

PRAISE FOR *THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER*

What happens when a major analytic philosopher subjects the arguments of New Testament scholarship on John's Gospel to critical scrutiny? This book! Lydia McGrew, who is already well known for her work in the analytic tradition, once again takes on New Testament scholarship, this time regarding the historical value of the Gospel of John. Although she addresses some of her arguments to those outside the evangelical camp, her primary adversaries are those fellow evangelical scholars and popular apologists who, she thinks, are far too apologetic of the historical value of the Fourth Gospel and concede too much to arguments that undervalue its historical reliability. McGrew makes a strong case for what she calls "historical reportage" as a means of reading and understanding John's Gospel as a reliable and trustworthy account of the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus. McGrew's opponents dare not dismiss this set of arguments.

Stanley E. Porter, President, Dean, and Professor of New Testament,
Roy A. Hope Chair in Christian Worldview,
McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

In 1959, J. A. T. Robinson began what he dubbed "the new look on John," arguing for the Fourth Gospel's historical accuracy in places where few scholars were willing to grant it. Since 2007, the fruit of the Society of Biblical Literature's John, Jesus and History Seminar has been appearing in print, reclaiming even more of John. Now Lydia McGrew, largely independently of these developments, shows how strong a case can be mounted for the entire Gospel as "historical reportage" when one does not begin with certain commonly asserted but unproven and implausible scholarly hypotheses about John's composition. I am grateful that McGrew found as much of my work on the historical reliability of John as helpful as she did and I am glad to see it pushed even further.

Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of
New Testament, Denver Seminary
Author of *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*

Lydia McGrew takes up the mantle of B. F. Westcott, Leon Morris, and D. A. Carson by arguing that John the Apostle was the author of the Fourth Gospel and that the Gospel of John is historically reliable. The idea that the Gospel of John represents both profound theology and genuine history isn't fashionable today, but McGrew demonstrates, with a battery of arguments and incisive reasoning, that the entirety of the Fourth Gospel is faithful to history. John as an eyewitness reports accurately what Jesus said and did. I am thankful for McGrew's book that challenges an accepted tenet in historical critical scholarship,

showing us that there are solid reasons for affirming that the Gospel of John truly represents to us the historical Jesus.

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of
New Testament Interpretation; Associate Dean
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Scholars have often treated John's Gospel as about theology, but not history. Even those claiming to defend it against skepticism have sometimes treated it thus. But here McGrew sets out a detailed case that John's Gospel was written by someone close to the events simply reporting what he saw. To demonstrate this she reads the text carefully and then deploys a range of compelling and mutually-reinforcing arguments. She also counters the most common objections, making this a very useful volume.

Peter Williams

Principal, Tyndale House, Cambridge

There is a widely adopted tendency among New Testament scholars, even conservative ones, to adopt an interpretive approach to the Gospels that results, perhaps inadvertently, in weakening one's confidence in their historical accuracy and intent. What is befuddling is that there is an alternative approach that not only fails to exhibit this result, it also provides strong epistemic support that raises one's confidence in Gospel historicity. In Lydia McGrew's *The Eye of the Beholder*, we are presented with a clear exposition and painstaking critique of all the major aspects of the former viewpoint along with a rigorous, detailed, persuasive case for the latter. What is also impressive and so desperately needed, is McGrew's focus on the Gospel of John. McGrew is a heavyweight Christian intellectual who knows her way around an argument. Her book is a *tour de force* that repays careful study and demands a point-by-point response equal to its rigor. What a great book!

J. P. Moreland, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy,
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University and
co-editor of *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*

Some years ago, I wrote a scholarly article entitled, "The Fourth Gospel Yesterday and Today," which received theological journal publication and was reprinted in my book, *The Suicide of Christian Theology*. I there defended the apostolic authorship and historicity of John's Gospel. Now we have a book-length treatment of this same perennial issue, and it is *badly needed*. Why? Because there are still many critics who argue that the Fourth Gospel is but a literary/theological interpretation, unreliable as to the factual life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Lydia McGrew's *The*

Eye of the Beholder: The Gospel of John as Historical Reportage is must reading on this exceedingly important issue as to whether indeed “the Word was made flesh.”

John Warwick Montgomery, Ph.D. (Chicago), D.Théol (Strasbourg),
LL.D. (Cardiff); Professor Emeritus of Law and Humanities,
University of Bedfordshire, England/UK

This is Lydia McGrew’s third contribution to the study of the Gospels. Writing as a philosopher, McGrew brings a fresh perspective on Gospel studies, asking questions to the biblical data which have indeed received mixed answers for a number of decades.

