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THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS AND THE SPIRIT:
THE “WE” OF JOHN 3:11 IN ITS LITERARY CONTEXT

1. Introduction

In John 3:11, Jesus surprisingly uses the first person plural in the midst of his discussion with Nicodemus. In fact, he uses no fewer than five first person plurals: *a)mh\n a)mh\n le/gw soi o#ti o# oildamen lalou=men kai\ o# e9wra/kamen marturou=men kai\ th\n marturi/an h(mw=n ou0 lamba/nete*. Jesus’ use of “we” is often commented upon, but rarely are more than a few lines or an extended footnote devoted to this puzzling issue.¹ Considering the lack of extended discussion on 3:11, a more complete examination of this question is needed.

Most scholars explain the mysterious “we”, at least in part, as a group outside of the narrative. Although this tends to be the majority position, this outside group is not uniformly defined and has been called the Johannine community,² the apostolic witness,³ or the Church.⁴ Along with these varying definitions, the first person plurals can be understood to be spoken solely by this outside group⁵ or spoken

¹ Schnackenburg 1968, 1.375-376; Nicholson 1983, 85-87, cf. 30-32; Frey 1998, 252-257; and Thyen 2005, 196-198 are exceptions, each devoting a full page or more to the issue.

² Frey 1998, 252-254; Schnelle 1998, 72; Wengst 2000-2001, 1.128-29.

³ Bruce 1983, 86-7; Wikenhauser 1961, 88. Cf. Bernard 1928, 109-10.

⁴ Dodd 1953, 328 n. 3; Strachan 1941, 137; Fenton 1970, 54.

⁵ Barrett 1978, 211; Bowen 1924, 22-23; Bernard 1928, 109-110; MacGregor 1928, 74; Enslin 1936, 128; Haenchen 1984, 202; Nicholson 1983: 30-32, 85-87; Painter 1992, 1877 n. 37; Schnelle 1992, 187; *idem*, 1998, 72; Brodie 1993, 198; Moloney 1998, 94; Lincoln 2000, 66; Wengst 2000-2001, 1.129; T.G. Brown 2003, 123; Edwards 2004, 48.

simultaneously by Jesus and the outside group.⁶ Although these slight differences of opinion exist, the general consensus is that the first person plural is used in John 3:11 because a group outside of the narrative is speaking.⁷

Those who support the view that these words belong to a group outside of the narrative seldom give arguments for this position. As a result, these scholars rarely address the possibility that a person or combination of people mentioned in the literary context of John 3 could be included in Jesus' use of "we". The view that an outside group is speaking typically arises from the "we" statements that are found at 1:14, 16 and 21:24.⁸ In each of these three verses, it is obvious that the author⁹ is the one speaking in the first person plural and that the author is speaking directly to the reader/s. John 3:11 is different because the one using the first person plural is one of the narrative characters, namely Jesus, and Jesus is speaking to another character in the narrative. For the author to insert his own words or the words of an outside group into the mouth of a narrative character is stranger than most scholars think. Except for 1:14, 16 and 21:24, each of the first person plural verbs and pronouns in the Gospel of

⁶ Schulz 1972, 58; Barnett 2005, 175; Martyn 1968, 106; Michaels 1984, 57; Witherington 1995, 98; Kysar 1996, 27; Beasley-Murray 1999, 49. Cf. Fenton 1970, 54.

⁷ Culpepper 1983, 21 and Burge 1987, 191 imply the view that an outside group speaks in 3:11. Another position that neglects the literary context is that of R. Bultmann 1971, 146, who suggest that the Evangelist has taken the phrase in 3:11 from a source and inserted it unchanged into the narrative. See also Lindars 1972, 155; *idem*, 1977, 121 n. 47; Ashton 1991, 349.

⁸ See Frey 1998, 255.

⁹ My use of "author" here represents the possible authorial "we" or the author and his community or school.

