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TEXT AND CONTEXT  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAY IN  
WHICH JOHN'S PROLOGUE HAS BEEN  
INTERPRETED BY SELECTED WRITERS  
- ORIGEN, LUTHER AND BULTMANN -

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JONATHAN CYRIL LATHAM

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## ABSTRACT

In chapter one of this work, as a preliminary to the formulation of the question that this thesis will attempt to answer, the changing understanding of the part played by the interpreter in the process of interpretation is discussed. This outline begins with the understanding of the role of the interpreter in liberal theology - where he is thought of as one who applies critical methods to the text in a detached and scientific way. After this the hermeneutic spiral is discussed - the formation of this model acknowledges to a greater degree the individual and human part played by the interpreter. This is followed by a brief examination of the most recent theories of interpretation in which meaning is regarded as residing not in the text but in the interpreter himself. The task of this thesis is to determine whether, as these recent theorists suggest, the reader creates meaning instead of reading out what somehow lies in the text itself. The task of this thesis is to ascertain, by studying the interpretations of John's Prologue by Origen, Luther and Bultmann, whether the text does in fact operate as a series of sign-posts that point the interpreter to a destination within his own semantic universe. This may be determined by noting whether or not the contexts, in the broadest sense, of these interpreters have played a formative part in their interpretations. Contextual influences are regarded as existing wherever there is a procedure or meaning in the interpreter's commentary which

one expects to find there as a result of one's knowledge of the interpreter's life and previous writings. Our research reveals that Origen, Luther and Bultmann have produced three very different commentaries in which the common denominator is the formative influence of the interpreter's context. Each of these writers has produced an interpretation that is consistent, in both approach and theology, with their previous exegetical and theological thought. This indicates that contextual factors have played a significant part in determining their interpretations of John 1:1-18. It would appear that these interpreters have been led to find the meaning of John's Prologue not with reference to any new, unprecedented set of symbols, but with reference to their own, well-worn semantic universes. In the conclusion it is noted that this research appears to support what many modern theorists have said as to the locus of meaning in interpretation. In the conclusion it is also noted that many of the fears raised by these findings - that readers and writers, or speakers and hearers, may become so isolated and trapped in their own thought worlds that any real contact with the outside is impossible - may be groundless. These findings also point to a certain consistency between the interpreters and their communities. This refutes the fears as to the isolation and solitary development of the individual in that it points to a certain community or corporate aspect which plays a part in the development of the individual's semantic universe.

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CHAPTER ONE

- THE TASK -

The aim of this thesis is to discover whether the interpreter's context is instrumental in determining his interpretation of the text of the New Testament. Every interpreter has his own unique background and exists in his own unique context; does this influence the way in which he interprets a New Testament passage? If one were to examine the way in which selected interpreters, who by definition existed in different contexts, had interpreted a certain passage, would one discover differences with regard to their method of interpretation and the meaning they attributed to the text? This is, in fact, a restatement of the old question as to whether or not an objective interpretation of Scripture is possible. So much has been written on this topic that we need do no more than outline, in the briefest possible terms, the progress that has been made in this area before we continue by restating and redefining the object of this thesis.

Bearing in mind that brevity is often accompanied by severe distortion, one may cautiously divide the recent history of New Testament interpretation into three stages - using the envisaged role of the reader as the criterion upon which the division is based. In the first of these stages the interpreter is thought of as an observer who watches objective interpretation unfold, like a scientific process, before his eyes. In the second stage there is a limited acknowledgement of the part played by the interpreter in the interpretative process. In the third stage the interpreter is acknowledged as creating the meaning of a text. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century it was widely held that an objective interpretation of

Scripture was possible. The belief in the attainability of an objective interpretation was the result of the ever increasing faith in the historical critical method. If one applied the historical critical method to the text then one could discover its meaning without the unwelcome intrusion of the human element. Just as a chemist could produce a certain reaction by combining various chemicals, so too could an objective interpretation of Scripture be produced by the scientific application of the historical critical method to the text. The interpretation of the New Testament took the form of the detached application of a scientific method and the subsequent reporting of the results. The passage, it was believed, had a fixed meaning and the task of interpretation was to liberate this by scientific means. One had only interpreted a passage correctly if one had achieved objectivity.

With the passing of time, however, practitioners of the historical critical method were able to give a more realistic appraisal of the limitations of their discipline. Along with this re-evaluation arose the question as to the possibility of objective interpretation. It was soon realised that throughout the application of critical methods to the text the human, intuitive element was involved. At the very heart of their interpretation lay an array of critical methods - but even here, they realised, objectivity was denied - for subjective presuppositions underlay both the questions they asked, which determined the answers they received, and their evaluation and use of their findings. Along with the recognition of the part played by the interpreter in the interpretative process went the creation of the 'hermeneutic circle' as the model for explaining the forces at work in interpretation.

'The full interpretation of an ancient document is thus very often a laborious business requiring great skill and sensitivity. What we have to do in many cases is to read between the lines in the hope of bringing into the open what is at most implicit in the text itself, and that is no

easy matter. The procedure must be to begin by interpreting the words on the basis of the best guesses we can make as to the original assumptions and presuppositions. In the light of the interpretation which that yields we may hope to refine our understanding of the presuppositions and then re-read the text on the basis of our new understanding of its assumptions. The process may have to be repeated many times and it may seem circular - it is in fact often referred to as the "hermeneutic circle". If nevertheless it works reasonably well in practice, that is because good interpreters bring into play intuitive insight - both at the state of initial guesswork and at subsequent stages of the interpretative process.'

(Nineham 1976:26)

'Bernard Lonergan has recently called presuppositionless exegesis "The Principle of the Empty Head". "On this view," he writes, "the less one knows, the better an exegete one will be .... Anything above a reissue of the same signs in the same order will be mediated by the experience, intelligence, and judgement of the interpreter." This is surely correct. It is possible to minimise the influence of presuppositions; it is not possible to begin to interpret a text without approaching it from a particular angle - and behind the choice of that initial stance from which one asks questions of a text lie presuppositions.'

(Stanton 1977:66)

Whereas previously the interpreter had been regarded as scientifically detached - his task being to facilitate a scientific process which would, if done correctly, ensure the extraction of the meaning without human interference - it was now realised that objectivity was impossible to attain since the human element was involved at every point in the process of interpretation. The 'observer' interpreter was replaced by the interpreter who entered into dialogue with the text. In many contemporary theories of interpretation the interpreter is assigned a much more active role than previously envisaged. The meaning of the text is no longer regarded as residing in the text itself, but in the reader. The writer of the document had

a certain message in mind which he tried to convey by expressing it in terms of the written symbols that best conveyed the desired meaning to him. The writer was himself, therefore, the first interpreter of the text. If one starts with the premise that meaning resides in the reader, and not in the text, then one may say that the text is a series of sign-posts that leads the reader to a destination within his own semantic universe.

'As long as language is treated as a complete and yet open-ended sign system of communication - a form of communication that involves encoder, message and decoder - then a text is never finished. Even when the message is printed as a text, it is not the material object itself. Rather, the text remains the complex symbolic object. Since its whole purpose is to signify, it becomes text only when readers as decoders enter into dialogue with it. In that dialogue the text is the sign system that always produces what Charlie Pierce called interpretants. Interpretants are the ideas, conclusions, and - ultimately - intellectual habits to which a sign gives rise in the minds of readers. Interpretants are themselves signs and consequently generate meaning without end.'

(Reese 1984:53)

Crosman expresses much the same idea in the following quotations:

'Any word or text, I shall argue, has "meaning" only when it is fitted into some larger context. Thus the act of understanding a poet's words by placing them in the context of intention is only one of a number of possible ways of understanding them.'

(Crosman 1980:151)

Commenting on the poem In a Station of the Metro, he says:

'This being so, it follows that a poem really means whatever any reader seriously believes it to mean. Just as the number of mental contexts into which Pound's poem can be translated is infinite, so is the number of possible .



meanings of the poem itself infinite.'

(Crosman 1980: 151)

'Do authors make meaning? Yes, of course they do, in exactly the same way that we all make meaning: as interpreters, as readers.'

(Crosman 1980:162)

Many modern theorists would, therefore, dismiss the question as to the possibility of an objective interpretation of a text as meaningless, stating that it is a misleading question arising out of a misconception as to the locus of meaning in the process of interpretation. The question as to whether or not the interpreter's context influences his interpretation would also be regarded as misleading. The text would, it would be said, guide the reader to create meaning in terms of his context. The reader's context contributes to creating his semantic universe and the text always refers the reader to the elements of his own semantic universe, so that it may be said that the reader will create meaning with reference to, or in terms of, his context.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the way in which Origen, Luther and Bultmann have interpreted the Prologue of John's Gospel - in order to determine whether the text has led them to create meaning in terms of their contexts. The term 'context' is used in the broadest possible sense to mean any element of their background or thought-world which could, by definition, be influential in their creation of textual meaning. If, therefore, one were to encounter in the commentaries of Origen, Luther and Bultmann approaches and understandings which one would expect to find there, as a result of one's investigation into their backgrounds and thought-worlds, then it would be reasonable to conclude that they had created meaning in terms of their contexts. A phenomenological approach to the task will be adopted. This means that Origen's commentary, for example, would be taken at face value, without

any reference to its relation to the Johannine Prologue. It would be examined in terms of what we knew of his background and method of interpretation. If it were to materialize that there were a consistency of approach and thought, then it would be taken to mean that Origen had created the meaning of the text in terms of his context.

## CHAPTER TWO

## - ORIGEN -

## I

Origen was born in about A.D. 185. His life spanned a troubled time in the history of both the Roman Empire and the Church. The Empire was beginning to show signs of severe stress and the Church was confronted by danger on two fronts. On the one hand, the Church was subjected to sporadic persecution and, on the other hand, there were certain groups who, by their teaching, were undermining the faith. Far more serious than the threat of persecution, however, were the issues raised by the unorthodox teachings of the dissenting groups. The teachings with which the Church had to contend were mainly Marcionite and Gnostic in nature and, generally speaking her response was not convincing. These groups brought to light many important issues and raised questions that could not be ignored but, as far as the Church was concerned, their answers were rendered unsatisfactory by their dualism, antinomianism and determinism. At the same time, however, the Church, which may be a misleading title since there were no convenient, clearcut divisions into the plainly identifiable 'orthodox' or 'unorthodox', could not provide any convincing answers to many of these questions either. It became a battle of proof texts and the Church was in danger of losing her credibility as she responded lamely to the very relevant questions that were being posed. Origen was able to assist the Church greatly in this struggle and most of his life was devoted to works of an apologetic nature.

Origen believed that the proof text was not the way to respond to the highly developed systems against which the Church often found herself contending at that time. If one wanted to respond to a system, one had to have one's

own system. He therefore set out to create a Christian system. It was an ambitious scheme never before attempted by the more orthodox Christian writers. His De principiis which he started to write in about A.D. 219, set out to explain, in a philosophical and systematic way, what Christians believe. His system consisted of a combination of Scripture and philosophy - mainly Platonic philosophy. This syntheses of philosophy and Scripture did not seem to him to be inappropriate, for the philosophers too had discovered something of the truth which was fully expressed in the Bible. It follows, therefore, that he did not think of philosophy as an alien imposition on Scripture for, by combining the partial awareness of the truth contained in philosophy with the fullness of truth in the Bible, a system could be produced, he thought, that would make the truth of Christianity abundantly clear to those who normally would pay no heed to the Gospel. De principiis is an elaborate account of the creation of the world and of the human predicament and its resolution. In the final book of this great work he outlines the part played by Scripture in this scheme.

De principiis begins with an understanding of God.<sup>1</sup> God alone has not been created and exists apart from considerations of time and space. When it comes to the matter of the Trinity, however, Origen finds that Platonism does not readily accommodate the notion of a triune God and so, in order to explain the relationship of the Logos, for example, to God, he sets out to describe it in terms of a series of relations. The Logos, who occupies a pivotal position in Origen's thought is, in relation to God, the same as God in much the same way as thinker and thought cannot be separated. In relation to himself, however, the Logos is a separate and distinct Being. The important thing for Origen is not the ontology, but the fact that it is always the Logos who mediates God - it is always the Logos through whom God mediates his life and knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, it would seem that Origen

is propounding a subordinationist view of the Logos (and the Holy Spirit, for that matter, whom he also explains in a relational sense). Other sections of his work, on the other hand, seem to dismiss these suspicions. As we have said, however, we need not concern ourselves overly with this issue, since the mediatory role which has a bearing on the question at hand appears to be beyond dispute.

Origen next proceeds to explain that God created, before time or matter, rational souls.<sup>3</sup> God did this not because he had to, but because, being by nature Goodness, he wanted beings with whom he could share his goodness. In this regard Origen is heir to Philo who, in turn, was heir to Plato. These rational souls had no bodies, were equal and eternal. Life and knowledge passed from the Father to the Logos and from the Logos to the rational souls. This understanding tends to blur the distinction between God and creatures and is dependent upon a chain-of-being view of reality that has as its sine qua non the paradox that the Word is both the same as God and other than God.<sup>4</sup> Out of fairness to Origen it should be said that, while the distinction between God and the rational souls often seems to be blurred, he does make it clear that only the rational souls were able to be put into bodies. Origen presents us with a picture of God surrounded by rational souls who bask in his goodness. Gradually, however, the souls become bored, their attention wandered and they began to look away from God. Origen shares Philo's idea that innocence brought about the misuse of the free will. Only experience can bring true rest in God because, he maintained, the reality of the alternative is known. The naïve rational souls did not realise how fortunate they were since they had never known the misfortune of some other state and so they let their attention wander. As their attention wandered their minds clouded and they began to fall away from God. The distance from God at which they finally came to rest was determined by the extent to which their attention had

wandered.<sup>5</sup> Only one soul remained attentive - it was this one to which the Logos would be united in the Incarnation. In spite of their failure God did not forsake the fallen souls but set out to educate them, an emphasis for which Origen is dependent upon Plato, so that one day they would all be able to exist in God's presence as they had previously - but this time they would no longer be innocent. In De principiis II Origen explains creation. He never really speaks clearly or decisively on the status which he assigns to matter, but it is evident that matter exists for the education of man - and the other rational souls like the angels, who were given angelic bodies because they did not fall as far as man, and the demons, who fell further than man.<sup>6</sup> In this regard he seems to be dependent on Irenaeus, who said that the world exists to make strenuous demands on people - so that, for Origen, the world exists to educate people as to the full meaning and value of rest in God. All penalties are remedial and all the rational souls are destined to be reunited with God. In Origen's understanding the human predicament may be presented in the form of an arc. The rational souls are created by God, they fall and are placed in bodies in the world; from then on they are led, by education, back up to God. The whole of life is a growth, or transition, from innocence to experience - with experience producing a longing to be with God. All wisdom, as the revelation, to some extent, of the Logos, is educative in the saving sense and forms a step, however small, on the way back to God. The Incarnation forms the focal point of revelation<sup>7</sup> when the embodied souls are confronted with the fullness of truth which confirms the hopes and longings aroused by the imperfect worldly wisdom and knowledge. Suddenly the incarnated rational souls become aware of the vanity of the things of this world as they are awakened to their true destiny. What the Logos had been teaching through worldly wisdom and knowledge is suddenly confirmed and surpassed in the Incarnation of the Logos. The long journey back to God, involving, perhaps education even

beyond the grave, begins in earnest. The first step on the heavenly road is the moral life which appears, in Origen's thought, as the essential prerequisite for understanding the deeper, spiritual truths of Christianity. It is the Holy Spirit who both creates the desire to live a moral life and who makes it possible to do so.<sup>8</sup> Closely associated with the desire to live a moral life is the realisation that the things of this world are not of ultimate significance. This realisation is the work of the Logos - because the logos in all things is the imprint of their Creator which not only indicates what they really are, but also that they have their origin and purpose beyond themselves, in God.

