

In this expanded and updated version of Van Belle's *De Semeia-bron in het vierde evangelie* (1975), the author, a student of F. Neirynck, provides a painstaking historical survey and critical evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis (SH). As is well known, this hypothesis argues that the fourth evangelist drew on (1) literary "signs (σημεῖα)" and "passion sources" for the narrative portions of his gospel and (2) a "discourse source" for Jesus' extended utterances, based on the observation that the discourses in John's gospel appear to be distinct from the accounts of Jesus' miracles (termed "signs" in John). Formulated for the first time in form of a full-fledged theory by R. Bultmann, and revised and expanded by R. Fortna, this hypothesis has found many followers but never achieved the status of a generally accepted paradigm in Johannine studies.

Van Belle traces the origin of the SH to Bultmann and antecedents (chap. 1), surveys reactions to Bultmann's commentary (chap. 2), follows the spread of the hypothesis (chap. 3), including further developments of the theory by Fortna and Nicol (chap. 4), takes inventory of the criticism of the SH in recent research (chap. 5), and concludes by summarizing and evaluating the SH (chap. 6). Two appendices on the Johannine σημεῖα and Johannine style characteristics are also included. The author notes that the case for a σημεῖα source has been made on the basis of five major arguments, two of which are source-critical and one each stylistic, form-critical and ideological. These are as follows: (1) The numbering of the first two signs in 2:11 and 4:54 were considered to constitute an *aporia* ("seam") in light of the references to other signs in 2:23, 3:2 and 4:45, a phenomenon best explained by a preexisting "signs source"; (2) the gap between the last recorded sign in John 11 and the concluding reference to signs in 20:30–31 (as if signs had been narrated from beginning to end) was likewise taken to reflect a literary *Vorlage*; (3) proponents of the SH claimed to have detected stylistic differences between Johannine narrative and discourse material, such as the preponderance of Semitisms in narrative portions; (4) form-critically, some noted similar patterns in the Johannine miracle stories; and (5) the references in the fourth gospel connoting a positive correlation between signs and faith (2:11; 4:53; 6:14; 20:30–31) and those indicating a negative stance (2:23; 4:48; 6:26; cf. 10:38; 14:11) were taken to point to a signs source (positive evaluation of signs) underlying the later redaction by the fourth evangelist (negative view); many found in the signs source a lower θεῖος ἄνθρωπος ("divine man") Christology in contrast to a higher Christology in the Johannine redaction. Regarding the contents of such a σημεῖα source, Bultmann postulated its contents as follows: 2:1–12; 4:46–54; 5:1–18; 6:1–21; 9:1–41; 11:1–44 + 12:37–38 and 20:30–31. Some, like Schnackenburg, also include 21:1–14. Others propose a short signs source made up of only 2:1–12 and 4:46–54 (to which some add 21:1–14), while yet others, like Fortna, extend the source to include also chaps. 18–20, thus forming a "gospel of signs," which combines Bultmann's "signs" and "passion sources" into one.

In the ultimate analysis, Van Belle finds none of the above stated arguments for a signs source underlying the fourth gospel determinative, for several reasons. (1) ἀρχή in 2:11 may refer to the primary, paradigmatic sign in John, not merely the first, and 4:54 may merely relate the second miracle in Cana to the first sign performed there by Jesus. (2) 20:30–31a need not be seen as the conclusion of a source but may rather be regarded as a provisional conclusion followed by an epilogue (chap. 21), comparable to 1 John 5:13. (3) Style criticism is rendered notoriously subjective in light of the fourth gospel's stylistic and linguistic unity. (4) The rigid form-critical *a priori* distinction between narrative and discourse units illegitimately tends to presuppose the conclusion of corresponding sources, which could not have been delineated merely on style-critical grounds. (5) Why would the evangelist use an entire source (i.e. the σημεῖα source) only to subject it to radical criticism? Moreover, Jesus' miracles in John's gospel cannot be isolated from the center of Johannine

Christology, i.e. the presentation of ultimate revelation of the Father in the incarnation of the Son. Van Belle also notes the vast disagreement among proponents of a σημεῖα source regarding the contents of such a document and the complete lack of consensus regarding the source's date, place of origin or life setting. For these reasons the author is "inclined to refuse the semeia hypothesis as a valid working hypothesis in the study of the Fourth Gospel" (p. 376). Following his mentor Neiryck, Van Belle rather leans in the direction of Johannine dependence on the synoptics.

Owing to the largely descriptive nature of this work and the author's comprehensive presentation of scholarship on the subject, this monograph constitutes an invaluable guide for all who are interested in Johannine studies. Its major contribution is that it can no longer be argued that anyone rejecting the SH is outside the mainstream of Johannine scholarship. Bultmann's stranglehold on the study of the fourth gospel may finally be broken and the way prepared for greater variety in methodology. Most important, Van Belle vindicates the fourth gospel as a "seamless garment," which makes an emphasis on the final text of John's gospel not only appropriate but also the most plausible approach to John in light of the available evidence.

Andreas J. Köstenberger
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC

*This review first appeared in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (1998): 489–91 and is posted with permission.