John, including those spoken by Jesus,¹⁰ is found within the context of narrative events and has a clear referent within the literary context. The statements make sense in their context without claiming that an outside group is speaking through one of the characters.¹¹ Indeed, with the introduction of Jesus' statement in John 3:11 by *avmh.n avmh.n le/gw soi*, the narrative portrays the entire saying as spoken by Jesus. The return to the first person singular in v. 12 underlines this point.¹² In sum, since all of Jesus' other uses of the first person plural include a figure from the literary context and since all of the "Amen, amen" statements in the Gospel of John are understood to be the words of Jesus, it would seem appropriate to suggest that

¹⁰ The majority of Jesus' first person plurals are found in everyday contexts (6:5; 11:7, 11, 15; 9:4; 14:31; cf. 13:29). He also includes himself with the Jewish people (4:22) and the Father (17:11, 21, 22).

¹¹ Nicholson argues that numerous first person plurals in the Gospel of John are used to indicate the speech of outside groups (1983, 30-32; Cf. Frey 1998, 253-254). Specifically, the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans speak for the Samaritan community in dialogue with the Johannine Community (4:12, 20, 25, 42); the Greeks speak for the Gentile Christians (12:21); the Jews speak for the synagogue (1:22; 2:18; 3:2; etc.); the disciples speak for the Johannine Community (1:45; 4:42; 6:68, 69; 14:22; 16:30; 20:25), as does Jesus (3:11; 4:22; 6:5; 9:4; 11:11). Nicholson's position largely ignores two important points. First, each of these statements makes sense in context, and, second, some of the disciples' first person plural statements do not make sense if they were spoken by the Johannine Community (cf. 14:5, 8; 20:2; 21:3).

¹² Thyen 2005, 197, states: "Zumal die solenne Einleitung von V. 11 durch Jesu *avmh.n avmh.n le/gw soi* und sein erneutes „Ich“ im *ei=pon* von V. 12 nötigen uns deshalb dazu, weder „die Gemeinde“ noch irgendeine durch den „Evangelisten“ repräsentierte spezielle „Gruppe“ von Zeugen, sondern allein Jesus als den Sprecher des in V. 11 Gesagten anzusehen." Also Brown 1966-1970, 1.132.

Jesus is to be understood as the speaker in John 3:11.¹³ Therefore, the aim of this study is to attempt to find the most plausible referent of Jesus' use of "we" within the literary context of John 3. After a preliminary examination of the speech and testimony of Jesus in the Gospel of John, an assessment will be made of the figures that could possibly be referred to by the first person plural.¹⁴

2. Jesus' Verbal Actions in John 3:11

John 3:11 states that Jesus speaks what he knows and testifies to what he has seen. The possibility exists that anyone who speaks and testifies in a manner and with content similar to that of Jesus could be a figure included with Jesus in his use of the first person plural. Thus, an examination of Jesus' speech and testimony should provide evidence of possible referents to Jesus' 'we' in John 3:11.

2.1 Speaking What Is Known

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he speaks (1a1ou=men) what he knows. In 12:49-50, we find that what Jesus knows is the command of life that the Father has given him to

¹³ The second person plural in John 3:11 also has a clear referent within the literary context and most likely refers back to the "we" used by Nicodemus in 3:2. Since Nicodemus is identified as one of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews in 3:1, Nicodemus' first person plural in 3:2 most likely refers to the Pharisees and/or the Jews (Brown 1966-1970, 132; Beasley-Murray 1999, 49). Similarly, Jesus' use of the second person plural refers to the same group (cf. 3:7, 12).

¹⁴ It might also be possible linguistically to argue that the shift to the first person plural from the first person singular is merely a matter of style. But considering the use of the first person plural in Jesus' speech in the Gospel of John, it seems plausible that another figure or figures are included in his statement in John 3:11.

speak. Jesus says: “For I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me has given me a command, what to say (eīlpw) and what to speak (lalh/sw). And I know that his command is eternal life. Therefore, what I speak (lalw~), I speak (lalw~) just as the Father has said (eīlrhke/n) to me.”¹⁵ The content of Jesus’ speech comprises what the Father has commanded him. What Jesus speaks comes from the Father.