Having declared themselves ready for the journey back to God by their desire for the moral life, the embodied rational souls are led by Christ to what will be, ultimately, the pure, direct contemplation of God. The higher the soul progresses, the less revelation he needs and the less Christ has to accommodate himself to the level of the soul. Eventually the soul, with its spiritual body (for in Origen's system the end is not exactly the same as the beginning - the soul has its spiritual body to remind it of its education) attains perfection in its pure contemplation of God.<sup>9</sup> This notion of perfection as contemplation is dependent upon the Platonic and early Neo-Platonic understanding of the inexhaustible nature of the quest for wisdom. At this point, as Harnack says 'the soul no longer needs a Saviour or any Christ of history at all.' (Harnack 1961:117)

Origen produced a cogent, all-embracing system, but not without some loss. He had to dispense with much that many would regard as an essential part of the Gospel (the crucial eschatological nature of the incarnation, for example, is lost). One thing is certain though, and that is that Origen was able to gain a hearing for the Church and restore, to some extent, its credibility. On

the other hand, much of the controversy that raged in the Church after his death is a monument to the price that had to be paid for this gain. We have not yet, however, mentioned a very important section of De principiis - Book 4 and some of Book 3 - which outlines the place of Scripture, and the way in which it should be interpreted, in his system. For Origen the Bible forms an integral part of his understanding of the world and, in particular, the plight of the rational souls and their God-ordained redemption. Christ came to educate men and to lead them, by this means, back to God. Education is, therefore, the means of redemption. When Christ ascended to heaven, however, he was no longer able to educate as he had in the past, when he had been on earth. The means by which the ascended Christ redeems is still education, but now he brings about redemption by education through the medium of Scripture. It is clear, therefore, that Origen's system would be incomplete without Scripture.

Origen begins his examination of Scripture by attempting to prove that it is divine. The Old Testament is divine, he says, because Moses, whose teachings it contains, persuaded people to change their way of life.<sup>10</sup> The Old Testament is also divine because it foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, who was himself divine because of the divinity of his teaching and the fact that he was able to predict its impact.<sup>11</sup> Consequently the New Testament is divine because it contains the teaching of Jesus Christ and because it speaks of him.<sup>12</sup> Scripture is a multi-layered entity that has, running throughout it, a substructure of hidden doctrines. It is in these doctrines that the power of Scripture lies, not in the obvious meaning of the text.<sup>13</sup> Scripture consists of body, soul and spirit - just as man himself does in Origen's Platonic trichotomy of man.

'The individual ought, then, to portray the ideas of Scripture in a threefold manner upon



his own soul, in order that the simple man may be edified by the "flesh", as it were, of Scripture, for so we name the obvious sense; while he who has ascended a certain way (may be edified) by the "soul", as it were. The perfect man, again, and he who resembles those spoken of by the apostle, when he says, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, but not the wisdom of the world, nor of the rulers of this world, who come to naught; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God hath ordained before the ages, unto our glory," may receive edification from the spiritual law, which has a shadow of good things to come. For as man consists of body, and soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of man.'

(Origen 1869:IV.1.11 Greek)

Scripturally Origen justifies this division by referring to a mistranslation of the Septuagint version of Proverbs 22:20f, which he translates as: 'Have I not written unto thee in triple way.'<sup>14</sup> He uses the Platonic trichotomy of man and this mistranslation to develop a system whereby Scripture comes to have different levels of meaning corresponding to various stages on the journey of the soul. At each of these levels the teaching Logos accommodates himself to the hearer or reader and from there proceeds to lead the person further along the road to salvation. As the reader is drawn, by the teaching Logos, to deeper levels of meaning, there is a corresponding advance along the road to perfection. All Scripture, no matter how unpromising it may appear, has something to teach, otherwise God would not have included it in his divine book. While all Scripture contains a meaning worthy of God, it is also true that men, at all stages of the spiritual journey, should be able to benefit from it. That is why there are three levels of meaning - the body, the unexegeted text as it is read in the worship of the Church;<sup>15</sup> the soul, an edifying meaning that may be deduced from the obvious meaning without too much difficulty; spirit, the hidden anticipations of future glory - so that

men may be met at their level and then guided to deeper truths and great advance along the heavenly path. By discovering edifying meaning in unpromising texts Origen was able to save the Old Testament from the destruction of the Marcionites and to confirm that the Creator was also the Redeemer.

Let us carry out a deeper investigation of his understanding of the Bible and the task of interpretation. Basic to Origen's conception of the nature and function of Scripture is his understanding of inspiration. Philo believed that God was the author of the Bible and that it could never contain anything unworthy of God. The most commonly held Jewish view of inspiration was that their sacred writings and traditions were verbally inspired - with every word there for a God-given reason. Philo combined this Jewish belief with the Hellenistic notion of inspiration in terms of ecstatic utterance and the suspension of human powers. This enabled him to manipulate a text at will until it produced a meaning that he believed to be worthy of God. Origen agreed with Philo concerning the verbal inspiration of Scripture.<sup>16</sup> The Holy Spirit was the author of the Bible and the Bible contained truth in so far as the Logos himself dwelt in Scripture. The Logos was present in every word and number of Scripture, both throughout the Old Testament and the documents, of what would later be recognized as the New Testament, regarded as testifying authoritatively to the life and meaning of Christ. The only point, regarding inspiration, on which Origen disagreed with Philo was that of irrational ecstasy. Origen's emphasis on rationalism made it impossible for him to think of anything irrational being involved in the relationship between God and man. In his system the Spirit heightens human powers and clears the mind so that the divine truth may clearly be seen and accurately communicated. Both Philo and Origen were only able to employ their allegorical methods of interpretation because they had first been able to assure them-

selves of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Origen, in his indebtedness to Philo, was able to free himself from the restrictive proof-text method of using the Bible in disputes. Suddenly even the most unpromising portions of Scripture were revealed as being rich in moral and spiritual truth.

Once it had been ascertained that the Bible had been verbally inspired, the question arose as to how an inspired meaning could be found in unpromising and contradictory passages. It also followed that if a deep, spiritual meaning could be found in unpromising passages, then a deep meaning could be found to underlie even the more obviously meaningful texts. The search was on for a method of interpretation that would draw this spiritual meaning out of texts. Once again Origen found his answer in the writings of Philo and Clement, who had himself been influenced by Philo. Philo, a man steeped in Greek philosophy, had discovered in the course of his studies a method of interpreting Greek traditions in such a way that they would be in line with prevailing philosophical opinions. This allegorical interpretation was thought to have originated in Plato's thought. As time progressed allegory developed into an elaborate style of interpretation whereby a philosopher could gain credibility for his thought by pointing out that the ancient authorities agreed with him - in spite of the fact that, if taken literally, they did not appear to. Philo saw in this a valuable way of interpreting the Jewish sacred writings in such a way as to commend the faith to educated Greeks. Philo, very much in the Platonic tradition, thought of timeless truth underlying the veil of the law in the Old Testament. He resolved the Old Testament words and incidents into ethical, psychological and philosophic teachings. A text had to be made to reveal the teachings of Greek philosophy - so that educated Gentiles could be drawn to the God of the Jews as the source of all truth. Philo's allegorical method was made up of two elements.

There was the 'physical' allegory, which yielded teachings about God and the world - in short, it was concerned with speculation about the nature of things. There was also 'ethical' allegory, which yielded teachings of a moral and psychological nature. The most important thing about Philo's allegory, however, was that, for an interpretation to be truly allegorical, the literal sense had to be discarded. It would seem that allegorization of this kind was introduced into Christianity by Clement of Alexandria. Up to the time of this introduction Palestinian Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity had restricted themselves to a cautious type of allegory used mainly to harmonise inconsistencies and eliminate absurdities and unedifying incidents. A similar procedure had been undertaken at Qumran. There had not yet been a consistent effort to make Scripture yield philosophical insights as Philo had done in Judaism. An exception is the interpretation of the Gnostic writers who consistently employed a method of interpretation, not unlike that used by Clement and Origen, calculated to make texts produce evidence in support of their systems. Clement was the first to introduce allegory of a Philonic type into Christianity. Clement, however, lacked the consistency of application and the systematic pursuit displayed in Origen's interpretation. Both Clement and Origen show the evidence of their Philonic legacy. They both retained the ethical element in Philo's allegory, but rejected his 'physical' category - renaming something of a very similar nature 'spiritual' allegory. Where Clement had been rather random and unsystematic, Origen set about the task in a clearly ordered way - even if one does sometimes get the impression that there was the odd unsystematic moment. Origen was not a pure allegorist, as Philo had been, in the sense that he forsook the literal meaning as a matter of principle.<sup>17</sup> Wherever possible he tried to move from the literal meaning to the spiritual meaning of the text. Only when there was clearly no sensible literal meaning did he move directly to allegorical interpretation. Even his allegorical

meaning did not lie beyond check, because he was adamant that an allegorical exegesis had to produce results consistent with Church tradition. This is not, in spite of initial impressions, a circular argument because, despite the fact that he believed that Scripture was the only source of Church tradition, he maintained too that obscure passages of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of passages that were readily, literally understandable. Origen's spiritual interpretation combined Philonic allegory with the typology of Justin and Irenaeus so that the Old Testament could be shown to anticipate the revelation of the eternal Truth in Christ, while the 'New Testament' could be shown to anticipate the future glory of the pure contemplation of Truth. He believed, however, that allegorical interpretation was only for the spiritually mature Christian<sup>18</sup> and set about expounding the spiritual sense only once he had outlined the literal meaning for the simple and the moral meaning for the slightly more mature.

The next step of our investigation is to examine the way in which Origen actually implements this theory of exegesis. At the same time we will discuss the theological structure that undergirds it. Karen Torjensen's book (1986) is an extremely informative study of this issue and it would be beneficial to present her findings at this point. Torjensen demonstrates that Origen's exegesis is characterized by a uniform, well-defined and recurring pattern of procedures. It is clear that the focal point around which Origen has organised this pattern of procedures is the reader. Investigation also reveals that there is a twofold division of these steps. Origen has a certain, characteristic way of interpreting each verse and then, along with this, a certain way of linking together the verses thus interpreted. The basis of Origen's interpretation of each individual verse is his belief that the Bible is the medium through which Christ continues the ministry that was his life when on earth. The Bible,

and more particularly the verse in question, contains Christ's teaching word to the writer, but it is also the means by which Christ's teaching is addressed to the contemporary reader. The teaching word that Christ addressed to the writer is the same word that he addresses to the contemporary reader - and this is possible because the writer and reader share a common identity in that they are both sinners undertaking a journey back to God.

Origen therefore interprets each verse in such a way as to draw the reader into it so that the teaching, saving word of Christ is now addressed to him - interestingly enough, while this seems to be true of much of his other exegesis, it would not appear to be quite so marked in his commentary on John. Having interpreted the individual verses in this way, Origen then organises the sequence of verses in such a way as to draw the reader on, from the position at which he found himself at the beginning of his interpretation, and to lead him further along the path that the soul must travel on its journey back to God. Christ in his earthly ministry accommodated himself to the spiritual level of the writer, leading him by education, to greater spiritual heights. Christ continues his saving activity but this time he uses Scripture and through it accommodates his teaching word to the situation of the reader, leading him on along the journey of the soul by progressive education - which is a Platonic concept. Scripture is the means by which Christ continues his saving work and the Church is the community of salvation, because it is there that Scripture is read and expounded.

Just as Origen strings together the interpreted verses and chapters of a book in such a way as to draw the reader from his present position to greater spiritual heights, in much the same way he views the Bible as a whole as a unit which progressively leads man from ignorance to knowledge and salvation. In the Old Testament one experiences the Logos indirectly as he is mediated to the reader through

the experience of the writer. In the New Testament one experiences the Logos directly, first in the flesh and then in the Spirit. The Bible as a whole, therefore, reflects the journey of the soul. One begins by indirect experience of the Logos. This paves the way for a direct encounter with the Logos. One encounters the Logos first in the flesh and this prepares one for the spiritual encounter, which is perfection. One begins by reading the Old Testament literally and morally, which paves the way for an encounter of limited proportions as one reads the New Testament literally and morally. This is a necessary preliminary to reading the New Testament spiritually - which reveals the Logos spiritually. Once one is able to encounter the Logos spiritually, one has attained perfection for one is now in a position to contemplate the perfect heavenly realities. In this state of perfection, expressed in Platonic terms, the reader may return to the Old Testament and see in it the anticipations of the perfect heavenly things to come, revealed in Christ. At this stage of the spiritual journey it would seem that no real distinction exists between the revelation contained in the Old Testament and that contained in the New Testament. It would also seem that history has been resolved into a type of charade, the only purpose of which is to lead one to ultimate truth. Closely associated with this is the fact that the perfect have no further use of the Jesus Christ of history. The earthly, and everything associated with it, has served its purpose - the perfected, experienced souls contemplate God directly again.

In conclusion, Origen's Biblical exegesis was not random, but carefully considered and systematic in nature. His understanding of the task of exegesis was shaped by his systematic understanding of the nature of reality. Origen's understanding of reality and the human plight was syncretistic, but never uncritically so. He was a Christian who did not hesitate to modify and use whatever means presented

themselves as useful in his endeavour to commend his faith to people. He began by constructing a model which best represented his understanding of reality. In this he relied heavily on Plato. It was, in spite of the many Platonic elements and emphases, a Christian model, calculated to commend Christianity to educated pagans. Origen's understanding of the nature and role of Scripture is an essential part of that model, for Christ is an essential part of the model of reality and Scripture is the medium through which he is communicated and by which redemption takes place. Great emphasis is placed on the fall and redemption of the soul, and his exegesis finds the proper context in the return of the soul to God. Scripture is interpreted in such a way as to facilitate the education of the soul, so that in Origen's system it becomes the way in which the teaching Logos is made present and in which salvation is accomplished.

## II

The aim of this section is to demonstrate that Origen's context was instrumental in determining his interpretation of the Johannine Prologue. An attempt will be made to show clearly that Origen's interpretation of John 1:1-18 is suffused with many of his favourite themes and was undertaken in a characteristically Origenist fashion. The sources upon which the findings are based are: 1) the fragments of Origen's commentary on the Prologue (consisting of an interpretation of the first seven verses); 2) two collections of catena fragments (one dealing with John 1:1, 4-8, 12-18 and the other with John 1:1, 2, 4, 5, 13, 15). The many other references to the Prologue of John's Gospel in Origen's other works have not been used in this examination since the sources already cited provide ample evidence in support of the thesis that Origen has created the meaning of the Prologue in terms of his context. The sections of Origen's interpretation that are quoted in the text are numbered in accordance with the numbering of the



sections in Preuschen (1903) - hereafter abbreviated as GCS.

The thesis that Origen's context was influential in determining his interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel will be vindicated by noting some of his characteristic themes and practices and by showing that these occur in his commentary. The division into characteristic themes and practices and the arrangement of certain substantiating quotations under each of these headings is, while necessary to achieve the desired end, of a somewhat artificial nature since many of the themes under investigation are inseparably interwoven and interdependent and many of the quotations used in support of one point could as easily be used to illustrate what is meant under one of the other headings.

Origen's commentary on John's Gospel is a somewhat rambling work in which he shows himself ready to go off at a tangent at every opportunity. In the investigation that will follow it should be borne in mind that this commentary is by no means typical of his usual approach to commentary writing. Tradition has it that a nobleman, a certain Ambrosius, was led from Valentinianism by Origen. Confronted by the folly of his previous ways, Ambrosius asked Origen to write a commentary on John's Gospel that specifically set out to refute the errors contained in the only commentary on the gospel extant at that time - the Valentinian document written by Heracleon in about 150. Origen therefore started the uncompleted task, in about 225, of writing a commentary that he believed to be in keeping with the true nature of Scripture and the tradition of the Church. It was this avowedly polemical purpose that set his commentary on John apart from his other commentaries. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to illustrating and supporting the contention that Origen interpreted John 1:1-18 in a way that bears witness to many of his perennial concerns. In presenting the results of this

investigation, the contextual influences will be divided up into categories, presented in no particular or exhaustive order here, which will be illustrated by means of frequent reference to the text of the commentary. Perhaps the best place to begin is the pronounced anti-Valentinian thrust of the commentary, arising, contextually, out of the very purpose of its creation.

Contextual factors instrumental in the creation of meaning:

1. Heracleon and the Valentinians:

Since Origen's commentary altogether directs against Gnostics it is hardly surprising to discover that he manipulates texts so that they may say a relevant word with regard to the false teachings of the Gnostics. Book I 277-288 is an extended example of this manipulation in which Origen, in interpreting the first verse of the Prologue, goes far afield to demonstrate that not only John but also other Old Testament and New Testament writers went out of their way to refute the teachings of the Gnostic type. It is not at all surprising, however, bearing in mind the nature and content of the Johannine Prologue, that Origen contends against Heracleon on three issues. There is the matter of creation, the problem of the nature of Christ, and the issue as to whether or not Christ needed prophets of old as witnesses. Let us examine what the Gnostics said with regard to these matters and then see how Origen's interpretation set out to refute their theories.