This contribution to Johannine studies to the question of whether the Fourth Gospel is historical is a resounding “yes.” She clearly presents and defends—often at length—what she calls a “reportage model,” by which she does not mean that the author of the Fourth Gospel produced a tape-recorded version of the words of Jesus, but rather that John’s narrative is what it appears to be *prima facie*—“memoirs of Jesus and his disciples, told with the intention to present historical truth.”

Like its predecessor, *The Mirror or the Mask: Liberating the Gospels from Literary Devices*, this book will stir no small amount of controversy, and readers must be ready to be challenged on many fronts. As she notes herself in her Preface, the reportage model she defends “has long been the default of many evangelical commentators,” from which many evangelicals seem to have departed in recent decades.

As McGrew walks in the footsteps of Craig Blomberg, D. A. Carson, Leon Morris, and Andreas Köstenberger, her attention to detail, her meticulous look at John’s story of Jesus, and her willingness to pursue arguments to their logical conclusion make this book a very enlightening read and a robust defence of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel.

Pierre Constant

Chair of New Testament Studies
Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College

Dr. McGrew’s book is much more than a well-reasoned discussion of the historicity of John’s Gospel. Wearing her philosopher’s hat, she exposes methodological flaws which are widespread in gospels scholarship, including unsupported assumptions, leaps of logic, and mishandling of evidence. There is much to be learned from her valuable and incisive critiques.

Andrew Bartlett QC, author of *Men and Women in Christ:*
Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts

During the past two hundred years, much of biblical scholarship has cast doubts on the traditional authorship and historical witness that John’s gospel provides about the life and teachings of Jesus. Even many supposedly conservative evan-

gical scholars have capitulated to this trend and maintain that John's Gospel cannot be trusted as an historical source on the life of Jesus. *The Eye of the Beholder* is an important book, because it challenges this trend and restores faith in John's Gospel as an historically reliable account of Jesus Christ. McGrew examines the primary reasons scholars today doubt the traditional authorship and historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel and exposes the weak foundations upon which these doubts are built. Beyond criticizing modern biblical scholarship, she also makes a powerful case for accepting John's Gospel as genuine reportage. Perhaps most striking to me is the way that she realistically portrays the Gospel writer as an eyewitness to the life of Christ. Rather than taking the differences in John's Gospel (compared to the Synoptics) as a basis for rejecting the historical value of this document, she convincingly shows that these differences can support the view that this Gospel was written by a credible eyewitness. Anyone who has doubts about the historicity, traditional authorship, or coherence of John's Gospel will find good reasons to check those doubts after reading *The Eye of the Beholder*.

John M. DePoe, PhD

Head of the Schools of Logic and Rhetoric,
Kingdom Preparatory Academy

That the four canonical Gospels are historically accurate memoirs of the life of Christ by contemporaries is the established and undeniable teaching of the historical record, namely of what contemporary or near contemporary sources say about the Gospels. That modern scholars reject this view is not based on the historical record, which record rather it rejects, but on literary critical deconstruction of the text of the Gospels. All the Gospels have suffered from this deconstructing, but the Gospel of John more so than the other three, the so-called Synoptic Gospels. Lydia McGrew has in an earlier book deconstructed this literary critical deconstruction of the Synoptic Gospels. In this book she does the same expressly and individually for the Gospel of John, which modern scholars consider to be the least historical of the four Gospels. But, on the basis even of literary criticism itself (style, character, structure, content, passing asides, contemporary references, etc., of the text), McGrew shows decisively that John's Gospel is a thoroughly historically accurate memoir by an eyewitness, indeed by an apostle, of the life of Christ.

What is remarkable about this book, and surprising about its argument, is that this fact about John's Gospel can be shown to emerge with such clarity, quality, and quantity of evidence that one wonders how anyone could ever have denied it. But McGrew's focus is rightly less on how the scholars could have denied it than on the simple fact that, by any fair assessment of the style and content of the text, it cannot sensibly be denied.

McGrew's comprehensive discussion shows the *soi-disant* New Testament scholarship to be arbitrary, unperceptive, and inconsequentially argued. What we should do instead, as McGrew herself does well and at length, is to read the Gospel of John with care, with a sensible, open mind, and with especial attention to the sort of literary critical detail that the *soi-disant* scholars insist on missing. John's Gospel, far from being an invented romance, emerges rather through McGrew's analysis as a richly accurate eyewitness memoir, and arguably the most divinely perceptive of all the historical memoirs that we call, and rightly call, the Good News, the Gospel, the Evangel of Jesus Christ.