Jesus not only speaks what he *knows* from the Father, but his speech also reflects what he *hears* (h1kousa) from the Father (8:26, 40; cf. 3:32) and what he *sees* (e9w&raka) from the Father (8:38; cf. 6:46). What Jesus has seen and heard from the Father forms the content of his speech. Jesus also speaks what he is taught by the Father (8:28; 7:16-17), what the Father has said to him (12:50), and the words that the Father gives him (17:8). Elsewhere, we find that Jesus judges as he hears (5:30), makes known what he hears (15:15), and testifies to what he hears (3:32).

Jesus’ speech comes directly from his relationship with the Father (1:1-2, 18). He speaks what he knows, hears, and sees because he has come from the Father’s presence.¹⁶ Because Jesus receives the content of his speech from the Father, he neither speaks on his own (7:17; 12:49; 14:10) nor does he do anything on his own (5:19, 30; 8:28; cf. 9:33). All that Jesus speaks, teaches, judges, makes known, does, and says comes from the Father. Since Jesus does not speak on his own, what he speaks to Nicodemus comes from the Father and not from himself. What he knows is what the Father has spoken to him.

¹⁵ Similarly, in 6:63, Jesus says: “The words which I have spoken to you are Spirit and life”.

¹⁶ Schulz 1972, 136; Barrett 1978, 346. Lincoln states: “...the sort of hearing that counts is hearing that has been given to one by God (cf. 8:47)” (2000, 244).

2.2 Testifying To What Is Seen

Jesus' second main action in John 3:11 is testifying (*marturou*=men). Jesus testifies to what he has seen. The parallel passage in John 3:32¹⁷ is the only other place in the Gospel of John where Jesus testifies to what he has seen. Elsewhere in the Gospel we discover that what Jesus sees is the Father (1:18; 6:46) and what the Father is doing (5:19-20). Jesus' testimony thus relates to his intimate sight of the Father and the Father's actions.

In the Gospel of John, the actions of speaking and testifying function in a closely parallel manner because Jesus speaks and testifies to what he has seen (cf. 3:11 and 8:38). Their similarity can also be observed in 3:32 where we find that Jesus not only testifies to what he sees, but he also testifies to what he hears.¹⁸ This parallel

¹⁷ Dodd 1953, 328 n. 3; Schnackenburg 1968, 1.375. *Contra* Nicholson (1983, 87), who maintains that 3:11 and 3:32 cannot be taken as parallel to one another because (1) of the singular and plural differences and (2) there is no *oildamen* in v. 32, which he argues is commonly points to the Johannine Community. With his first objection, Nicholson overlooks the fact that there is a change of person as well as number, which indicates that another perspective is being given on the same topic. Nicholson's second objection ignores the parallelism between knowing, seeing, and hearing. This parallelism implies that the lack of *oildamen* is not significant (cf. 3:11, 32; 4:42; 8:38, 40). Karagaraj (1998, 279) points to the connection between knowing and testifying in 4:42 and 15:26-27. Nicholson's second objection also neglects the fact that the use of *oildamen* is not evidence for the speech of the community (cf. 14:5, 8; 20:2; 21:3 and n. 9).

¹⁸ See BDAG³, 618, which lists 3:11 and 3:32 under the following definition of *marture/w*: "to confirm, bear witness to, declare, confirm, act" (emphasis original). The definition "declare" is very similar to "speak" in this context.

between speaking and testifying is also evident in 3:11 and in the lack of reception of Jesus' testimony (*marturi/a*) and words (*r(h=ma)*) (cf. 3:11, 32; 12:48). A further example of the close relationship between Jesus' speaking and testifying can be found in Jesus' speech to Pilate. Jesus says: "For this reason I have been born and for this reason I have come into the world: that I might testify to the truth" (18:37). Not surprisingly, Jesus also speaks the truth (8:40; cf. 8:45-46). Jesus' speaking and testifying, while not being synonymous, function in a similar manner in the Gospel. His speaking is testifying to what he knows, hears, and sees. His testimony is his words.¹⁹

Jesus' words and his testimony come from the Father who sent him. Jesus testifies and speaks the same things, whether it is the truth (8:40, 45-46; 18:37), what he sees (3:11, 32; 8:38) or what he hears (3:11, 32; 8:26). The Father is the ultimate source of what Jesus speaks and testifies, makes known and judges, does and says. Jesus neither speaks nor does anything on his own.