In truly Gnostic fashion Heracleon maintained that there were really two Gods in existence. There was the all-powerful good God and there was the inferior, tormenting demiurge. The true God had nothing to do with the creation of the world. The weaker, evil demiurge had created an evil world in which the spiritual selves of the Gnostics were trapped in misery. By way of some highly imaginative thinking the Gnostics came to identify the God of the Old Testament with the demiurge and the Father of

Jesus Christ with the unknown, all-powerful God. Christ, continued Heracleon, had been sent from on high by the unknown God to free his spiritual offspring from their entrapment in evil bodies in an evil world under the power of the demiurge and his minions. Origen, in the light of these serious and often all too plausible explanations, had to stress the fact that the God of the Old Testament is also the Father of Jesus Christ and the Creator of the world. There are many passages in his commentary where this point is emphasised - I 82 is a particularly instructive example.

ὁ Θεὸς θαυμάζειν μοι εἶπεισι, πῶς δυοὶ θεοὶ προσάπτουσιν ἀμφοτέρως  
 τὰς δικθῆκας οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι, αἷκ ἕλαττον καὶ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ῥητοῦ  
 ἐλεγχόμενοι. πῶς γὰρ δύναται ἀρχὴ εἶναι τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὡς αὐτὰ οἰοῦνται, ἑτέρου  
 τυγχάνων θεοῦ ὁ Ἰωάννης, ὁ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀγνοῦν, ὡς νομίζουσα,  
 τὴν καινὴν θεότητα;

In a reference to Mark 1:1-3 Origen expresses his amazement at the illogical nature of the Gnostic understanding of two gods - one, the demiurge, associated with the Old Testament and the other, the previously unknown Father of Jesus Christ, associated with the New Testament. He proceeds to point out a fatal error in the argument of οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι. Mark, he points out, refutes the Gnostic theory. Mark emphasizes that John the Baptist preceded Jesus and witnessed to him. The Gnostics claimed that until the arrival of Jesus Christ the true God had remained hidden from mankind and even from the demiurge himself. How was it possible then, asks Origen, for someone whom the gospels so clearly associated with the God of the Old Testament even to know about Christ, let alone bear witness to him as the Son of the unknown God? While Origen does not explicitly mention creation in this passage, it is clear that he is identifying the Father of Jesus Christ with the Creator of the world. There are a great many sections in the commentary that explicitly connect the Father of Jesus Christ with the act of

creation. A catena fragment dealing with John 1:16 (GCS 493) contains one of these more explicit references to God the Creator:

ἘΠΕΙ Οὖν ἡ ἀρετὴ χάρις ἐστὶ κεχαριτωμένον ποιῶσα τὸν  
 ἔχοντα, ὅταν ἡμῖν προαιρετικῶς κατορθωθῇ αὐτή, τὴν κλαῦτα  
 τὸ ἐκ Θεοῦ παραγίνεται, καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ δίδουσθαι παρὰ  
 Θεοῦ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος.

In this passage Origen comments on the *χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος* in John 1:16. In essence, Origen says that in Christ God adds supernatural graces to the natural ones already given. Natural man is the recipient of natural graces, even before the advent of Jesus Christ. God is the source of all good gifts - which includes all the natural ones. In the coming of Christ, God adds supernatural, spiritual gifts to the natural ones that he has already given. Here Origen is identifying the Father of Jesus Christ with the Creator, since the Creator alone is able to give natural gifts. To phrase it differently, the Creator, who is the source of all providence and other good gifts, is the One who in Christ provides also the ultimate spiritual gifts. While Origen does not explicitly mention any false teachings which he is trying to refute, it would seem to be reasonable to assume that, given the initial impetus for his commentary on John, he has the Gnostics in mind as he comments on God as the author of natural and supernatural gifts. To the Gnostics Origen would have appeared to be contradicting himself since they believed that the demiurge was responsible for everything physical and natural while the unknown God was responsible for the unanticipated grace that had been made known to the Gnostics in Christ. The Gnostics would never have associated the unknown God with anything natural since all created things, by virtue of their origin and their evil or morally indifferent character, could never, by definition, be associated with the word grace.

It seems quite possible, therefore, that Origen may have been contending against the Gnostic distinction between τὸ δίκαιον and τὸ ἀγαθόν, used of the demiurge and the unknown God respectively. This distinction is set forth in I 253:

τὸ δὲ σῆμα τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν αἰρέσεων εἰς τὸ ἕτερον εἰπεῖν τὸν δίκαιον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, μὴ τρανωθῆν δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς, ὁληθεῖσι δίκαιον μὲν εἶναι τὸν δημιουργόν, ἀγαθὸν δὲ τὸν τοῦ χριστοῦ πατέρα, ὅμαι μετ' ἐξετάσεως ἀκριβῶς βασανισθῆν δύνασθαι λέγεσθαι ἐπὶ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ • κ.τ.λ.

The Gnostics said that the demiurge was the God of judgment and wrath. He was the God who had given the Law to the people of Israel in the Old Testament and who was always mercilessly punishing them for their failures. By contrast, the unknown God was good and freely gave spiritual men all that was necessary to free them from the clutches of the dictatorial demiurge and set them on the path that would lead them to their heavenly home. Origen, in his interpretation of the Johannine Prologue, set about identifying the Father of Jesus Christ with the God of the Old Testament. Creation and the troublesome aspects of the nature of God revealed in the Old Testament were once again attributed to the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, in accordance, said Origen, with the true meaning of Scripture and the tradition of the Church.

Having investigated only a few of the great many anti-Gnostic references to the unity of the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, with the inherent confirmation of God as both Creator and Redeemer, let us now turn our attention to the anti-Gnostic element in Origen's discussion on the nature of Christ. Origen did not devote as much time to this as he did to the previous topic, but book II 16 is an example of his context-dictated treatment of the nature of the person of Christ:

καὶ τὸ πολλοὺς φιλοθέου εἶναι εὐχομένους τὰράσσον εὐλαβουμένους δύο ἀναγορευσαί θεοὺς καὶ παρὰ τοῦτο

περιπίπτοντας ψευδέσι καὶ ἀσεβέσι δόγμασιν, ἧτοι ἀρνούμενους ἰδιότητα  
 υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς, ὁμολογοῦντας Θεὸν εἶναι τὸν  
 μέχρι ὀνόματος παρ' αὐτοῖς » υἱὸν « προσκαφευόμενον, ἢ  
 ἀρνούμενους τὴν Θεότητα τοῦ υἱοῦ πθένης δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν  
 ἰδιότητα καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν κατὰ περιγραφὴν τυγχάνουσιν  
 ἑτέραν τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐντεῦθεν λύεσθαι δύναται.

This section of the commentary may be said to present concisely the reason for the existence of Origen's commentary. The faithful are being troubled and retarded in their spiritual growth by false teaching of a Gnostic type. Indeed, some are even leaving the true way to involve themselves with those who spread this false teaching. The Gnostic talk of two gods is making the faithful uneasy and some, led astray by the convincing falsehood, have already started to entertain false notions as to the nature of Jesus Christ. Either they deny the divinity of the Son or else they deny his separate identify or 'ownness'. The initial disturbance in the form of talk of two gods is a clearly identifiable reference to Gnostic speculation. The two misconceptions as to the nature of Christ, however, are not as easy to classify with certainty. They may well also be Gnostic in origin, and there is no reason to imagine that they are not, since Origen seems to link them with the misconception as to the existence of two distinct, different gods. Whatever the case, it emerges that the Prologue leads Origen to create meaning in response to the demands of his context - in this case he is led to interpret the Prologue in such a way as to refute those who hold misleading and mistaken ideas as to the nature of Christ.

The third main area in which Origen set out to refute the false teaching circulating at the time, particularly in Heracleon's commentary, was that of the testimony of the prophets to the coming of Christ. Book II 199 demonstrates

this concern:

τῶν ἑτεροδόξων τινὲς πιστεύειν φάσκοντες εἰς τὸν Χριστόν, καὶ  
διὰ τὸ ἀναπλάσσειν ἕτερον (θεὸν) παρὰ τὸν δημιουργὸν ὡς ἀκόλουθον  
αὐτοῖς οὐ προσέμενοι τὴν ἐπιδημίαν αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν προφητῶν  
προκατηγγέσθαι, ἀνατρέπειν πειρῶνται τὰς διὰ τῶν προφητῶν  
περὶ Χριστοῦ μαρτυρίας, φάσκοντες μὴ δεῖσθαι μαρτύρων τῶν υἱὸν  
τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἔχοντα τὸ τοῦ πιστεύεσθαι ἄξιον ἐν τε ᾧς  
κατήγγειλε σωτηρίους λόγους δυνάμειως πεπληρωμένοι καὶ  
ἐν τεραστίοις ἔργοις αὐτόθεν καταπλήξασθαι πάνθ' ὄντινῶν  
δυναμῆν.

In an earlier section we noted how Origen referred to Mark 1:1-3 in order to prove the illogical nature of the Gnostic argument for the existence of two gods. The same passage could also be invoked to demonstrate that Christ had prophets to witness to his coming. But the emphasis is different here since the question which Origen sets out to address is not so much that of the possibility of Old Testament prophets witnessing to Christ as that of the necessity of witnesses to Christ. He outlines the Gnostic argument against the necessity of witnesses to Christ's coming and thereby demonstrates that the text has led him to create meaning in terms of his context. The Gnostics maintained that no witnesses were necessary since Christ's words and deeds were self-authenticating and commended him to people. The spiritual man, they said, was drowsy and forgetful of his true nature and home as he lay imprisoned under the spell of the demiurge. All that was necessary to break the spell was an encounter with the heavenly envoy. The Gnostic needed no witness to introduce him to Christ because as soon as he met him he recognised him as a messenger from his spiritual home. Suddenly memory returned and the spell was broken. Because Christ and the gnostic both came from the heavenly realm instant recognition of the Revealer was possible and witnesses were unnecessary.

It is hardly necessary to mention all the other passages that deal specifically with the Gnostic threat. Suffice it to say that, throughout the commentary on the Prologue, Origen has continually had the Gnostics in mind and constantly been aware of Heracleon's interpretation of John's Gospel. The few examples given above have been included merely to demonstrate that Origen has been guided by the text to create meaning in terms of the particular circumstances and needs of his context. In this case Origen has been guided by the text so as to create a meaning useful for combating the very real danger posed by Gnostic teaching in general, and Heracleon's commentary in particular.

## 2. Platonism:

As we noted in the first part of this chapter, Origen was steeped in Platonic philosophy. This section seeks to demonstrate that his commentary on the Prologue of John bears the evidence of his interest in Platonism. The presence of Platonism will be demonstrated under four headings: the existence of evil as a state of non-being; the reflection of the perfect heavenly realities in the world; perfection as a spiritual state free from the constraints of matter; Trinitarian difficulties. These sections are by no means exhaustive and many other important examples, such as I 267-290 in which men are said to become λογικοὶ by virtue of their involvement with the Λόγος, are not included. A Platonic understanding of evil appears to be present in II 91 ff.

ἴδωμεν δέ, διὰ τί πρόσκειται τὸ »καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν«. τισὶ καὶν δόξαι περὶ τὸν τυγχάνειν τὸ »χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν« ἐπιφερόμενον τῷ »Πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο«. εἰ γὰρ πᾶν ὀτιποιοῦν »διὰ τοῦ λόγου« γεγένηται, οὐδὲν »χωρὶς τοῦ λόγου« γεγένηται. οὐκέτι μέντοι γε ἀκολουθεῖ τῷ χωρὶς τοῦ λόγου <μη> γεγενῆσθαι τι τὸ πάντα διὰ τοῦ λόγου γεγενῆσθαι. ἔξεστι γὰρ οὐδενὸς



χωρὶς τοῦ λόγου γεγενημένου, μὴ μόνον διὰ τοῦ λόγου  
γεγονέναι πάντα ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τινά. κ.τ.λ.

This paragraph is the beginning of a discussion on the nature of evil based on a rather unusual understanding of the punctuation of John 1:3. Origen understood evil in the sense of the privation of good. In II 95 f God is referred to as ὁ ὢν and through his Word everything has come into existence. God is good and everything that has come into existence through his Word is good too. But, said Origen, as soon as anything is created then there are automatically 'gaps' left where other things have not been created. Along with existence there is always non-existence. In Origen's thought non-existence is itself of an ontological nature. Something may exist, paradoxically, by virtue of its obvious omission. Just as space or emptiness may be said to exist by virtue of the existence of concrete objects between which nothing else concrete lies, so too evil may be said to exist in virtue of the creation of good. In II 96 evil is described as τὸ οὐκ ὄν. God has created everything through his Word and everything that he has created is therefore good. By virtue of this good creation that has come into being that which has not been created has also, by its omission, received an ontological status and has been given the character of evil. Evil has come into being only indirectly and therefore has only a transitory existence. What appears to make this notion of evil Platonic in nature is that evil is only a passing phenomenon of limited duration since it does not have a heavenly prototype and has no part in the Word. Evil may seem real enough, but it is not real in the sense that it does not correspond to a perfect heavenly form. In Platonic thought the real world is the heavenly world and things on earth are only copies of the heavenly realities. Something may be said to exist, strictly speaking, only if it has a heavenly masterplan and everything that does not have this perfect heavenly counterpart does not in

fact exist, despite its real appearance. It is for this reason that Origen's privative understanding of evil may be classified as Platonic.

A second and related aspect of Platonism in Origen's commentary has to do with his understanding of creation as conforming to some sort of heavenly masterplan. An example of Origen's treatment of this subject may be found at I 114 ff:

οἶμαι γάρ, ὡσπερ κατὰ τοὺς ἀρχιτεκτονικοὺς τύπους οἰκοδομεῖται ἢ τεκταίνεταί οἰκία καὶ ναὺς, ἀρχὴν τῆς οἰκίας καὶ τῆς νεὼς ἔχόντων τοὺς ἐν τῷ τεχνίτῃ τύπους καὶ λόγους, οὕτω τὰ σύμπαντα γεγονέναι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ προτρανωθέντας ὑπὸ Θεοῦ τῶν ἔσομένων λόγους. » Πάντα γὰρ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησε. « κ.τ.λ.

Origen begins his discussion by saying that a house or a ship is built in accordance with plans. If this is true, then the beginning of the existence of the house or ship lies in the mind of the craftsman. This is also true of the universe. The universe has been created in accordance with God's plans and the beginning of the universe lies, therefore, in the mind of God. Origen uses Ps 103:24 (LXX) to advance his argument. God, according to this Psalm, made everything in Wisdom. God was the source of Wisdom and gave her the task of planning creation. Wisdom was able to give shape and form to creation because she had in her the models upon which creation could be based. We need not follow Origen's argument beyond this point because Platonism is already very much in evidence as regards his understanding of creation. Plato's theory of forms clearly lies behind this account of creation by Wisdom. As we have said, in Platonic thought the world, as we know it, is based on corresponding, perfect heavenly forms. The fact that Origen mentions a plan upon which creation is based is not in itself

necessarily particularly Platonic, but what is markedly Platonic is the mention of models, that exist in Wisdom - the source and agent of creation, upon which creation is based.

A third area in which Platonism appears to be present is in Origen's understanding of perfection as a spiritual state free from the constraints of matter, as is found, for example, in his interpretation of John 1:18 (GCS 494):

Διττοῦ τοῦ Θεωρεῖν ὄντος, αἰσθητικοῦ τε καὶ νοητικοῦ, τὸ μὲν τῶν σωμάτων τὸ δὲ τῶν ζωμάτων ἔστιν ἀντληπτικόν. διὸ καὶ τὰ ὑποκείμενα τῷ νῷ καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τούτου θεωρούμενα ἀόρατά φημεν, οὐ τῷ μὴ ὁρᾶσθαι ἀλλὰ τῷ μὴ πεφυκέναί βλεπέσθαι. οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν σωμάτων ἀόρατον, καὶν ἔγω ποτὲ τυγχάνω τῆς ὀψεως μὴ ὁράται. οὐ γὰρ τὸ μὴ ὁρᾶσθαι σημαίνει τὸ ἀόρατον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὴ πεφυκέναί πρὸς τοῦτο. κ.τ.λ.

