap. 6, because there Jesus is already in Galilee.”

4 Bultmann (1971: 287) says that, “7:1–13 is the introduction to the whole complex; it prepares the way for Jesus’ appearance in Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles, which is surprising both in its timing and manner.”
and the religious or cultic setting of the story (vv. 1–2; cf. Resseguie, 2005: 113–4). The reason for Jesus' staying back is indicated with the help of a narrative description in v. 1b, i.e., “he [Jesus] did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him” (cf. Painter, 1993: 287–9). The first nine verses of chapter seven have to be treated as an independent unit (because of its setting in Galilee), that is different from the setting of the rest of the episode (i.e., in Judea; 7:10–52; 8:32–59). The narrator provides clues concerning the celebration mood of the Jewish community and their preparation for the forthcoming Festival of Tabernacles (cf. Wise, 1992: 240). Barrett (1978: 310; cf. Smith, 1999: 166–8) describes the Festival of Tabernacles as follows: “Tabernacles lasted seven days, from 15th to 21st Tishri (September–October); of these the first day was sabbatical.” This religious/cultic scene necessitates Jesus to go to Jerusalem than being in Galilee (cf. Resseguie, 2005: 113–4; Crossan, 1967: 100–3).

Though there is no indication of the exact location of the dialogue, it is left to the reader to think about Jesus' family atmosphere as the interlocutors are his brothers and the geographical location is Galilee, the homeland of the protagonist (cf. Resseguie, 2005: 87, 113–4). The first exchange as a whole forms a Galilee to Galilee inclusio between v. 1 and v. 9. The second exchange (7:10–13) frames its setting as the brothers depart for the festival (v. 10a) and Jesus secretly departs for it at a later time (v. 10b). The narrator reports that the Jews were waiting for Jesus' coming (v. 11a) and there was considerable complaining (γογγυσμὸς) among the crowds (v. 12a; cf. Bultmann, 1971: 294–5). Witherington (1995: 171) says that, “in vv. 11–13 there is a clear distinction made

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5 Bultmann (1971: 288) states that, “Verse 1 links up the new section with the preceding one, and at the same time gives a general description of the situation.... Verse 2 gives a more precise account of the chronological situation, presupposed in the following narrative.”

6 Beasley-Murray (1987: 104) says that, “Unlike previous episodes narrated we do not have sign(s) plus discourse, but we do have a narrative with a core of teaching significantly related to its setting. The Feast of Tabernacles is taking place in Jerusalem.” There are continuing attempts to kill Jesus in chaps. 7 and 8, particularly in 7:1(11), 19–20, 25, 44; 8:37, 40–59.


9 Dodd (1963: 323; cf. Quast, 1991/1996: 59–62) states that, “both passages are in some way associated with the move from Galilee to Jerusalem (or Judea).”

10 Painter (1993: 289; cf. Bennema, 2009: 41) says that, “the crowd is viewed as distinct from the Jews in that fear of the Jews inhibited open debate about Jesus.”