3. Who Can Speak and Testify with Jesus?

While the Father is the source of Jesus' speech and testimony, this does indicate that the Father testifies with Jesus in John 3:11. The examination of Jesus' speech and testimony suggests that any figure that speaks and testifies what they know, hear, and see from the Father could be included in Jesus' speech and testimony. In the following section, an evaluation will be made of the possible referents within the literary context that could explain Jesus' use of the first person plural in John 3:11.

¹⁹ Lincoln says that the parallelism in 3:11 indicates that Jesus' testimony is comprised of his words (2000, 193).

3.1 *The Father*

One suggestion is that Jesus includes the Father in his use of “we”.²⁰ Based on Jesus’ use of “we” in the Gospel, the Father is a strong candidate for inclusion with Jesus in 3:11 (17:11, 21, 22), but the Father’s testifying provides evidence for his exclusion. Although the Father testifies (5:32, 37; 8:18),²¹ his testimony and speech are not dependent on what he hears and sees. The speech and testimony of Jesus is dependent on what he knows, hears, and sees from the Father.

3.2 *Jesus’ Disciples*

Jesus’ disciples are another suggestion for inclusion in the “we” of John 3:11,²² which is not impossible considering they are frequently included in Jesus’ use of the first person plural throughout the Gospel of John (6:5; 11:7, 11, 15; 9:4; 14:31; cf. 13:29). R. Schnackenburg argues for their inclusion by connecting 3:11 and 9:4 (1968, 1.376). In 9:4, Jesus implies that the disciples take part with him in doing the works of the Father (cf. 4:38; 14:12; 17:18), but this inclusion does not mean that the disciples are also engaged in Jesus’ revelation of the Father nor is the content of their speaking and testifying the same as that of Jesus. The disciples will testify, but their testimony

²⁰ Abbott 1906, §2428; Keener 2003, 558; Kruse 2003, 109.

²¹ Abbott states: “viii. 16, 17 and context” as evidence of the Father’s inclusion in the “we” of 3:11 (1906, §2428).

²² Westcott 1908, 113-114; Schnackenburg 1968, 1.376; Morris 1995, 196; Ridderbos 1997: 133-134; Bennema 2002, 144 n. 137; 179.

is based on their eyewitness testimony, their having been with Jesus from the beginning (15:27). It does not come from the Father.²³ Not only that, but the disciples' lack of understanding at this point in the narrative makes it even more unlikely that they could have been included with Jesus in the speech and testimony that comes from the Father (2:22; cf. 14:5, 8; 16:18).²⁴

3.3 *John the Baptist*

John the Baptist is a strong possibility for inclusion with Jesus.²⁵ He is not included in any other "we" statements of Jesus, but John does testify (1:7, 8, 15, 19; 3:26, 5:33). In fact, he even testifies to what he has seen and heard (1:32-34), and like Jesus, John also testifies to the truth (5:33).²⁶ On the other hand, as with Jesus' disciples, the testimony that John gives is not what he has seen and heard from the Father, as is

²³ Schnackenburg even concedes this point, stating: "The disciples are not primary bearers of revelation in the same sense as Jesus...." Further, he says that the revelation Jesus brings is "the special revelation which Jesus, and Jesus alone, has brought from his direct 'seeing' (and 'hearing', v. 32) in heaven" (1968, 1.376).

It should be noted that the beloved disciple sees, knows, and testifies (19:35; cf. 21:24), but his testimony involves his eyewitness testimony and not anything he saw, knew, or heard from the Father.

²⁴ Carson 1991, 198; Lincoln 2000, 247-248. *Contra* Westcott 1908, 113; Hoskyns 1940, 233.

²⁵ Zahn 1908, 193; Weiss 1912, 61-62. Köstenberger (2004, 126) implies that the Baptist is included in Jesus' "we".

²⁶ The similarities between Jesus' and John's testimony makes one wonder why Bultmann (1971, 146 n. 4) found the suggestion of John the Baptist's inclusion in Jesus' "we" as "odd".

Jesus' speech and testimony. John only testifies to having seen the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus.