Origen's emphasis on ὁ νοῦς appears to be Platonic. This is the only part of man that is of any enduring consequence. The body passes away but man's rational soul continues to survive. The only part of man that can have any knowledge of, or encounter with, God is his rational soul. Man's body, however, is a severe spiritual hinderance. In itself the body is not evil, but it is a limitation that prevents man from realising his spiritual potential. Ignorance and evil prevent man from seeing God, and so does matter. In this life man can only have a partial knowledge of God both because evil and ignorance cloud his vision and also because his physical state does not allow him to raise his eyes heavenward. It is obvious, therefore, that man can only see God once he has been delivered from his physical state. It is this that leads one to view the sentiment expressed in this interpretation as, at the very least, Greek or, more probably, Platonic in origin. Characteristically, matter is not evil in the Gnostic sense, but is

merely the irritatingly unavoidable interference of the physical in the true life of the soul. With death comes the release from the body and the possibility of seeing God as the spiritual potential of the soul is liberated.

Origen's Platonic understanding of God resulted in his having serious difficulty in trying to give the Son, in this case, his true position and status without detracting from his detached monotheism. An example of this is II 163 ff:

Ἰηγήσει δέ τις, εἰ ἐπὶ τοῦ πατρὸς τέτρακται τὸ  
 »Σκοτία οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐδέμια«, πῶς τὸ ἔξαίρετον  
 ἔροῦμεν εἶναι ἐν αὐτῷ, πάντη ἀναμάρτητον καὶ τὸν  
 σωτῆρα νοοῦντες, ὥστε καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ ἂν εἶπειν,  
 ὅτι »φῶς ἔστι καὶ σκοτία οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ  
 οὐδέμια«. κ.τ.λ.

Origen's discussion of John 1:5 leads on to an examination of 1 John 1:5 and, in particular, the following part of that verse: 'There is no darkness in him'. Origen attributes the sense of this verse to the Father, and not to the Son. There is no darkness in the Father and there never has been. The Son, on the other hand, has known darkness in that he took upon himself our sins and death, and in that way removed our darkness.

... τούτῳ ὁ πατήρ ἔχει μόνος τὸ »Σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ  
 οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδέμια«, τοῦ χριστοῦ διὰ τὴν πρὸς  
 ἀνθρώπους εὐεργεσίαν ἐφ' αὐτὸν τὰς ἡμῶν σκοτίας  
 ἀναδέδεγμένου, ἵνα τῇ συνάμει αὐτοῦ καταργήσῃ  
 ἡμῶν τὸν θάνατον καὶ ἐξαφανίσῃ τὸ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ  
 ἡμῶν σκότος κ.τ.λ.

Christ has known darkness in the act of removing our darkness. The father, however, has remained peacefully detached. Here Origen seems to be entertaining a Platonic idea of God which causes him a great many serious difficulties in his Trinitarian thinking. God is serenely

detached from the world and is, among the other characteristics which the Platonists attribute to him, isolated. God is all-knowing and all-powerful, but he is also coolly detached from the affairs of the world. God sends Christ to involve himself, but He remains uninvolved. In this way Origen opens himself to the danger of being accused of making the Son a separate entity who is less than God.

In conclusion, Platonism, as is the case with many of the other criteria in terms of which we examine Origen's commentary, is everywhere present in the text under examination. Very often it is explicit, more often it is implicit in what is said. Our examination has brought to light four of the more obvious examples of the presence of Platonism. There are many more. We have, however, determined that Platonism, as a contextual factor, has been responsible to some extent for the meaning that Origen creates in response to the guidance of John's Prologue.

### 3. The journey of the soul:

As we noted earlier, Origen was a systematic thinker who developed a Christian system of his own with which to refute the Gnostic systems. This section of the chapter attempts to determine whether he has interpreted the Prologue in terms of this system outlined in De principiis. Let us begin with the creation, a brief assertion about which, contained in I 104, appears to bear some resemblance to what is said in De principiis. In an extended interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 he says:

Πρὸς τούτοις ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ καθ' ὅσον οἶον κατὰ τὸ εἶδος, οὕτως· εἶπερ εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου ὁ πρωτότεκος πάσης κτίσεως, ἀρχὴ αὐτοῦ ὁ πατήρ ἐστιν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Χριστὸς ἀρχὴ τῶν κατ' εἰκόνα γενομένων Θεοῦ. κ.τ.λ.

Origen says that Christ is the firstborn of all creation and, as such, has the Father as his ἀρχή. Christ is in the image of the Father and is himself the ἀρχή of all creatures created in the image of God. This line of thought seems to be in keeping with the understanding of the creation of rational souls in De principiis I 5. In his systematic treatment of the subject, Origen appears to be blurring the distinction between rational souls and God. His chain-of-being understanding of the creation of rational souls seems to find an echo in this section of the commentary. Here too there seems to be a blurring of the division between God and man. The begetting of the Son does not, in this section, seem to be very different from the begetting/creation of the rational souls, and in both cases they are said to be in the image of God.

The creation of different divine beings leading down to the creation of man is spoken of in I 216:

Ὁ τοίνυν τῶν ὄλων Θεὸς πρῶτόν τι τῆς τυχῆς γένος λογικὸν πεποίηκεν, ὅπερ ἅμα τοὺς καλουμένους Θεούς, καὶ δεύτερον ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος καλεῖσθαι «Θρόνοι», καὶ τρίτον χωρὶς δισταξείως «ἀρχαί». οὕτω δὲ τῷ λογικῷ καταβατέον ἐπὶ ἑσχατὸν λογικόν, τάχα οὐκ ἄλλο τι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τυγχάνον.

In De principiis I 8 Origen speaks of the fall of the rational souls. The rational souls fell because, in their innocence, they let their attention wander - thinking, in their naïve state, that God was not all-sufficient to their needs. Instead of being completely absorbed in the contemplation of God, their attention wandered and they began to fall. The distance that they fell was determined by the extent to which the souls had let their attention wander. The most inattentive fell the furthest and were made demons, and those who had been only slightly

more attentive were made humans, while those who had been the most attentive were made angels. In the above section of the commentary we seem to see a very similar sentiment expressed. There is not only the mention of the creation of various divine beings leading to man, there is also the mention of λογικός - a Platonic concept of central significance in Origen's understanding of the creation and fall of the rational souls.

In keeping with Origen's understanding of salvation, there are also references to Christ as himself the Gospel. In I 33 he says that in the Law and the prophets of the Old Testament the advent of the Gospel was announced. This announcement was not the Gospel itself, but only predicted the coming of Jesus Christ who is himself the Gospel. With the advent of Christ, however, everything associated with him, even his announcement became part of the Good News.

λεχθείη δ' ἂν πρὸς τοῦτο ὅτι πρὸ τῆς Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίας ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται, ἅτε μηδέπω ἐκδηλώθησαν τοῦ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς μυστήρια σαφηνίζοντος οὐκ εἶχον τὸ ἐπάγγελμα τοῦ περὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ὄρου. ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἐπιδημίας καὶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον σωματοποιήθησαν θελήσας τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ πάντα ὡσεὶ εὐαγγέλιον πεποιήκειν.

In I 65 Christ is thought of as both the Gospel and the one who proclaims the Good News:

οὐ θαυμαστόν ἐστὶ εἰ τοῖς μέλλουσιν εὐαγγελίζεσθαι τὰ ἀγαθὰ Ἰησοῦς εὐαγγελίζεται τὰ ἀγαθὰ, οὐχ ἄλλα τυγχάνοντα ἑαυτοῦ. ἑαυτὸν γὰρ εὐαγγελίζεται ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῖς συναγμένοις οὐ δι' ἄλλων αὐτὸν μαθεῖν. κ.τ.λ.

Origen believed that education was the way to salvation. The fallen souls had to be taught the way to God. The

goal of the educative process was pure contemplation of God. The soul could not, however, begin by direct contemplation of God. It had to be educated and taught the way of life that would climax in this contemplation. Christ was the teacher and also, because he was the Word of God, the Message. As the embodiment of the divine communication, Christ is the Communicator and the Communication. Closely associated with the idea of Christ's teaching activity is the concept of accommodation. This principle, which is such a characteristic theme in Origen's thought, appears to be present in I 39:

καὶ τοῦτο δὲ εἰδέναι ἔχρην, ὅτι ὡς περ ἔστι  
 »νόμος σκιάν« περιέχων »τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν«  
 ὑπὸ τοῦ κατὰ ἀλήθειαν καταγγελλομένου νόμου  
 δηλουμένων, οὕτω καὶ εὐαγγέλιον σκιάν μυστηρίων  
 Χριστοῦ διδάσκει τὸ νομιζόμενον ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν  
 ἐντυγχανόντων νοεῖσθαι.

According to the principle of accommodation, the Word presents itself in a form that is acceptable to the one to whom it is addressed. The Word of God is aware of the spiritual level of the person in question and, without being too crudely anthropomorphic, armed with this knowledge is able to meet the person on his own level. Once the person has accepted the Word, the process of education begins. The person is shepherded along the road to spiritual maturity by the Word as he is gradually introduced to deeper spiritual truths. This principle seems to be in evidence in the above quotation. The gospel presents those who do not yet know reality, as it is to be seen in Christ, with only the slightest and most tantalising glimpses of the truth. To present these people with a mature understanding of the Gospel would be to frighten them off. Because of this, the Word presents itself to the spiritually immature in a way that they can understand and that leaves them eager to know more. This calls to mind Origen's distinction between πνευματικῶς



καὶ σωματικῶς χριστιανίζεεν and his three levels of interpretation graded in accordance with the principle of accommodation.

In II 140 ff another characteristically Origenist thought is expressed:

Φέρε δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς καὶ τοῦτο ζητήσωμεν, εἰ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν μόνων ἀνθρώπων φῶς καὶ μὴ πάντος οὐτινοσοῦν ἐν μακαριότητι τυγχάνοντος. ἔαν γὰρ ταῦτόν ἦ «ζωὴ» καὶ «φῶς ἀνθρώπων» καὶ μόνων ἀνθρώπων ἢ τὸ τοῦ χριστοῦ φῶς, μόνων ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦτο δ' ὑπολαμβάνειν ἔστιν ἡλίθια ἄμικ καὶ ἄσεβής, ἀνημαρτυρουσῶν τῶν ἄλλων γραφῶν ταύτῃ τῇ ἐκδοχῇ, εἰ γέ, ὅταν προκόψωμεν, ἐσάγγελαι ἐσόμεθα. κ.τ.λ.

We have already mentioned the understanding of the fall of the rational souls which Origen set forth in his De principiis. The distance which the souls fell determined whether they became angels, humans, or demons. In the above quotation we find the expression of the natural conclusion to such a line of thought. The Word has come to save not only man, but all rational creatures - which includes both angels and demons. It is not man alone who is in need of the light of the Word - it is all the fallen rational souls who need this light. This subject will be further addressed in a discussion on I 20-23.

Another characteristic emphasis is that of salvation in terms of intellectual involvement. The stress on the noetic way is very much in evidence in Origen's commentary on John's Prologue. An example of this is I 51:

Ἡσαΐας δὲ φάσκων· «Ὡς ὑφαῖοι οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων ἀγαθῶν», τὸ ὑφαῖον καὶ ἐν καιρῷ γινόμενον τῶν ἀποστόλων ὁδεύοντων τὸν εἰπόντα· «Ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ ὁδὸς» κήρυγμα νοήσας ἐπαλνεῖ «πόδες» τοὺς δὲ τῆς νοητῆς ὁδοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ βαδίζοντας διὰ

τὴ τῆς Θύρας εἰσίστηντας πρὸς τὸν Θεόν» ἀγχαῖα « δὲ  
εὐαγγελίζονται οὗτοι, ὧν ὠραῖοί εἰσιν ἃ πόδες, τὸν  
Ἰησοῦν.

The apostles bring the news that Christ is the way to God. The door through which man must pass is the noetic way of Christ by which alone a man may enter God's presence and behold him directly. The fact that the stress is laid on the noetic nature of the way is a very characteristic emphasis in Origen's writing. While his stress is on saving knowledge, he is by no means Gnostic in this respect. One of the many points which sets Origen apart from the Gnostics is his customary reminder that the promotion of knowledge can only take place in union with Christ. The Gnostic Revealer leaves the spiritual man with secret knowledge and then returns to heaven, having accomplished his task. In Origen's understanding salvation is a gradual process in which the believer is educated only as long as he continues in a state of unity with Christ. This is shown in I 93 where salvation is for those of whom it is said:

... ὅταν γένωνται ἐν ὧς <ὁ> υἱὸς καὶ ὁ πατήρ  
ἐν εἶσι.

This section makes it quite clear that knowledge of the Father is only possible for believers as they become one with Christ even as the Father and the Son are one. Salvation is, therefore, presented in a way that is characteristic of Origen's thought. Saving education is only possible for the believer if there exists between him and Christ the closest possible relationship - a unity which is compared to the state of unity existing between the Father and the Son. While Origen stresses that salvation is of a noetic nature, he is quick to state that the road to perfection begins with a new way of living. Knowledge of God, and the state of unity in which it is received, comes only after the believer has started to live

an appropriate lifestyle. The mention of the righteous life as the beginning of the path of salvation is one of Origen's favourite themes and finds expression in his commentary at I 94:

εἰ γὰρ » ἀρχὴ « ὡς μεταβάσεως ἔστι καὶ ὁδοῦ καὶ μήκους, » ἀρχὴ δὲ ὁδοῦ ἀγαθῆς τὸ ποιεῖν τὰ δίκαια « ἔστιν εἰδέναι, ὅτι πᾶσα ὁδὸς ἀγαθῆς πρὸς » ἀρχὴν « μὲν ἔχει » τὸ ποιεῖν τὰ δίκαια «, μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τὴν θεωρίαν, καὶ τὴν τρέπον τὴν θεωρίαν.

We have demonstrated so far, therefore, that Origen's interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel reflects the systematic treatment of salvation expressed in De principiis. This observation will be supported by further extracts which illustrate this influence. In II 18 ff salvation in terms of deification is prominent:

ἀληθινὸς οὖν Θεὸς ὁ Θεός, οἱ δὲ κατ' ἐκεῖνον μορφούμενοι Θεοὶ ὡς εἰκόνες πρωτοτόπου· ἀλλὰ πάλιν τῶν πλειόνων εἰκόνων ἢ ἀρχέτυπος εἰκὼν ὁ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἔστι λόγος, ὅς » ἐν ἀρχῇ « ἦν, τῷ εἶναι » πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν « ἀεὶ μένων » Θεός «, οὐκ ἂν δ' αὐτὸ ἔσχηκός εἶ μὴ πρὸς Θεὸν ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἂν μέλλας Θεός, εἰ μὴ πρέμενε τῇ ἀεικλείπτῃ Θεῶ τῷ πατρικοῦ βύθου.

This little section is fascinating in that some interesting words are used by Origen. One of these is βύθου, which is a Gnostic term rich in association. Another is Θεῶ, which Origen inserts to create a word play in relation to Θεός. Those who are being saved are being formed in the image of God. They are being formed in the image of the Word, who is himself in the image of God. This is a process in which the fall is reversed. The fallen souls are once again restored to their original position by deification. As those who are being educated and deified move along the path of salvation, so

their relationship with Christ undergoes a change. As they become gods, having attained perfection, Christ is no longer their master; he has become their friend. The principle of accommodation is evident in this. This transition from master, teacher and expositor to friend is mentioned in I 201:

Πάνυ δὲ καὶ τοῖς τυχοῦσιν σαφές, πῶς ἔστι διδάσκαλος καὶ σαφημιστὴς τῶν εἰς εὐσέβειαν συντεινόντων ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν καὶ κύριος δούλων τῶν ἔχόντων» πνεῦμα δουλείας εἰς φόβον«. προκρίπτόντων <δὲ> καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν σαφῆσιν σπουδέντων καὶ τρυφῆς ἀξιουμένων - ἐπεὶ» ὁ δούλος οὐκ οἶδε τί θέλει ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ« - οὐ μένει κύριος, γινόμενος αὐτῶν» φίλος«.