Peter L. P. Simpson

Professor of Philosophy and Classics
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

For too long the Gospel of John has been in exile in Gospel studies as a text that has been deemed inferior to the Synoptic Gospels. This has been the normative approach to the Gospel of John among the more liberal scholars in academia, but unfortunately and sadly a considerable number of conservative scholars have also imbibed from the same fountain. This has led to confusion and doubt about the integrity of John in terms of his reportage on the life and sayings of Jesus. John has been accused of fabricating stories about Jesus, changing the date of Jesus' crucifixion and death, and shuffling events in the life of Jesus such as the cleansing of the Temple. This is glaringly incongruent with John's careful and meticulous treatment of his data, since John goes to great pains to assure his readers, "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe" (John 19:35) and, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). These are hardly the words of a writer who manipulates and invents fictional stories. Truth matters to John, as indicated by the fact that he uses the word 'truth' (*alētheia*; Greek) twenty-five times in contrast to Matthew who uses it once, and Mark and Luke who use it three times. Lydia McGrew's book *The Eye of the Beholder* is a long-awaited contribution to Johannine studies. It carefully and with great depth and erudition argues for the reliability of the Gospel of John in a consistent manner, showing it to be the work of a careful historian and eyewitness to Jesus of Nazareth. I believe that this work will contribute tremendously to turning the tide on John. McGrew restores John to this rightful place of honor alongside the Synoptics. I believe this book is a must read for any serious student of the Gospels and laypeople alike. This book is a breath of fresh air in Gospel studies.

Tony Costa, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Theology,
Toronto Baptist Seminary

Lydia McGrew's new book, *The Eye of the Beholder*, is a masterpiece of clear thought, cogent argument, and careful scholarship. This spirited defense of the historical reliability of the Gospel of John should be read by all who handle the Scriptures.

Edgar Andrews

Author of *Who Made God? Searching for a Theory of Everything*

Those who appreciated the detailed rigor of Lydia McGrew's defense of the historical accuracy and reliability of the Gospels in *The Mirror or the Mask* will be eager to dive into her focused application of the same approach to the Gospel whose historicity is most often questioned: The Gospel according to John. *The Eye of the Beholder* shows the flimsiness of the reasons urged against taking John as straight and reliable history and the strength of the evidence for doing so. With many even supposedly "conservative" scholars in pitiful captivity to the negative scholarly consensus on the Fourth Gospel, this book meets a critical need.

McGrew brings two great strengths to this project that are ironically sometimes seen as weaknesses. First, she is by training not a biblical scholar but an analytic philosopher. This simply means that she brings fresh eyes to the data, eyes not easily bamboozled by the specious reasoning that dominates the received orthodoxy in a field that has long confused skepticism with objectivity. Second, she is not personally committed to the inerrancy of Scripture. This means that her reasons cannot be dismissed as *a priori* special pleading for a position she was doctrinally committed to before she formulated them. The results lend support to those of us who believe in the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture and make me very sad that such a strong defense of general biblical veracity could not have come from inside our ranks. We are grateful for it in any case, as all people should be who care about the truth.

Donald T. Williams

Professor Emeritus, Toccoa Falls College

Past President, International Society of Christian Apologetics

It is past time for someone with professional expertise in epistemology to take a critical look at the muddled methodology, careless reading, and sloppy scholarship that have seeped into evangelical New Testament studies. This book, alone among the many volumes of Johannine scholarship published in the last few decades, provides that critique *in extenso*. Written in the spirit of Westcott and Lightfoot, it restores the reader's confidence that John's Gospel affords us an intimate and accurate portrait of the *historical* Jesus.

Timothy McGrew

Professor of Philosophy, Western Michigan University

In *The Eye of the Beholder: The Gospel of John as Historical Reportage*, Lydia McGrew shows herself a true champion of the historicity of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry—John's in particular. While McGrew's demurral from a rigorous inerrantism is regrettable, the remarkable clarity and cogency with which she argues the case for John's historical reliability will undoubtedly generate both appreciation from those who accept that historicity and consternation from those who do not—both of which are to be cheered! The illustrations she develops from everyday, real-life parallels are truly illuminating in their support of the credibility of her arguments. *The Eye of the Beholder* is a worthy contribution to the literature on this vital issue.