Another reason to question John the Baptist's inclusion with Jesus is that, although John and Jesus are closely related, the Gospel highlights a number of differences between the two.²⁷ John was not the light, but he testified to the light (1:8). Jesus is the one whom John says was before him (1:15, 27, 29). John is the friend of the bridegroom and must decrease as Jesus increases (3:26-30).²⁸ Jesus is from above, and John is from the earth (3:31). Jesus has testimony greater than that of John and does not receive the testimony of man (5:33-36), and John did not do signs as Jesus did (10:41). Even though John the Baptist is similar to Jesus in some ways, the Gospel's portrayal of the contrast between Jesus and John and John's lack of testimony that is dependent upon what he knows, hears, and sees from the Father suggests that it would be problematic to include John the Baptist in Jesus' "we" in 3:11.

3.4 *The "We" of Majesty*

Another possible explanation of Jesus' "we" in John 3:11 is that Jesus uses the "we" of majesty.²⁹ The "we" of majesty explanation is plausible because it avoids the difficulties concerning the content of speech and testimony coming directly from the

²⁷ See Wink 1968, 87-106.

²⁸ Hoskyns says that this analogy of the bridegroom and his friend indicates "both the proximity of John to the Christ and the vast distinction between them..." (1940, 241).

²⁹ Harnack 1923, 106-107; Odeberg 1968, 71; Hartingsveld 1980, 47; Hofius 1996, 57; Salier 2004, 54 n. 26.

Father that the three previous suggestions faced. Further support for the “we” of majesty view can be found in the fact that Jesus speaks to Nicodemus using the second person plural (vv. 7, 11-12).

But if 3:11 is an instance of the “we” of majesty, it would be the only usage of the “we” of majesty in the Gospel of John, whether by Jesus³⁰ or by anyone else.³¹ The “we” of majesty explanation cannot be completely ruled out based solely on the fact that there is no other use of it in the Gospel, but this fact does suggest the likelihood that Jesus is including someone else in his use of the first person plural.

R.E. Brown (1966, 132) suggested an explanation that is similar to the “we” of majesty view. Namely, he contends that Jesus uses the first person plural because he is responding with Nicodemus’ own words (cf. *oildamen* in vv. 2, 11 and *dida/skaloj* in vv. 2, 10). Therefore, R.E. Brown thinks that Jesus does not

³⁰ Zahn says that Jesus never speaks of himself in the plural in John or the Synoptics (1908, 193). Cf. Bernard 1928, 109.

³¹ Mary Magdalene uses a first person plural even though the Gospel of John mentions that she is the only person going to the tomb (20:2). Four possibilities have been suggested for her use of the first person plural. Strangely, Minear (1976, 126) takes Mary’s “we” as that of the community. Jeremias (1971, 304 n. 9) suggests that Mary’s “we” is a “we” of majesty. Third, the possibility exists that Mary includes Peter and the other disciple in her statement, but this seems awkward. Fourth, some think that the Synoptic accounts, which mention a few women going to the tomb, are behind the Gospel of John’s account (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 23:55-24:1). See Bernard 1928, 656; Barrett 1978, 563; Beasley-Murray 1999, 368; and Ridderbos 1997, 631. As Brown (1966-1970, 2.984) implies, Mary’s use of the first person singular *oij da* in v. 13 indicates that the other women are most likely included in her statement in 20:2.

include any other person(s) with himself but only parodies Nicodemus.³² Like the “we” of majesty position, R.E. Brown’s explanation remains possible, although he reaches this conclusion by stating that the uniqueness of Jesus in 3:13 excludes anyone else from being included with him in the first person plural of 3:11 (1966, 132). Jesus, however, is not the only one who descends from heaven and comes from the Father.³³

4. Evidence for the Spirit as Speaking and Testifying with Jesus

Another possible and rarely mentioned figure that could be included in Jesus’ “we” is the Spirit.³⁴ Due to the Spirit’s close relationship with Jesus and the Father, the Spirit’s actions, and the immediate context of Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus, it is extraordinary that the Spirit has largely been ignored as a possible referent.

³² Cf. Carson 1991, 198-199, who says that “Jesus is sardonically aping” Nicodemus’ plural.