Another salient feature of Origen's theology is his apparent universalism. All the rational souls, except the one to which the Word would be united in the Incarnation, lost their positions in the presence of God because of their inattention. As the souls fell they were placed in bodies that were determined by their degree of inattentiveness. The purpose of this was not, however, to let them remain in their fallen state. The purpose was that all should be educated and led to salvation. Universalism may, therefore, be said to form an integral part of Origen's theology. There are a number of examples of this in his commentary. One of those appears to be his interpretation of John 1:7 (GCS: 487):

Ἰνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν. Ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ δηλονότι, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντες ἐπίστευσαν. οὐδὲ γὰρ, εἰ μὴ πάντες τὸν περὶ τοῦ ἡλίου ἔχοντο φωτισμόν, ἤδη καὶ τὸν ἥλιον φαίη τις ἂν μὴ ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἀκτέλλειν, ἐφ' ᾧ τε πάντας φωτίζεσθαι. ἢ γὰρ πρόθεσις τοῦ πέμψαντος αὐτὸν ἦν πιστεῦσαι πάντας.

In this passage he expresses the belief that the purpose in sending Christ was that all should believe. A better example of the same belief may be found in I 234 where it is said that Christ's death resulted in the liberation of

the whole world from sin. Neither of these passages are completely unambiguous, for it is not made clear as to what exactly is meant by making forgiveness possible for all and making it possible for all to believe, but, in the light of the fact that nothing to the contrary is intimated, it is reasonable to assume that they are in agreement with his characteristically universalist position.

Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἕως πᾶς ἔχθρος αὐτοῦ καταργηθῆ καὶ τελευταῖός γε ὁ θάνατος, αἶρει τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ὁ πᾶς γένηται χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας κόσμος, διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Ἰωάννης δεικνύς αὐτὸν φησιν. «Ἴδε ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ αἶρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου».

Although many important passages have not been included in this examination, among which are II 77, I 36 and, especially, I 204 - all of which provide us with indications of Origen's theological background, we have succeeded in demonstrating that he has interpreted John's Prologue in a manner consistent with the views expressed in De principiis. It would appear from these findings, that the Prologue has guided him in such a way that he has found its meaning in terms of the thoughts expressed previously in his De principiis.

#### 4. Non-literal approach to the Bible:

Origen was well-known for his allegorical approach to the Bible and his three-fold method of interpreting it. This meant that Origen often interpreted the Bible in such a way that the meaning he found in a text was not the obvious, common-sense meaning. Allegorical interpretation is, as we noted in the first part of this chapter, the method of finding, particularly in the case of apparently unedifying or theologically dangerous texts, an edifying meaning in line with orthodox Church theology. Origen was able to approach the text in this way because he

believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Every single word and number had a reason for being included in the Bible. Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit could not be saying anything contrary to the teaching of the Church, the Bible had to be interpreted in such a way that it yielded a suitable meaning. In Origen's commentary on the Johannine Prologue we find both the theory of allegorical interpretation and examples of this in operation. This does not, of course, mean that this is the only method of interpretation adopted by him in the commentary. The typological approach used in I 1 is an example of the use of another method. The allegorical method, however, is his most characteristic interpretative technique and if, therefore, it can be demonstrated, as it will be, that it is employed in this commentary, then we will be in possession of valuable evidence in support of the thesis that Origen's interpretation of John's Prologue has been shaped by his context. In I 44 there is a reference to the theory underlying allegorical exegesis:

Ταῦτα δὲ ἐξετάζοντες περὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὐ μάρτην  
εἰρηκέναι ἠγούμεθα, οἷον εἰ αἰσθητὸν εὐαγγέλιον νοητοῦ  
καὶ πνευματικοῦ τῆ ἔπινοίας διακρίνοντες. κ.τ.λ.

The importance of this section lies in the distinction that is drawn between αἰσθητὸν and πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον. This distinction lies at the heart of allegorical exegesis because it maintains that there is a spiritual gospel that may be distinct from the more obvious, common-sense meaning of the words. In the following section, I 45, Origen attempts to discover the meaning of the hidden, spiritual gospel. There is an urgent need, he says, to get behind the 'types', 'figures', 'myths' and to discover what is really being said.

καὶ γὰρ νῦν πρόκειται τὸ αἰσθητὸν εὐαγγέλιον  
μεταλαβεῖν εἰς πνευματικόν· τίς γὰρ ἢ διήγησις τοῦ  
αἰσθητοῦ, εἰ μὴ μεταλαμβάνουτο εἰς πνευματικόν; ἦτοι

οὐδεμίᾳ ἢ ὀλίγῃ καὶ πῶν τυχόντων ἀπο τῆς λέξεως αὐτῆς  
 πεπεικότων λαμβάνειν τὰ δηλούμενα. ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀγῶν ἡμῶν  
 ἐνέστηκε πεφρομένοις εἰς τὰ βάθη τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ νοῦ  
 φθάσαι καὶ ἐρευνῆσαι τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ γυμνῆν τύπων  
 ἀλήθειαν.

In I 89 there is a prayer which is also relevant to our present discussion. The prayer requests the Holy Spirit to make clear the secret, spiritual meaning that is in words. From this it may be deduced that Origen does not believe that an understanding of the outward form of the gospel is the real aim of interpretation. The secret inner meaning is the goal.

ἤδη δὲ Θεὸν αἰτώμεθα συνεργῆσαι διὰ Χριστοῦ  
 ἡμῶν ἐν ἀγίῳ πνεύματι πρὸς ἀνάπτυξιν τοῦ ἐν ταῖς  
 λέξεσιν ἐναποτεθησαυρισμένου μυστικοῦ νοῦ.

There are a number of examples of allegory in Origen's commentary on the Prologue. Right at the beginning of the commentary, at I 8, Origen says that one should be aware that the account of the 144 000 virgins has a deeper meaning. As one is led on to a deeper interpretation of this, one is, at the same time, elevated and brought to realise one's membership of the heavenly realm.

καὶ γὰρ ἐπιφέρεται «Ὁὗτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπο τῶν  
 ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ Θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, καὶ ἐν τῷ  
 στοματὶ αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος ἁμώμου γὰρ εἶσαν»  
 αὐκ ἀμοητέον δέ, ὅτι ὁ περὶ τῶν ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα  
 τεσσάρων χιλιάδων παρθένων λόγος ἐπιδέχεται  
 ἀναγωγὴν.

The principle underlying allegorical interpretation is the same as the view expressed in the above passage. The soul itself is able to advance upwards with a leap that corresponds with the interpretative advance from the

literal to the spiritual meaning of a text. In I 207 f we see an allegorical interpretation of the bread and wine. The bread, says Origen, refers to the ethical teaching of the Church. This is logically prior, he continues, to the wine, which refers to mystical contemplation. This is not only an example of allegorical interpretation, it is also a restatement of his belief that the road to perfection begins with the holy life.

Ἔργον δὲ διαφορὰν παραστήσαι ἄρτου καὶ ἄμπέλου, ἔπει οὐ μόνον »ἄμπελος« ἀλλὰ καὶ »ἄρτος ζωῆς« εἶναι φησιν. ὅρα δὲ μήποτε, ὡσπερ ὁ ἄρτος τρέφει καὶ ἰσχυροποιεῖ καὶ στηρίζειν λέγεται καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου, ὁ δὲ οἶνος ἡδεῖ καὶ εὐφραίνει καὶ διαχεῖ, οὕτως τὰ μὲν ἠθικὰ μαθήματα, ζῶν περιποιοῦντα τῷ μανθάνοντι καὶ πράττοντι, ἄρτος ἐστὶ τῆς ζωῆς (οὐκ ἂν ταῦτα γεννήματα λέγοιτο τῆς ἄμπέλου), τὰ δὲ εὐφραίνοντα καὶ ἐνθουσιῶν ποιοῦντα ἀπόρητα καὶ μυστικὰ θεωρήματα, τοῖς κατατρυφῶσι τοῦ κυρίου ἐγγινόμενα καὶ οὐ μόνον τρέφεσθαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τρυφᾶν ποθεοῦσιν, ἔστιν ἀπὸ τῆς »ἀληθινῆς ἄμπέλου« ἐρχόμενα, »οἶνος« καλούμενα.

Allegory is very much in evidence, both in theory and in practice, in Origen's commentary on John's Prologue. Having heard so much about Origen's allegory, however, one is surprised to discover that there is only a limited application of this method in his interpretation of John 1:1-18. The reason for this limited presence of allegory is probably that Origen has, in accordance with his claim to apply it mostly where the obvious meaning of a text is senseless or out of keeping with Church tradition, restricted its application because John's Prologue provides the interpreter with a more obvious edifying meaning. Nevertheless, the presence of allegory in Origen's commentary indicates that he was driven by the text to discover a meaning that accorded with his context.



## 5. Intertextuality

Intertextuality, as it is used here, is the name given to the practice of using references from other sections of the Bible to explain the meaning of a specific passage - as if, contrary to the historical-critical approach, the Bible were a single, uniform document written by one author. Intertextuality is a phenomenon very characteristic of Origen's work. Since the whole Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit, and since it cannot contradict itself, any section of the Bible is in accordance with any other section. Relevant sections of the Bible may, in this view, be used to illustrate what is being said in a certain passage, as if the same thing were being said in all of them. The whole Bible, in short is treated as a uniform and consistent work - it is 'one' story, and one can explain obscure parts of that story by referring to other more lucid sections of it. A brief glance at Origen's commentary will reveal that it is filled with cross-references illustrative of the principle of intertextuality. A good example of this is to be found in I 269. In trying to determine the meaning and significance of the Word in John 1:1, Origen refers to Romans 10:6 ff, which in turn refers to the experience of the Israelites in Deuteronomy. It does not even occur to Origen that Paul and John may have had slightly different understandings of the role of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the author of the whole Bible and so, no matter to which human author it is attributed, the meaning of the 'Word' is the same throughout the Bible - the fact that Origen would have conceded that the context and grammatical structure would indicate different uses does not alter the thrust of what is being said here. This understanding is the exact opposite of that held by those who adhere to the historical critical method, where the independence of the books and the individuality of their authors would be stressed.

ἐπίστησον δὲ εἰ μετέχουσι πως αὐτοῦ πάντες  
 ἄνθρωποι, καθ' ὃ λόγος ἐστὶ. διόπερ ζητεῖσθαι οὐκ ἔξω  
 τῶν ζητούντων ὑπὸ τῶν εὐρεῖν αὐτὸν προαιρουμένων  
 διδάσκει ἡμᾶς ὁ ἀπόστολος, λέγων· »Μὴ εἴπῃς ἐν τῇ  
 καρδίᾳ σου > Τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; < τοῦτ'  
 ἐστὶ, Χριστὸν καταγαγεῖν· ἢ > Τίς καταβήσεται εἰς  
 τὴν ἄβυσσον; < τοῦτ' ἐστὶ Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν  
 ἀναγαγεῖν. ἀλλὰ τί λέγει ἡ γραφή; Ἐγγύς σου τὸ  
 ῥῆμά ἐστὶ σφόδρα ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῇ  
 καρδίᾳ σου· « ὡς τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὄντος Χριστοῦ καὶ ῥήματος  
 τοῦ ζητουμένου.

There are many other similar examples illustrative of Origen's intertextuality - among which is the important one at I 117-118. We will, however, discuss only one further example since it appears to be of a different kind. In II 86 Origen is attempting to harmonise passages which seem to speak of the relation between the Son and the Holy Spirit in different and contradictory ways. In some places in the Bible the Spirit appears to be given priority over the Son. Origen, therefore, attempts to harmonise these passages so that they may be seen to be in agreement.

Ταῦτα δὲ ἐπὶ πολὺ ἐξητάσθαι σαφέστερον ἰδεῖν  
 βουλομένοις, πῶς, εἰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ τὸ  
 πνεῦμα διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐγένετο, ἐν τῶν πάντων τυγχάνον  
 ὑποδεέστερον τοῦ δι' οὗ ἐγένετο νοούμενον, εἰ καὶ  
 λέξεις τινὲς περισπᾶν ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον δοκοῦσιν.

Intertextuality, since it appears to be a principle underlying both Origen's commentary on John and his other works, may be regarded as a contextual force responsible to some extent for shaping his understanding of the Johannine Prologue. It is quite possible, given this, that this principle may have enabled Origen to read into certain texts his favourite themes expressed unequivocally in

other passages.

6. The relationship between the Old Testament and the 'New Testament':

Origen held an extremely high view of the Old Testament. To the spiritually mature person, said Origen, the Old Testament and the 'New Testament' (strictly speaking there was not yet at the time of his writing an authoritative collection of books called the New Testament) are alike Gospel. By means of his allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament he was able to demonstrate a highly developed Christian theology in it. This theology agreed substantially with the developed Christian doctrines that Origen was able to discover, again by employing allegory, in the New Testament. This means that any distinction between the two testaments largely disappeared as Origen's allegorical interpretation predisposed him to find in both virtually identical theologies which reflected the Church doctrine of his time. This attitude to the two testaments is also to be seen in his commentary of John's Prologue. An example of this attitude may be found in I 36-37:

οὐκοῦν πρὸ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὃ γέγονε διὰ τὴν Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίαν, οὐδὲν τῶν πάλαι εὐαγγέλων ἦν. τὸ δὲ εὐαγγέλιον, ὅπερ ἔστι διθεθήκη καινὴ· ἀποστήσων ἡμᾶς παλαιότητος τοῦ γράμματος τὴν μηδέποτε παλαιουμένην καινότητα τοῦ πνεύματος, οὐκείαν τῆς καινῆς διθεθήκης τυγχάνουσαν, ἐν πύσιν ἀνακευμένην γραφαῖς τῶ φωτὸς τῆς γνώσεως ἀνέλκυσεν. ἔχρη δὲ τὸ ποιητικὸν τοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ διθεθήκη νομιζομένου εὐαγγελίου ἔξαιρέτως καλεῖσθαι »εὐαγγέλιον«.

The distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament is not completely erased in this passage. While both may be considered to be Gospel, the New Testament is

especially so since it is in the light of this that the Gospel may be seen in the Old Testament. He goes on to say that those who have attained perfection are able to see, even before the incarnation, the residence of Christ himself in Israel. Origen refers to Christ as having been present with Israel in much the same way as he was present in the incarnation.

Πλὴν οὐκ ἀγνωστὸν Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίαν καὶ πρὸ τῆς κατὰ σῶμα ἐπιδημίας τὴν νοητὴν γεγονέναι τοῖς τελειότεροις καὶ οὐ νηπιῖς οὐδ' ἔτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγῶν καὶ ἐπιτρόπων ἐπιτυγχάνουσιν, οἷς τὸ νοητὸν τοῦ χρόνου πλήρωμα ἐνέστη, ὡσπερ τοῖς πατριάρχαις καὶ Μωυσεῖ τῷ Θεράποντι καὶ τοῖς τεθεσμένοις Χριστοῦ τὴν δόξαν προσήγαγαν.

The combination of speaking of the Gospel as present in both testaments and the loss of the historical element as a result of the application of the allegorical method has produced, in the above passages, the blurring of the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Elsewhere, I 13 ff, Origen again stresses the unity of the two testaments, but also the nature of the difference between them. Relying on the less than obvious distinction between ἀπαρχή and πρωτογέννημα, he sets about arguing that the Old Testament is like the first fruits of the harvest, while the New Testament is the choice portion of that. At one and the same time this understanding both emphasizes the difference between the two testaments and also reduces the gap between them. Origen speaks of their difference in terms of their similarity. Both are like the first fruits of the harvest, but there is something qualitatively different about the New Testament that makes it like the best portion of that yield.

... οὐκ ἂν ἑμάρτοί τις λέγων πρωτογέννημα μὲν τὸν Μωυσέως νόμον, ἀπαρχὴν δὲ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. μετὰ γὰρ

τοὺς πάντας τῶν προφητῶν καρπὸς τῶν μέχρι τοῦ  
κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ὁ τέλειος ἐβλάστησε λόγος.

In conclusion, Origen's commentary on the Johannine Prologue shows ample evidence of his characteristic blurring of the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Their unity is stressed at the expense of their individuality. This may be regarded as evidence in support of the thesis that Origen's context has been instrumental in determining his interpretation of the Prologue.