Randy Leedy

Author of Greek New Testament Sentence Diagrams

Most readers through the ages have taken John's Gospel as aiming to tell true history about the words and deeds of Jesus. They have seen this Gospel as a complement to the other three, equally historical and factual—the report of a sober eyewitness. Many scholars have come to doubt that John supplies much reliable history; and recently some, including otherwise “conservative” scholars, have argued that John never intended to be read as factually historical in the same way as the other Gospels. Lydia McGrew, with her characteristic keen literary savvy and incisive logical acumen, has shown why the ordinary readers have been right in how they have read John: not only does he aim to recount actual events, but he is worthy of our confidence in his truthfulness. Besides the pleasure that comes with reading an argument skillfully reasoned and well-presented, there is an added benefit: the renewed sense of meeting through John's Gospel a genuine personality, in all its concreteness and gritty detail. I count it a privilege to urge my fellow scholars to pay careful heed, and the faithful to come to this Gospel, with fresh appreciation.

C. John Collins

*Professor of Old Testament
Covenant Theological Seminary*

According to many within the scholarly guild, including a significant portion of conservative scholars, the Gospel of John is a heavily theologized Gospel, whose author took liberties to alter the historical facts in order to provide his readers with a “higher-level” perspective of the person and ministry of Jesus. Accordingly, it is common in contemporary New Testament scholarship to view the Fourth Gospel with profound suspicion. In *The Eye of the Beholder*, analytic philosopher Lydia McGrew conducts a careful and thorough investigation of these claims. She makes a powerful case for taking the Fourth Gospel to be historical reportage and

dispels scholarly myths that have for too long been allowed to go unchallenged. Whether you are a layman, student, or scholar, McGrew's engaging style, rigor, and unique insight make this book an essential addition to your library and ought to be required reading for seminary courses.

Jonathan McLatchie

Assistant Professor of Biology, Sattler College

In *The Eye of the Beholder*, Lydia McGrew examines and finds wanting a claim that has found its way even into much of conservative New Testament scholarship, namely that the Gospel of John is much less historically reliable than the Synoptic Gospels. Expanding on the superb work she did in *The Mirror or the Mask*, McGrew again provides meticulous consideration of the evidence combined with a clear-eyed appraisal of arguments she finds lacking in clarity and substance. Her sustained and massive case for taking the historicity of John's Gospel seriously deserves a wide readership.

Robert Larmer

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy
University of New Brunswick

Theologians, ministers, and lay persons since the dawn of the New Testament era have seen the same Jesus portrayed in all four Gospels, his words faithfully recorded in each of them. This common-sense view of the Gospels (for those who hold to divine inspiration) has been brought into question lately by New Testament scholars who say they've found a different Jesus in John. If true, it's more than a little disturbing, as it would necessitate revising not just academic theology but incalculable numbers of sermon texts, hymns, books, personal devotions, and more. So be it, the scholars say: this is what close, careful scholarship has shown to be true; so let the practical ministry chips fall where they may, and if you find it strange that God would have allowed such a grand mistake all these years, well, at least we've got a better answer now. In this book, however, Lydia McGrew takes an even closer, more careful look at the evidence and reasoning and finds good reason to retain not just a more natural reading of Scripture, and not just practical ministry flowing from it, but even our trust in God as he chooses to reveal himself in the Gospels.

Tom Gilson

Senior Editor at *The Stream*
Author of *Too Good to be False*

This is another excellent and comprehensive contribution by Lydia McGrew to the debate surrounding Gospel reliability. Making excellent use of academic sources, she has nevertheless made this book accessible to the layman, with a view

to giving orthodox Christians confidence in the Gospel of John as a reliable historical source about Jesus of Nazareth.

As in her previous work, *The Mirror or the Mask*, Lydia McGrew goes beyond refuting the arguments of those who would undermine the reportage model of understanding the Gospel of John. She also makes a positive case for the reliability of this Gospel and helps the lay Christian reader to understand the theological as well as historical implications of assertions made by her opponents, such as Craig Keener and Michael Licona.

In addition to the main body of arguments, she has also produced a useful appendix, refuting arguments made by Richard Bauckham in favour of “another John” as the author of the Gospel. Refuting his arguments, she cogently defends the traditional view that the Gospel was authored by John the son of Zebedee and brother of James, one of the Twelve.

It is concerning that such a book as this was necessary. However, Lydia McGrew has done a wonderful job in defending orthodoxy and drawing the attention of Christians to the unwarranted concessions made by some evangelical scholars in the field of Johannine studies. My prayer is that this book will find a wide readership among both academic and lay communities.