³³ Other explanations of the first person plural in John 3:11 combine more than one figure or group with Jesus. These explanations will not be addressed separately because they consist of one or more of those previously discussed. See Hoskyns (1940, 232-233), who suggests the disciples, the prophets, and John the Baptist; Schlatter (1948, 91-92), who mentions Abraham, Isaiah, and John the Baptist; Ruckstuhl (1975, 320), who includes “Gott, den Werken Jesu, dem Täufer und andern”; and Thyen (2005, 197), who argues that Jesus’ “we” includes all who were in Israel’s past and all who will be Jesus’ witnesses in the future.

³⁴ Bengel 1862, 300; Gundry 2002, 16. Although Bengel and Gundry advocate the Spirit as included in Jesus’ “we”, neither scholar devotes more than a paragraph to the issue. Bengel merely cites 3:32; 8:34; 16:13; and 5:30 as evidence, while Gundry argues primarily based on the connection between 3:8 and 8:14. Cf. Martyn (1968, 106; 141), who contends that in the “two-level drama” of the Gospel it is the Spirit who allows the Johannine Church to speak the words of Jesus.

Like John the Baptist, the Spirit is not included with Jesus in any of Jesus' other first person plural statements in the Gospel, but, while the Gospel contrasts John the Baptist with Jesus, the Spirit is described with words and in a manner similar to the description of Jesus. In John 3:8, Jesus says, "...you do not know where [the Spirit] comes from or where he goes" (πο/γεν ελrxetai kai\ pou= u(pa/gei). Jesus says the same of himself in 8:14: "... you do not know where I come from or where I go" (πο/γεν h]lqon h2 pou= u(pa/gw).³⁵ The Spirit, like Jesus, is sent by the Father (14:26).³⁶ Both Jesus and the Spirit descend from heaven (3:13; 6:38; 1:32).³⁷ The coming of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit bring judgment (9:39; 15:22-24; 16:8-11), and they both give life (5:21; 6:63). In the Gospel of John, the Spirit is described in language so similar to Jesus that it indicates a unity of function, if not of identity, between the two.³⁸

³⁵ Gundry sees this similarity between Jesus and the Spirit as a primary reason for including the Spirit with Jesus in the first person plurals of 3:11 (2002, 16).

³⁶ In 15:26 the Spirit is said to be sent by Jesus, but the Spirit is sent by Jesus para\ pou= patro\j ("from the Father") which is different than Jesus' sending of the disciples (20:21).

³⁷ The descent from heaven of both Jesus and the Spirit answers R.E. Brown's argument that the uniqueness of Jesus in 3:13 is evidence of no one being included in Jesus' "we" (1966-1970, 1.132).

³⁸ T.G. Brown states that, while the Spirit and Jesus cannot simply be equated, the parallels between them give the appearance that they are "one and the same" and that they "share a functional unity" (2003, 189-191). Note that the Spirit is called a]llon para/klhto] in 14:16 (cf. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7), which may suggest that Jesus was also understood as para/klhto]. In 1 Jn 2:1, we see that at least one other early Christian author took this view, but whether this was the same author of the Gospel we cannot be sure. Further parallels between Jesus and the Spirit are listed by Burge 1987, 141. Burge's list is reproduced by T.G. Brown 2003, 190.

The speech and testimony of the Spirit are spoken of in language parallel to that used of Jesus' speech and testimony. The Spirit also testifies as does Jesus (15:26). Although the Spirit's testimony is concerning Jesus (*peri\ e0mou=*), the Spirit's coming from the Father suggests that his testimony concerning Jesus has its source from the Father (cf. 15:26; 14:16, 26).³⁹ Further, what the Spirit hears he will speak (16:13). Jesus' statement in 16:14 may seem to imply that what the Spirit hears and receives originates from him, but Jesus clarifies that this is not the case. What the Spirit receives from Jesus and announces to the disciples actually belongs to the Father (16:15 – *pa/nta o#sa elxei o(path\r e0ma/ e0stin*).⁴⁰ Hoskyns (1947, 486) states: “As the teaching of the Son was derived from the Father (vii. 16, 17, viii. 26, 40, xii. 49, 50), so the Spirit will declare only what He shall hear, the identity of the teaching of the Son and of the Spirit being guaranteed by an identity of origin.”⁴¹ Like Jesus (14:10 – *a)p' e0autou= ou0 lalw~*; cf. 5:19, 30; 7:28; 8:28), the Spirit does not speak on his own (16:13 – *ou0 ga\r lalh/sei aof' e9autou=*). In fact, Jesus' own words are Spirit (6:63). Since the Spirit has descended from heaven (1:32) and comes from the Father (14:16, 26; 15:26), it can be assumed that the Spirit, like Jesus, speaks and testifies based on what