7. Careful attention to the meaning of words:

Origen was widely known and highly respected as an extremely thorough scholar. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that we should find that careful attention is paid to the meaning of words in his commentary. An example of Origen's thoroughness is provided by II 7-10. In sections 7 and 8 Origen discusses the difference between the coming of the Word of God to the prophets and the continual presence of the Son with God. In the remainder of section 8 and in section 9 Origen undertakes a careful analysis of the actual wording of John 1:1. The Word, he concludes, did not come to God as it did to the prophets, so that we may say that there was a time when the Word was not with God. On the contrary, the Word has always been with God. God and his Word are inseparably linked. In II 10 Origen summarises his argument and explains the contrast between γενέσθαι and εἶναι:

ὁμοίως λόγος καὶ πρὸς Ἰσραὴλ ἐρχεται, διδόντων  
τὰ ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις ἀπαντησόμενα τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ  
καὶ Ἱερουσαλήμ. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ πρὸς Ἱερουσαλὴν  
Θεῶν μετεωρισμῶ ἐπαρθέντα. ἐρμηνεύεται γὰρ  
»Μετεωρισμὸς Ἰαῶ«. ἀλλὰ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς

ἀνθρώπους πρότερον οὐ χωροῦντας τὴν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ  
 Θεοῦ, λόγου τυγχάνοντος, ἐπιδημίαν ὁ λόγος γίνεται.  
 » πρὸς δὲ τὸν Θεόν« οὐ γίνεται, ὡς πρότερον οὐκ ἦν  
 πρὸς αὐτόν, παρὰ δὲ τὸ ἀεὶ συνεῖναι τῷ πατρὶ λέγεται.  
 » καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν« κ.τ.λ.

There are many other sections of Origen's commentary that show that Origen is deeply concerned to discover the meaning of the words to be interpreted. In II 64 ff, for example, he expresses the belief that there is the need to examine words and sentences very carefully. In an extended discussion, at I 90-95, dealing with the polysemy of ἀρχή the same interest is betrayed.

Origen's careful attention to the meaning of words is indicative of both the conviction that the Bible is verbally inspired (so that there is an intimate link between his close attention to words and his allegorical interpretation) and also of his desire to take the literal, common-sense meaning seriously wherever possible. This scholarly approach to the text is again evidence of the role played by contextual factors in his interpretation of John's Prologue. Origen's work in general is characterised by this meticulously careful approach and so, since its presence in this case is not unexpected, it may be called on to demonstrate that his interpretation of John 1:1-18 conforms to time tried techniques and beliefs.

#### 8. Rational emphasis:

The final area that we shall investigate is that of Origen's rational emphasis. His work is permeated with a strong rationalistic flavour. Origen always goes to great lengths to emphasize man's intellect and the noetic way of salvation. He places so much importance on man's mind because he is convinced that the defining element in man is his mind, his intellect. Evidence of this is his

careful account of the creation of rational souls before anything else. This stress on the rational is another Platonic legacy, but it is so pronounced in Origen's commentary that it warrants a separate investigation. In keeping with his noetic understanding of salvation, Origen, in I 205, speaks of the Son as providing the mind of man with a deep satisfaction. The Son of God is the grape-vine which provides man with wine that gladdens his heart. The wine, that pleasantly satisfying drink, is the Word and the heart which it gladdens is the intellect of man.

προσθετέον τοῖς εἰρημένοις πῶς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς ἡ ἀληθινή  
 ἀμπέλος «. τοῦτο δὲ δῆλον ἔσται τοῖς συνειδῶσι ἁγίως  
 χάριτος προφητικῆς τὸ » οἶνος εὐφραίνει καρδίαν  
 ἀνθρώπου«. εἰ γὰρ ἡ καρδία τὸ διανοητικόν ἐστὶ,  
 τὸ δὲ εὐφραῖνον αὐτὸ ὁ ποτνωτάτος ἐστὶ λόγος κ.τ.λ.

In I 246 we chance upon another, similar theme dear to Origen's heart. In his other writings he maintains that all wisdom is from God and that the pagan philosophers were themselves able to partake of Christ, even if in a very diluted form, by virtue of the fact that Christ, the Word of God, is the source of all wisdom. Pagan wisdom is an imperfect, but recognizable, relative of the perfect wisdom revealed in Christ. In this section we find that Origen expresses a similar sentiment:

ἕκαστος δὲ τῶν σοφῶν καθ' ὅσον χωρεῖ σοφίας,  
 τοσαῦτον μετέχει Χριστοῦ, καθ' ὃ σοφία ἐστίν·  
 ὡς περ ἕκαστος τῶν δυνάμων ἔχόντων κρείττονα ἔστιν  
 εἴληχε τῆς δυνάμεως, τοσαῦτον Χριστοῦ, καθ' ὃ δυνάμις  
 ἐστὶ, κεκαυνώθηκεν.

In I 160-166 Origen relates the light spoken of by John to the mental enlightenment brought about by Christ. In

I 160 he dismisses the natural lights of the world; John is not writing about these. The light spoken of is that which brings understanding. He continues, in I 163-166, by saying that the real light is that which illuminates the minds of men. Most believers first come into contact with this illumination through the efforts of Christians who have themselves seen the true light. Once people have come to the true light, by way of the reflection of the believers, they no longer need the guiding Christian ministers.

Φῶς δὲ κόσμου αἰσθητὸν ὁ ἥλιος ἐστίν, καὶ μετὰ  
 τούτων οὐκ ἀπαδόντως ἢ σελήνη καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες τῷ  
 αὐτῷ ὀνόματι προσαγορευθήσονται. ἀλλὰ φῶς μὲν  
 αἰσθητὸν τυγχάνοντες αἱ γεγονέναι παρὰ Μωσθεῖ λογόμενοι  
 τῇ τετάρτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, καθὼς φωτίζουσι τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς, οὐκ εἰσὶ  
 φῶς ἀληθινόν· ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἐλλάμπων τοῖς λογικοῖς  
 καὶ ἡγεμονικοῖς, ἕκαστων ὁ νοῦς τὰ ἴσα ἑρπύδα βλέπει,  
 τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου ἐστὶ φῶς κ.τ.λ.

Another aspect of Origen's emphasis on the mind is his association of darkness and evil with ignorance of God. In one of the catena fragments dealing with John 1:5 (GCS 486,7) he says that wherever the light of God shines all darkness is dissipated. This darkness which is dissolved is ignorance of God and the light which does away with it is the truth which gives true knowledge of God.

Τὸ θεολογούμενον φῶς λυτικόν ἐστὶ πάσης σκοτίας καὶ  
 ἀγνοίας καὶ κακίας ἐφισταμένης. διὸ ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ σκοτίᾳ  
 φαῖνον οὐ καταλαμβάνεται ὑπὸ αὐτῆς. Ἐν γὰρ τούτῳ τὸ  
 φῶς σοφία καὶ δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, ἣ μὲν σοφία ἐστὶ  
 λύει τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ἀγνοίαν, ἣ δὲ δικαιοσύνη τὰ διαβήματα  
 τῆς ψυχῆς κατευθύνει, καὶ τούτῳ ἐστὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ  
 φάνειν αὐτὸ οὐ κωλυόμενον ἐκπέμπειν πᾶς οἰκείας αὐγῆς  
 τῷ φωτιζομένῳ ἀνθρώπῳ· διὸ οὐ καταλαμβάνεται ὑπὸ  
 τῆς σκοτίας, λυομένης καὶ ἀφαιρουμένης τῇ παρουσίᾳ  
 αὐτοῦ.



In II 158 the realm of darkness is closely linked with evil deeds and false knowledge. True knowledge is the light and the commands of the Lord are, in a derivative sense, light too. Christ, the light of the world, has given man true knowledge and the way which he instructs him to follow is also light because it is based on the true knowledge of God and what it means to serve him. In accordance with 1 John 1:6 and 2:9, Origen says that the one who loves his brother walks in the light and has true knowledge.

We have demonstrated that Origen's constant concern with rationality is also present in his treatment of the Johannine Prologue. This suggests that contextual factors have been responsible for shaping his interpretation of this passage.

### Conclusion

Our investigation of Origen's interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel has revealed that he was a child of his own age and that he interpreted Scripture accordingly. It has been shown that he used his customary methods and procedures in interpreting this passage and that his interpretation resulted in meanings that accorded with the theological convictions he expressed in his other works prior to his commentary on John. This implies that, as some modern theorists have suggested, the text, in this case John 1:1-18, may serve as a series of signposts that guide the interpreter, in this case Origen, to discover a meaning that lies not so much in the text as in the interpreter's semantic universe. Our findings so far would, therefore, support the theory that the reader creates the meaning of a text in relation to his context, under the direction of the text itself.

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Footnotes

1. Origen 1869 b: I 1
2. ibid. I 2
3. ibid. I 5
4. cf. Plato 1952:35 - 'Midway between the Being which is indivisible and remains always the same and the Being which is transient and divisible in bodies, He blended a third form of Being compounded out of the twain, that is to say, out of same and the other; and in like manner He compounded it midway between that one of them which is indivisible and that one which is divisible in bodies.'
5. Origen 1869 b: I 8
6. ibid. I 8
7. ibid. II 6
8. ibid. I 3
9. e.g. ibid. III 6.1 - '... that man received the dignity of God's image at his first creation; but that the perfection of his likeness has been reserved for the consummation - namely, that he might acquire it for himself by the exercise of his own diligence in the imitation of God, the possibility of attaining to perfection being granted him at the beginning through the dignity of the divine image, and the perfect realization of the divine likeness being reached in the end by the fulfilment of the (necessary) works.'
10. ibid. IV 1.1
11. ibid. IV 1.2
12. ibid. IV 1.6
13. ibid. IV 1.7, 1.9, 1.14, 1.26 - 'The treasure of divine meaning is enclosed within the frail vessel of the common letter.' (Rufinus)
14. ibid. IV 2.4
15. ibid. IV 2.5 e.g.
16. cf. ibid IV 1.15 - '... the chief object of the Holy Spirit is to preserve the coherence of the

spiritual meaning ... He composed a texture of both kinds in one style of narration, always concealing the hidden meaning more deeply; but where the historical narrative could not be made appropriate to the spiritual coherence of the occurrences, He inserted sometimes certain things which either did not take place or could not take place ... (this) was done by the Holy Spirit in order that, seeing those events that lie on the surface can be neither true nor useful, we may be led to the investigation of that truth which is more deeply concealed, and to ascertain a meaning worthy of God ...'

17. cf. Origen 1869 a: V 42
18. There was clearly a group within the Church that did not agree with Origen's methods, hence the need to justify his interpretation. It was probably a group representing a major anticipation of the fifth century antiochene position on the strictly literal interpretation of Scripture that opposed Origen.

## CHAPTER THREE

## - LUTHER -

## I

If one wants to understand the way in which Martin Luther interpreted Scripture, then careful attention must be paid to the situation in which he found himself. The sacrament of penance, abused by the sale of indulgences in Germany, was an abuse that Luther could not ignore. That whole scandalous business was, in his eyes, a way of trying to buy righteousness and he, after his own long and torturous struggle with the same issue, could not allow it to continue. Further investigation had also led him to the conclusion that an incorrect attitude to the place and importance of works had been the misplaced emphasis that had been responsible for many of the errors in which the Church now found herself.<sup>1</sup> Luther did not deny the fact that the Christian life should issue in good works, but he did deny that man could ever earn his own worthiness to stand before God. Years of bitter experience and his understanding of Scripture had led him to this conclusion. Taken literally, said Luther, Scripture spoke of Christ as the righteousness of God (iustitia Dei), but if one read it tropologically it would soon become evident that it is faith in Christ (fides Christi) which is righteousness. Luther maintained that in Jesus Christ God had, in his undeserved love, made it possible for man to stand worthily before him. The only way that man could appropriate this loving and undeserved outreach on the part of God was by responding in faith. This response of faith was the acceptance both of what God had done in Christ and of the responsibility it entailed. Luther also maintained that, in the light of this and of the fact that the Church was misleading people, Scripture alone should be the rule of faith.<sup>2</sup> The will of God with regard to the Church is clearly stated in the Bible and what was necessary, said

Luther, was to reform the Church so that it should once again conform to the Master's will. One of the many places in which the key to his understanding of the basis of reform may be found is in his interpretation of Psalm 31:2 where, in connection with in iustitia libera me, Luther refers to Romans 1:17-18 about which he says: 'Haec est conclusio totius Epistolae S. Pauli ad Romanos.' (Luther 1961:18)

Suddenly Luther found himself in a severe struggle with the Roman Catholic theologians. They opposed him not because of his recourse to Scripture but because what he was in fact doing was defying the pope by contradicting his interpretation of Scripture and maintaining his right to do so. What offended the Roman theologians was not Luther's use of Scripture, for all agreed that Scripture was normative for Christian life, but his rejection of the pope as the sole authoritative interpreter of it. Luther was, in his attack on the sale of indulgences, really questioning the pope's position as the sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture. In consequence, on 15 June 1520, the Bull Exsurge Domine excommunicated him for his questioning of the absolute authority of the pope. The bull included the following words:

'Exurgat denique omnis Sanctorum, ac reliqua  
universalis Ecclesia, cuius vera sacrarum  
literarum interpretatione posthabita.'

(Luther 1554:509)

This makes it clear that Luther, in challenging the authority of the pope as the sole authoritative interpreter of the Bible, was thought to be placing himself in opposition to the tradition of the Church and, in so doing, was denying the faith. Whether wittingly or unwittingly Luther was challenging the Church's system of authority - a system specifically intended to ensure the untainted preservation of the faith.

'Praefatos omnes et singulos articulos seu errores tanquam, ut praemittitur, respective haereticos, aut scandalosos, aut falsos, aut piarum aurium offensivos, vel simplicium mentium seductivos, et veritati catholicae obviantes, damnamus, reprobamus, atque omnino reicimus.' (Denzinger 1937:278)

The Roman Catholic Church was an old institution and much of its history had been spent in conflict with teachings and influences that threatened the faith. The influences of paganism, Judaism and heresy had been influential in shaping the Church's system of authority. The Church emerged from these contentions with a system consisting of three elements for the preservation of true doctrine. These were: Scripture, tradition and pope. To keep all these elements in perfect balance proved to be difficult and so, as time progressed, the tradition and Scripture were subjected to the pope's authority. The pope arose, in response to the ongoing difficulties with which the Church was faced, as the one who mediated the true meaning of tradition and Scripture. Experience had shown that both Scripture and tradition were open to misunderstanding and so they were made subject to the interpretation of the pope, who alone was able to discern the truth in them. In effect, the pope was himself guarded from error in his interpretation of Scripture by the tradition and vice versa. From all this it becomes clear that the Roman Catholic Church did not ignore the Bible or attempt to do away with it. It was realised, however, that a book is always open to varied interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Since the Bible is no ordinary book, in the sense that it contains the record of God's unique and all-important act in Christ, it should, the Roman theologians maintained, be protected from interpreters whose interpretations would be misguided and do it no justice. To ensure, therefore, that his purpose would not be thwarted by incompetent or malicious interpreters, God had, in the pope, ordained the only authorized interpreter of Scripture to ensure that the message of salvation was not misunderstood. The pope was himself guarded from error by

the Holy Spirit and the living tradition of the Church. This ensured that the institution of the Church was the source of the continuing disclosure of the revelation of God in Christ.<sup>4</sup> Up to the time of Luther there was, generally speaking, no dissatisfaction as to the interrelation of Scripture, tradition and pope.