Nicholas Barrett

BA (Classics), MPhil (Classics), MA (Cantab), MSc

One of the untold ironies of modern evangelical scholarship is how far it has gone down the path of destructive higher criticism. Critical presuppositions are uncritically repeated, often without care or caution in argumentation—and especially in the case of the Gospel of John. Lydia McGrew unmasks this all-too-casual dismissal of the disciple John’s account of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection. Far from being unhistorical, by design John neatly supplements the other three gospels. McGrew restores our confidence in John as eyewitness testimony and reportage. This book deserves a wide readership among students of the Gospel and scholars as well as in university and seminary classrooms—a welcome rejoinder to prevailing assumptions in Johannine scholarship!

A. Andrew Das

Professor of Religious Studies and Assistant Dean of the Faculty
Elmhurst University

In *The Eye of the Beholder* Lydia McGrew deals a fatal blow to the widespread claims that John rearranged or presented material with little regard for historical accuracy in order to serve merely theological or symbolic purposes. Continuing her argument that the Gospels are historical reportage, McGrew exposes the false dichotomy that John’s theological claims about Jesus are disconnected from

or only loosely associated with the actual historical sayings and actions of Jesus himself. *The Eye of the Beholder* is extensively and meticulously researched and yet written with such precision that the weight of evidence and the logic of McGrew's argument is unmistakably clear. With numerous illustrations and concise bullet point chapter summaries this rigorous research is accessible to specialist and non-specialist alike. All who are interested in John's Gospel—students, teachers, scholars, Bible readers, pastors—can and should take up and read this important work. Highly recommended!

Alan J. Thompson

Head of New Testament department, Sydney Missionary
and Bible College, Croydon, Australia

Author of *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus* (New Studies in Biblical Theology),
and *Luke* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament)

The traditional symbol of John's Gospel is the eagle. John lifts our minds and souls into the heights of spiritual truth. Since the 19th century, Johannine scholarship seems to have thought that the eagle only rarely touched ground. Historical nuggets of the earthly sojourn of Jesus might exist within the Gospel, but overall John's Gospel possessed very little historical material. Giants such as Westcott, Lightfoot, Sanday, and Zahn and more modern scholars such as Leon Morris and Donald Carson have done their best to argue for John's reliability. Yet no one has approached the task of defending the historical truthfulness of John's Gospel with such vigor and clarity as does Lydia McGrew in this book. Her thesis is bold—John presents the story of Jesus such as it, in reality, was. McGrew is aware that historical account can possess its own forms of literary emphasis and structure, without that calling into question the historical veracity of the text. This book deserves wide reading. There is no conservative naïveté here, but solid thinking while engaging recent arguments which are less confident about the historical facticity of John.

William C. Weinrich

Professor of Patristics Studies
Concordia Theological Seminary

Author of *John 1:1–7:1* (Concordia Commentary Series)

Johannine scholarship has often spoken of the Fourth Gospel as a “problem” and a “question,” driven by challenges or denials regarding its historicity and credibility. In *The Eye of the Beholder*, Lydia McGrew offers eclectic and at times controversial answers to such assumptions and objections, defending and explaining the historicity, eyewitness character, and trustworthiness of the Gospel of John. Writing to several kinds of readers, this helpful resource offers students of John not only a

tour and triage through contemporary Johannine scholarship, but also training for reading God's Word in the modern, scientific world.

Edward W. Klink III

Author of *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)

Among biblical scholars over the last century and a half, two dichotomies of David Strauss have been taken as givens: (a) a theologically invested report cannot be objectively historical, and (b) respectable Jesus research may only make use of the Synoptics but not the Gospel of John. In this sustained engagement of the issues, rather than seeing John as the "red-headed stepchild of Gospel scholarship," Lydia McGrew builds a robust case for seeing the Fourth Gospel as a self-standing apostolic memory of Jesus and his ministry, worthy of full consideration alongside the Synoptics as a lens through which to view more clearly the Jesus of history as well as the Christ of faith. In this philosophic critique of Gospel ahistoricity, the author forces critical scholars to doubt their doubts as well as default alternatives to traditional views. A worthy contribution to the field.

Paul N. Anderson

Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies, George Fox University
Founding Member, *John, Jesus, and History Project* (Society of Biblical Literature)

Author of *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus* and
Jesus in Johannine Perspective: A Fourth Quest for Jesus (forthcoming)