³⁹ The disciples also testify (15:27), but their testimony is based on being with Jesus *a)p' a)rxh=j* (their eyewitness testimony) and not from the Father. *Contra* Bennema 2002, 235.

⁴⁰ An objection could be raised concerning the future tense of the verbs in 15:26 and 16:13 that the Spirit will speak and testify in the future but is not doing so at the time of Jesus' statement in 3:11. In response, the Spirit has already come down from heaven and remained on Jesus (1:32; cf. 19:30), and Jesus told Nicodemus that he can presently hear the Spirit's voice (3:8).

⁴¹ Cf. Porsch 1974, 301-302; Brown. 1966-1970, 2.708. *Contra* Burge 1986, 140.

he hears from the Father. The Father is the source of the content of Jesus' and the Spirit's speech and testimony. Both Jesus and the Spirit testify and speak what they hear from the Father.

Further evidence for the Spirit's inclusion with Jesus in the first person plural is found in the literary context. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the Spirit and says that Nicodemus hears the voice of the pneu=ma .⁴² Following Jesus' seeming bewilderment at Nicodemus' lack of understanding (v. 10), Jesus says "Amen, amen I say to you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen and you do not receive our testimony". Jesus' speaking and testifying refers to what he has just said to Nicodemus in 3:3-8, which includes his mention of the voice of the Spirit in 3:8. The Spirit is the nearest possible and most likely figure whose speech and testimony could also be heard and rejected by Nicodemus. The literary context of 3:11 suggests that the Spirit is the one who is included in Jesus' use of the first person plural.

6. Conclusion

The narrative use of the first person plural in the Gospel of John typically has a clear referent. This fact coupled with the "Amen, amen" saying in 3:11 casts doubt on the commonly stated position that a group outside the narrative is in some way part of Jesus' "we". By examining the literary context of John 3, the inclusion of the Father,

⁴² It is clear that Jesus is speaking about the Spirit in 3:8 because Jesus says that the pneu=ma blows (pnei=) where it *wishes* (qe/lei). As Gundry, in an unpublished manuscript, points out, wind does not wish. Note also that when actual wind blows (pne/ontoj) in 6:18, the word used for wind is alnemoj .

the disciples, and John the Baptist in Jesus' use of "we" has been shown to be problematic. Less problematic are the "we" of majesty, the parody of Nicodemus's words, and the Spirit, which are all credible explanations of Jesus' use of the first person plural in John 3:11.

Neither the "we" of majesty nor R.E. Brown's parody suggestion can be ruled out completely, but the evidence for the Spirit's inclusion in Jesus' "we" appears to be the more likely explanation. Both the Spirit and Jesus are described in parallel language, and Jesus and the Spirit receive the content of their speech and testimony directly from the Father and do not speak on their own. In the immediate context of John 3:11 (3:8), Jesus speaks of the Spirit and, specifically, of the Spirit's voice being heard. Thus, the literary context suggests that the Spirit is the most plausible referent for inclusion in Jesus' use of the first person plural.

A further implication of this view that the Spirit and Jesus testify together in John 3:11 is that it suggests an active role of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John.⁴³ This activity of the Spirit in Jesus' life and ministry may be further suggested by the Spirit's descent and *remaining upon* Jesus (1.32),⁴⁴ even though the disciples have yet to receive the Spirit (7:39; 14:26; 20.22).*

⁴³ See Bennema 2003 for a recent argument that the Spirit is active during Jesus' ministry.

⁴⁴ Cf. Luke 4.1, 17-18, where following Jesus' baptism and the descent of the Spirit, Jesus is referred to as being full of the Holy Spirit.

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