Luther believed that, while in theory the system was sound, in reality it had led to severe abuse of the Bible - so severe, in fact, that the Bible had successfully been gagged. Experience had shown, he said, that tradition had not guarded faith from error. In fact, tradition had been responsible for blurring the otherwise clear image of Scripture. The Church had been abusing tradition by elevating the Fathers to a position of authority over Scripture that they themselves would have rejected. By subjecting Scripture to tradition, the Church had also been subjecting the Bible to abuse. The Fathers had exhibited a marked tendency to over-value works and had made many concessions to philosophy. Luther was in no doubt as to the value of what the Fathers had done for the faith, but he thought that if the Bible were subjected to the cumulative effect of their errors then it would effectively be silenced. The mistaken emphasis on tradition would lead to the destruction of both Scripture and tradition itself. At all costs, maintained Luther, the Bible had to be allowed to speak its own word and interpretation could be guarded from error by ensuring that portions of Scripture that were unclear were illumined by the many sections that were obvious as to their meaning.<sup>5</sup> Having dealt with the problem of tradition, Luther turned to the question of the pope as the sole interpreter of Scripture. He was concerned that the popes were entrusted with this weighty responsibility when all too often they showed themselves to be men who cared nothing for the teachings of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Luther was certain that the appointment, by the Church, of the pope as the only authoritative interpreter of Scripture had also been responsible

for its having been silenced.<sup>7</sup>

In his attack Luther brought to a head the critical tendencies of the middle ages. He had many predecessors and his challenge embodied elements from earlier grievances. William of Occam (c 1285-1347), for example, was one of Luther's most noteworthy forerunners. He maintained that a Christian was not called on to believe what was not in Scripture and what could not be derived, sensibly, from Scripture. All authority was derived from Scripture. Under him the Franciscans branded Pope John XXII a heretic for saying, contrary to Scripture, that Christ had property. The conciliarists too were among Luther's forerunners. At the end of the fourteenth century, when the strange situation arose that there were two popes, each condemning the other, it was said, in order to resolve the deadlock, that councils should have supreme authority in interpreting the Bible. This did not mean, however, that individual interpretation was sanctioned - which conclusion is supported by the burning of Hus under the Council of Constance. While Luther had many forerunners, it is also true that the situation in which he found himself was partly the result of the attacks of these men. This is so because the various dissenters were responsible for the reaction of the canon lawyers that led, eventually, to the extreme position of the pope displacing both Scripture and tradition. The extremes to which the canon lawyers felt themselves driven by the objections of dissenters is evidenced by this statement made by Sylvester Prierias, who was commissioned by Leo X to refute Luther:

'Quicumque non innititur doctrinae Romanae ecclesiae ac Romani Pontificiis, tanquam regulae fidei infallibili, a qua etiam Sacra Scriptura robur trahit et auctoritatem, haereticus est.' (Kidd 1911:32)

Luther, in opposition to this, contended that Scripture was the master of both pope and tradition because it contained the Gospel which was responsible for the existence of the Church. The Church did not create the Bible.



The Gospel created the Church and the Church selected those documents which best expressed its faith. Consequently, the Church could never assert anything that went beyond what was taught in the Bible. The Church and the pope were subject to Scripture and the task of both was to preach the Word of God as it was to be found in the Bible. Scripture was not, he conceded, always clear, but there was no need for an infallible interpreter because in its essence it was intelligible and could be interpreted authoritatively even by a layman.<sup>8</sup>

Having mentioned that Luther regarded the Bible as the sole authority for Christian life,<sup>9</sup> both corporate and individual, and that he believed that one official and authoritative interpreter was, at best, not necessary, let us set about determining how Luther thought the Bible should be interpreted.<sup>10</sup> If we want to understand Luther's interpretation of Scripture then we should first familiarize ourselves with medieval interpretation in general. As we have seen, one of the major characteristics of medieval exegesis was the subordination of interpretation to tradition. The other major characteristic was the differentiation between the literal/historical meaning of Scripture and the spiritual senses. The early Church had been faced with many perplexing difficulties in reading the Old Testament, in particular, literally. Allegorical interpretation had become the accepted solution to the problem. The great allegorical interpreters like Origen and Augustine paved the way for medieval exegesis, and as the art of interpretation gained in confidence scholars came to see the Bible as having four possible categories of meaning. The medieval scholars carefully set about interrogating a text to find out what it taught about Christ, the Church, the individual believer and the life to come. It would seem that this carefully structured scheme of speculation existed to keep interpretation under control and to discipline it. Each text was interrogated on four different levels - there were, in other words, four different types of interpretation.

There was the literal interpretation which dealt with the primary meaning of the text - what the text clearly and obviously seemed to be saying. There was also the allegorical interpretation which, though not used in debate, made the text, by some unnatural meaning, support doctrines about the Church and about Christ. The third type of interpretation was tropological exegesis and concerned personal salvation and morals. Anagogical interpretation made a text yield information about heaven, the future and anything else calculated to give hope to the believer. Medieval exegesis also exhibited different attitudes to the literal meaning of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas (c 1224-1274) believed that one should not give oneself over to extremes either of literal or spiritual interpretation. Historical/literal meaning should always serve as the foundation for spiritual interpretation. Spiritual interpretation was what helped the believer and the Church but, methodologically, a sound spiritual interpretation could only arise from a careful consideration of the literal sense of a passage.<sup>11</sup> After Aquinas the two extremes between which he had tried to steer were championed with renewed vigour. Nicholas of Lyra (c 1270-1340), a man deeply influenced by the methods of rabbinic scholars, represented an extreme form of literalism, while Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c 1455-1536) represented an extreme form of spiritual exegesis. Ignoring these two extremes, however, it may be said that the middle ages exhibited a more or less steady move away from the excessive spiritualism of the Platonic kind to a healthier appreciation of the importance of history in the task of exegesis.

What set Luther apart from his predecessors and his contemporaries was, broadly speaking, his recovery of the historical element in Christianity. In many respects Luther owed a debt to his age for the growing historical consciousness which enabled him to see the difference between what exegetes said was in the Bible and what

actually appeared to be there. He rejected both the Platonic presuppositions of allegory and the method itself as the one best able to discover the essence of Scripture. The writers of the Bible had written history said Luther, not hidden truths about the perfect world above. Luther's understanding, however, was not of the spiritually arid type epitomised by Nicholas of Lyra. The Bible, he said, is the record of the experiences of the people of God. Throughout it we see the history of the people of God in their encounter with the Word of God in history. The Bible is not a conductor of heavenly truths but a record of the way in which the Word of God dealt with his people in their historical situations.<sup>12</sup> Suddenly the elaborate medieval exegetical system was rendered meaningless and irrelevant and the central concern was to find the fundamental theme of Scripture in its literal sense.

Closely associated with this attempt to discover the fundamental theme of Scripture in its literal sense is Luther's Word theology, which is one of the single most important keys to his thought. Luther said that the speech of God had always been with God and was, in reality, God himself. For him the Word of God was eternal and was the same as God because it was God's way of expressing himself. Long before creation and redemption, existing always with God himself, was God's ability to express himself. This expression, the Word of God, was both verbal and concrete. For God to speak is to do - so that in God's expression, in the Word, speech and action co-exist:

'Opera Dei sunt verba eius ... idem est facere et dicere Dei.' (Luther 1961:33)

God spoke his Word and created the world. Because God created the world by his Word, and because the Word is God's communication, relations between God and the world were put upon the foundation of the Word. It may be said that everything in the world, including events, is a

word of God because everything owes its existence to the creative Word. While all things are words of God, only a few special events and deeds are the Word of God. These special events and deeds have a redemptive and revelatory purpose. While everything bears the stamp of God's creative Word, there are a few special deeds in which God reveals himself and brings about redemption. In the normal course of events God's redeeming purpose is not always inherent in what comes to pass, but in the special events, which are the Word of God, the redeeming purpose of God and the nature of the event are suddenly one. In the Old Testament the focus of God's primarily corporate redemptive act was the exodus. Redemption in the exodus event, however, was not the ultimate redemption. The word of God in this event was all the time pointing ahead to the ultimate act of redemption. This ultimate act came to pass when the Word of God became a human being in Jesus Christ. In him God revealed himself through his Word, and in the words and deeds of the man Jesus God expressed his purpose and revealed himself perfectly. In the life of Christ, and particularly in his death-resurrection, the redemption of mankind was accomplished and the way and will of God was revealed. The Word of address healed and saved men and called them to faith. In the age of the New Testament, after the ascension of Christ, the saving action of God in Christ was continually recited and this expression was also the Word of God because it too called men to health and redemption as it called them to faith in Jesus Christ.

For Luther Scripture is the Word of God in a derivative sense. The Bible is the Word of God because it tells about Christ, the Word of God incarnate, and because its proclamation of the good news and the call to faith is a continuation of the Word of God in the life and teaching of Christ. The Scriptures exist to provide a foundation for the ongoing proclamation of the Word of God and to preserve this proclamation from error. Luther believed,

however, that while the whole Bible is the Word of God, not the whole of it is gospel. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are the Word of God, but the Old Testament is scripture while the New Testament is gospel. This does not mean that the Old Testament and the New Testament differ with regard to what they say. The same Word gives the same message in both testaments, but there is a difference in emphasis. The Word of God is at the same time both law and gospel.<sup>14</sup> In the Old Testament the emphasis is on law, while in the New Testament the emphasis is on gospel. In the emphasis on law, however, gospel is not absent and in the emphasis on gospel, law is not absent. In the Old Testament the Word of God appears mainly as imperative, drawing attention to the will and standards of God. In the New Testament the Word is principally declarative as it tells of God who makes it possible for man to be put right with him. Consequently, the New Testament always functions as the key to understanding the Old Testament while the Old Testament serves as the essential background to understanding the New Testament aright.

For Luther interpretation and preaching went hand in hand. Interpretation existed for the sake of preaching, so that the Word of God that encountered the people of God in the Bible in Christ might encounter people in a different generation in the same life-changing way. Luther knew from experience that the Word of God as gospel - that message of God's gracious acceptance of sinners for Christ's sake - was the medium of Christ's real presence in his Church. Preaching existed to announce the good news and thereby to actualize the saving presence of Christ in the hearer's life. In order for this preaching to be effective, however, a proper understanding of law and gospel and the ability to tell the difference between them was essential. If there were any confusion with regard to which was which, the value and joy of the good news would be lost and Christ's saving presence would not be actualized in the life of the hearer. To understand

gospel one must first have heard the demands of the law; furthermore, while this was true, the gospel itself should never be presented as law. Failure in preaching, said Luther, resulted from failure in interpretation. If Christ's saving presence was not actualized in preaching, then something had gone wrong in interpretation for the task of interpretation was seen to be that of making the saving Word of God, addressed to the people of God in biblical times, audible to the people of Luther's own time. Failure in interpretation was, very often, the result of the inability to differentiate between law and gospel so that, instead of receiving the good news of God's gracious acceptance of man in Christ, very often Christ himself came to be viewed as another overwhelming lawgiver. For Luther, therefore, an essential element in interpreting the Bible aright was the ability to differentiate between law and gospel while at the same time understanding their interrelatedness.

During the Reformation, and particularly in the work of Luther, the Bible came alive in an unparalleled way. While this is true, it is also true that the dividing line between medieval exegesis and reformation exegesis is not at all clearcut.<sup>15</sup> Luther instituted, broadly speaking, a return to simpler, less rationalistic methods of interpretation. Quite early in his career Luther abandoned the rigid Quadruga in favour of a more flexible system. This does not mean that he did not use the elements of the Quadruga. He continued to use allegory, but only in a limited way, usually when it was clear that that was how the writer had intended the passage to be understood. He also continued to employ tropological and anagogical methods - since these provided material on conduct and consolation, which he thought of as vital elements in preaching. Luther's contribution was his realisation that the text should be allowed to communicate what it contained. Rigid rules of interpretation too often silenced the text, and so Luther diverged from the

medieval techniques of interpretation in that he allowed the text more freedom and did not subject it to a rigid series of questions that ensured that the interpreter found there only what he had expected to find.

'Deinde leges interpretandi verbi Dei non patior, cu oporteat verbi Dei esse non alligatu, quod libertatem docet omniu aliorum.' (Luther 1554.b: 463)

Luther also rejected allegory because it silenced the text in its quest for deeper, less obvious spiritual meanings. The interpretation of the text had to reflect the natural, plain meaning of the words. The Bible was absolutely clear with regard to salvation by grace through faith and the clear passages had to be used to illumine the unclear ones. In this Luther confirmed his rejection of allegory because it imposed an alien meaning on the text. He also rejected it because its presupposition was no longer acceptable to him. The presupposition of allegorical interpretation was that the reader's soul could mirror the transition from literal interpretation to spiritual interpretation in its climb to spiritual perfection. It was thought that, as the interpreter moved to deeper more spiritual meanings, his soul would be drawn, by the spiritual meanings, to a level of spiritual perfection. Luther rejected this and said that the Spirit of God works in and through the literal meaning of the text. The Spirit of God comes through the letter and in history and first condemns before making alive. The Word comes to man in his historical situation, through the letter intended for historical people, and, by the Holy Spirit, first lets man know that he is under God's judgment and then tells him that in Christ he has been forgiven and put right with God. Allegory, as the primary mode of exegesis, was no longer acceptable both because a growing awareness of the historical had shifted the focus from Platonic heaven to earth and because the link between grammatical interpretation and the spiritual experience

of the hearer had been recognised.

Luther did not attempt to be coldly objective in his exegesis. He believed that a text had not been properly or fully interpreted until it had cast light on the life of the reader. The Word of God had been addressed to people as a relevant Word to their situation and in order, therefore, to understand the relevance of that Word one had to attempt to determine what it would have meant to those people in their specific situations. Only once the original significance of the Word had been realised could its present significance become clear. In consequence, Luther continually attempted to project himself into the situations of those to whom the Word had come in the Bible, in an attempt to understand the text - which understanding, he took for granted, had implications for his life. Even today his commentaries and sermons bear eloquent testimony to the vitality of his interpretation.

## II

The aim of this section is, as was the case with the corresponding section of the chapter on Origen, to demonstrate that Luther created a meaning, for the Prologue of John's Gospel, that was determined to some degree by his context. It will be demonstrated that his background, his beliefs and the situation in which he found himself were instrumental in determining the meaning he attributed to John 1:1-18.

In this investigation of Luther's interpretation of John's Prologue one is restricted to his commentary-like sermons on John's Gospel. This volume is the primary source upon which the findings presented here are based. Luther did, of course, refer to the Prologue in many of his other writings, but these scattered and fragmentary references do not add anything new or relevant to the



thoughts expressed in the sermons. As was the case with the study of Origen's interpretation of John, the one, primary source provides more than enough evidence on which to base a conclusion. Luther, who is remembered primarily as an interpreter of the Pauline writings, had a high regard for the Fourth Gospel. Again and again, in his manifold theological pursuits, he turned to John's Gospel. This accounts for the presence of the scattered references to the Fourth Gospel throughout his writings. Our primary source, his sermons on John, arose out of his desire to devote Saturday sermons to this gospel. It had long been his desire to preach his way through the Fourth Gospel when at last his chance came when he was called upon to substitute in the pulpit for the parish pastor of Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen, who went abroad for some time. On July 7, 1537, Luther delivered the first of his sermons on John - and it is upon these that the findings that will be presented here are based. Already a fundamental difference between Origen and Luther's interpretation of John becomes evident. Origen wrote a commentary, the main purpose of which was to refute the Gnostic teachings of Heracleon's commentary. Luther's sermons, on the other hand, besides being sermons and not a commentary, did not have the same singleness of purpose and were more general and less avowedly polemical in their thrust.

Contextual factors instrumental in the creation of meaning:

1. Historical influences:

Luther's sermons on John's Prologue are filled with direct references and hinting allusions to events in the world at the time of his writing. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there should be repeated references to the Roman Catholic Church:

'The papists accuse me of insisting that God alone should be respected and revered. They

say that I set no store by the saints, disapprove of their ascetic life and their good works, as if they had never done anything good or useful. They say: "After all, did John the Baptist amount to nothing?" Furthermore, they aver that I have no regard for the Church, for papal power, that I am abolishing obedience to the pope, etc.' (Luther 1957:64)

This is one of the very few references, if not the only one, to the Roman Catholic Church that does not set out to attack it in defamatory terms. Here Luther appears to be restricting himself to a general summary of the objections which the papists had against him. While references of this type are infrequent, there are a great many passages of a polemical nature:

'Although the Antichrist in Rome and the devil frightfully mutilated and perverted all that is divine in the Church, God nevertheless miraculously preserved Holy Scripture - even though it was darkened and dimmed under the pope's accursed rule - and past it down to our day.' (102)

This passage not only reflects the prevalent practise of referring to the pope as the Antichrist, but also shows clearly the importance of Scripture as a major issue in the events in which Luther found himself involved. There are many passages of the polemical kind which do not so much refer us to events of the time, although to some extent they do this, as make it evident that Luther was involved in a bitter struggle with Rome. The passages of this kind bear the traces of an orator's evocative and emotional touch.

Because the pope blasphemes God so appallingly through his lies and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1); because in this way he has, from time immemorial misled innumerable thousands of souls; because he and his powerful faction condemn and damn the pure doctrine and persecute it as the rankest heresy; because they make bold to exterminate it and all who disseminate it, teach it, confess it, and are

loyal to it - in brief, because he judges his blasphemous abominations as just and holy and persists in retaining them, he is the most rapacious wolf and murderer of souls the world has ever seen.' (61)

'In like manner we today focus this light brightly and clearly on the papacy, so that even our enemies are convinced and must concede that our doctrine is the divine truth. For this light shines so powerfully before the eyes of the pope, bishops, cardinals and other knaves that it reveals to them their own darkness. But what good does it do? It is apparent how little we who preach it accomplish thereby. The papist mob with its motly hangers-on does not reform but only grows worse, more blinded, perverse, and stubborn. Unceasingly they are bent on subduing the light, yes, on quenching and extinguishing it, and on exterminating us, who send it out, teach it, and confess it.' (35)

'It was mainly the blasphemous Roman see, that is, one pope after another, who for several centuries set himself up as the supreme head and light of Christendom. This is his boast in all his bulls, books, and canon law. Yes, he also claimed to shine. But it seems to me that he shone like manure in a lantern. He, the chief and archheretic, hid the Gospel and buried it under a bushel. In its place he filled and flooded the world with his filth, stench, and dirty mess, that is, with his false and devilish doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1), his loathsome decrees and decretals, his gross idolatry, his abominations, and with innumerable sects and schismatic spirits.' (58)

In passages like these there is clearly some historical content but this serves only as a springboard to launch into long and emotional denouncements. In Origen's commentary, which also reflects its origin in the Church in a state of conflict, Origen mostly confines himself to an attack on the teachings of his opponents. Luther clearly did not feel the need to confine himself to attacking the doctrines of his opponents. He appears to have been more personally involved in the conflict than Origen was, whose commentary suggests a greater

detachment. Reflecting his historical situation, Luther did not attack only the Roman Catholic Church but spoke out against the proliferation of sects too. Again his language is emotive and forceful. In the following passage he denounces the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians, both of which, he claims, are hiding something evil under the guise of piety:

'When the Arians parade Christ as the noblest and most laudable of all creatures, that is not enough. By this device they were attempting to hide their shameful error from the people. In our day the pernicious sects of the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians follow the same course to cover up their numerous vices and wicked deeds.' (22)

Commenting on John 1:6, where John the Baptist is first introduced, Luther says that this verse, which stresses the significance of the oral word of testimony, denounces those of his own day who say that the spoken word of testimony and the sermon are irrelevant beside the higher wisdom of their own private visions:

'These words hurl another thunderbolt against the sectarians and fanatics of our own day, for these visionaries despise the oral word. And now mark well the words of our text, which are intended to honour the external Word. Those desperate rogues, the fanatics, would like to drive us to the point where the light, Christ, would be hidden from us.' (48)

In his attack on these sectarians who lay so much, even exclusive, emphasis on the personal spiritual experiences of the individual believer, Luther continues as follows:

'The Schismatic spirits ... lay claim to better ways and means of conversion; however, they do not convert to God but to the devil himself. They are so full of the fanatical spirit that they do not realise how much is required to overcome and vanquish one's own mistaken ideas, opinions, and conceit. It takes toil and trouble to engender faith in people by the

God-ordained means of the preaching ministry, absolution and the sacraments.' (48)

In the above passage, despite his denouncement of the Roman Catholic Church, one can see Luther's own Roman background coming through in his emphasis on absolution and the sacraments. His own peculiar emphasis on preaching is combined with this in his attack on the private, detached spirituality of the sectarians. In the following passage, in which he speaks out against the Anabaptists, the importance of the spoken word is again stressed:

'Here it is necessary to note these words which tell us that John was "sent from God" to bear witness to the light for the purpose of engendering faith in all. A warning to you to beware of the Anabaptists and their pernicious, spiteful, and fanatical ilk is very timely and necessary. As you have often heard, these people claim that "the Spirit, and the spirit alone, must perform everything." They ask: "What good does it do to give ear to the external Word, to rely on this as if it were the way and the means of bringing us to faith and of imparting the spirit. For, after all, a mere word is written with pen and ink. As soon as it is spoken it passes into thin air and vanishes." Thus they malign and blaspheme the blessed Word, which God himself called and commissioned John to announce.' (54)

In the above passages we have demonstrated that Luther's commentary-like sermons on the Prologue of John's Gospel reflect the historical situation in which they were written. They show Luther in conflict with, on the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church and, on the other hand, the numerous sects and breakaway movements. Without trying to push the evidence too far, it may be surmised that the impassioned character of Luther's attacks suggests that his concern lies on the plain of history where dangerous men are threatening the faith. Origen, however, in his more restrained speech against the Gnostic Heracleon, appears to be concerned more with the value of

eternal thoughts which float high above the earth than with the men and the circumstances responsible for the propagation of false knowledge.

Luther's sermons also tell us much, beyond what we have already noted, about his own background and the world in which he lived. Luther held a doctor's degree in theology at a time when such a degree was still very rare. His university background is alluded to in the following passage in which Luther comments on the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist:

'He received a genuine doctor's cap and royal crown, namely, the Holy Spirit ...' (77)

It is also well-known that Luther had been a monk for some time before he broke with the Roman Catholic Church. This is mentioned in his sermons when, on one occasion, he speaks about the futility and sin of attempting to justify oneself before God by one's works:

'Is he actuated by your sacrifices, your circumcision, the divine worship in your temple? No! Much less is he persuaded by my monasticism, in which I disgracefully squandered fifteen years of my life, wickedly crucified Christ, my dear Lord, with my blasphemous celebration of the mass, and misspent the best years of my life to my own and other people's detriment.' (135)

In the following extract, which speaks of the privilege of man's being made heir to God in Christ, Luther speaks in a way that appears to allude to the ascetic and rigorist practices of monasticism.

'To acquire this privilege we should be ready to crawl to the ends of the world on our knees, yes, on our bare feet.' (90)

Beyond these personal elements, Luther's sermons also reflect their medieval background in their constant

awareness of the supernatural. Luther and his contemporaries lived in a world inhabited by the devil himself and his evil spirits. The air was thick with spirits which were counted as continual threats to man's well-being and safety. There are a great many passages in the sermons which refer to this background, but only two of them will be mentioned here:

'But if, as God's Son, he sheds his blood to redeem us and cleanse us from sin, and if we believe this, rubbing it under the devil's nose whenever he tries to plague and terrify us with our sins, the devil will soon be beaten; he will be forced to withdraw and stop molesting us.' (24)

In the following extract Luther mentions a similar way of driving off the devil, but contrasts it with a superstitious and evil abuse of the sort of approach he is advocating:

'I have also read of a number of people who, when persistently assailed by the devil, crossed themselves and spoke these words: "The Word became flesh", or the equivalent: "I am a Christian!" with the result that the devil was beaten and put to flight and their peace of mind was restored. And I believe this to be true .... It is, however, a frightful misuse and a piece of witchery to write the words: "In the beginning was the Word." on a slip of paper, incase this in a quill or some other container, and hang it around one's neck or somewhere else; or to read these words as a protective charm against thunder and storm, as was customary in the papacy.' (106)

Luther's sermons also offer us brief glimpses into the services of the Church at the time and into monasticism. In the following passage Luther refers to a part of a service that is rich in symbolism - a symbolism which he himself, in reaction, tended to shun:

'These words, too, "And the Word became flesh," were held in reverence. They were sung daily

in every Mass in a slow tempo and were set to a special melody, different from that for the other words. And when the congregation came to the words "from the Virgin Mary, and was made man," everyone genuflected and removed his hat.' (102)

"If it is true that John the Baptist, this great and saintly man, as Christ himself calls him, was nothing but a witness to bear testimony to Christ alone, what then are we to think of Francis, Dominic, and others? They founded special organizations, established new monastic orders, and set themselves and their brethren apart from the people in costume and food, even initiating a new mode of living and alleging that theirs were holy monastic orders and the proper way to salvation. They did not follow the pattern set by John, who directed people to Christ; they drew them to themselves, attracting them to their monastic orders and their monastic rules.' (50)

Before we examine the way in which Luther's sermons on John's Prologue refer to the type of Society in which Luther lived, let us briefly turn to a short extract which reflects something of the scientific method of the age. In this passage, in which the eternal nature of the Word of God is under discussion, there is the mention of the result of dating the earth by means of biblical genealogies.

'This Word or Speech existed from the beginning of the creation of the world, approximately four thousand years before Christ's birth and incarnation.' (13)

Let us now proceed to the matter of Luther's references to the society in which he lived. In the first example he outlines the aspirations of the young men of various classes:

Take, for example, a rich peasant's son; he likes to look upon himself as a great young nobleman. A distinguished citizen's son will rely on his father's reputation and money. A powerful member of the nobility regards



himself as a prince of the land, esteeming himself very highly.' (88)

The same structure of society underlies the point he makes on page 91:

'Otherwise, take all the various stations of life, from the highest to the lowest, and you will find that all - emperors, kings, princes, townsmen, peasants - are called "flesh and blood" and are born of blood.'

So too in the following passage, where he discusses the power of the Word of God, is the structure of society alluded to. If a powerful man's word, says Luther, can accomplish much, how much more so with the Word of God.

'If we reflect on the matter at all, we must concede that a man's word, especially that of a great and mighty prince or king, really carries weight.' (11)

Other than these matters of local political concern, Luther also shows himself to be familiar with 'international affairs'. In the first reference the sermons mention the alarmingly rapid progress of the Turk and speak scornfully of the futile schemes of the pope to stop this advance. In the second reference the sermons play upon the seething discontent that Germans feel at the pope's interference in what they regard as their affairs.

'What measure of success and victory against the Turk might the Lord God be inclined to grant such protectors of the Church - so they style themselves - as condemn and damn his divine Word, give Christ the lie, persecute his believers in manifold ways, harass and murder them, and then piously propose to march against the Turk, give him battle, and defeat him for the honour of Christ and for the protection of his Church. It seems to me that they have hitherto defeated him so thoroughly that he has maintained himself

over against them for several centuries, that almost half of Europe was lost to him. Now he is occupying one country after another, and he has penetrated Hungary and Austria up to the boundary of Bohemia and thus could scarcely be closer to us. He has advanced to the gates of Vienna, into territory where we thought his name would never be heard.' (82)

'... then may the Germans call upon the pope, the Antichrist in Rome, their idol, for help and counsel, that he may lay the Turk or whoever it may be under an interdict and expel the enemy by means of his doctrine, creed, and prayer. But just as the Turk does not worry about the pope's interdict but pursues his aims with the sword, so the Antichrist will not be concerned about Germany's misery and ruin; indeed, he will even laugh up his sleeve and deride the Germans.' (85)

To conclude: we have demonstrated that Luther's sermons on the Prologue of John's Gospel are filled with references to the historical background against which they were delivered. This would suggest that Luther has interpreted the Prologue in such a way as to find in it a relevant word for the needs of his situation. Luther's historical context has, therefore, been instrumental in his creation of meaning for John 1:1-18. Origen's commentary, on the other hand, contains only a fraction of the explicit historical references that are found in Luther's interpretation. The reason for this difference may be, as we shall show shortly that Origen and Luther operated on different theological levels. Luther had his feet firmly fixed on the earth while Origen, as a result of his Platonism, underplayed the importance of the historical and the this-worldly.

## 2. Education:

Origen was a man of legendary ability and learning. His commentary on the Prologue of John is suffused with indications of the operation of a powerful mind. Luther's

sermons also betray tell-tale signs of great learning, although it is doubtful whether his ability approached Origen's. The presence of indicators of education may be regarded as contextual since they demonstrate that Luther's learning influenced the way in which he interpreted the text. Origen's mental ability and learning are demonstrated in his interpretation by the presence of convoluted philosophical arguments. Luther, on the other hand, while not devoid of philosophical argument, generally confines his arguments to illustrations from Church history.

'The first man to attack the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was the heretic Cerinthus, a contemporary of the apostles. He presumed to fathom and comprehend this article with his reason. Therefore he declared that the Word was not God. And in order to support this view he cited the verse from Deuteronomy (6:4): "The Lord our God is one God", and also (Dt 5:7): "You shall have no other gods before me." With this sham he worked great harm. He gained a powerful following. Many Jews attached themselves to him, even some of those who had believed in Christ.' (7)

In another passage Cerinthus is again mentioned:

'The heretics have called both natures of Christ, the divine and the human into question. Cerinthus, as already stated, began his attacks as early as the apostolic days. He denied his divinity. The Manichaeans impugned his humanity.' (21)

There are also two passages which refer to the errors of Arius. In the second extract Luther mentions the refutations of St Augustine.

'Arius, the heretic, was the most artful and subtle of all the enemies. In order to support his blasphemous lie that Christ was not true and natural God he invested it with a semblance of truth by alleging that in this text, "the Word was God," the term "God" did not refer to the true, natural God but to a titular deity.' (18)

On John 1:3:

'Augustine turns these words to good account against the Arians, who are given to pervert, to attenuate, to gloss and interpret so speciously all passages dealing with Christ's deity. St Augustine really presses them hard with this passage. And Arias found it impossible to surmount this obstacle, no matter how he perverted and glossed the words.'  
(19)

The final example that we shall use to show that Luther's education affected his interpretation is perhaps the most interesting of all. Luther is speaking about atonement and the metaphor that he uses in explanation is one that was very popular among the Fathers of the early Church:

'For the hook which is the divinity of Christ, was concealed under the earthworm. The devil swallowed it with his jaws when Christ died and was buried. But it ripped his belly so that he could not retain it but had to disgorge it.' (24)

To conclude: both Origen and Luther were learned men and this factor determined, to some extent, the way in which they interpreted the Fourth Gospel. Origen's education consisted primarily of Greek philosophy, though obviously not exclusively so, while Luther's consisted mainly of Church doctrine and history. To put it differently, it is extremely doubtful that Luther, and Origen for that matter, would have interpreted the Prologue in the way in which he did were it not for the fact and the character of his education.

### 3. Language:

Normally, as in our investigation of Origen's commentary, not much attention would be paid to the way in which the interpreter expressed himself, since the subtleties of style and vocabulary would call for a detailed investigation that is beyond the scope of this thesis. In

Luther's case, however, time should be spent on this subject for the simple reason that Luther's well-known use of strong, abusive and descriptive language is everywhere to be seen in his sermons of John's Prologue. In Luther's day strong, very often abusive, language was no stranger to the debates in which the Church found herself involved. Luther himself, however, was particularly well known for his use of this sort of language, and one finds this in his sermons on John too. In the following passage he is commenting on Mohammed's concession that Christ was born of a virgin:

'To be sure he conceded that Christ was born of a Virgin; but the Turks claim that such a thing is no rarity among them. Well, this may happen and be true among them; but with us those virgins who bear Children become women. A virgin who gives birth to a child cannot remain a virgin. We do not believe their yarn, and we do not want to spread it in our homes; otherwise our daughters would all become whores. I do not believe that a virgin who has a child remains a virgin. Among us this is incredible. Those who have the audacity to claim that it is true are stupid asses.' (18)

On much the same subject he continues on page 47 where he says of the Jews:

'Up to the present day they have persisted in their madness and folly, blaspheming the Virgin Mary, saying that she was a whore and that Christ the Lord was a whore's child, a murderer, or a malefactor.'

There are many other passages which serve as examples of the point that is being made. We shall, however, mention only two more. In both of these extracts the Roman Catholic Church is under attack. In the first one Luther denounces the Roman Catholics for not being open to the light which God is bringing to christendom through his movement. In the second he is arguing against any attempt to justify oneself before God by

one's works.

'Light is shining brightly before the very eyes of the people in these countries. Yes, the pope in Rome, the cardinals, the bishops, and all the papal scum and vermin know more about it than they wish.' (69)

'Therefore it is a terrible and detestable blindness and a demonic presumption when a person has the audacity, as the work-righteous hypocrites do, to attempt atonement for his sin through his works and tries in this way to earn the grace of God. It is wretched arrogance for a jurist, a scholar, a monk, or a nun to venture to boast this way. This is like a poor beggar - lice-ridden, syphilitic, leprous, filthy, stinking and crawling with maggots and worms over his whole body, but nevertheless proud and arrogant - who vauntingly says: "Just look at me, a handsome fellow!" .... Even if we were members of the highest aristocracy on earth and were prone to take pride in this, before God we would still be nothing but bags of worms or bags of manure, infested with lice, maggots, stinking and foul.' (132)

In conclusion, it would appear that Luther expressed his understanding of the Prologue of John's Gospel using his customary style and vocabulary. This suggests that the Prologue guided Luther to create a meaning that accorded with his usual style of expression. Since Origen's communication lacks the immediate and obvious characteristics of the type with which Luther's is imbued, we shall, not unreasonably, have to assume that what is true of Luther is equally true of Origen - namely, that they have created meanings, in response to the guidance of the text, that fall within the parameters of their semantic universes.

#### 4. Theological influences:

We will demonstrate that Luther's preconceived theological ideas come to expression in his sermons on the Johannine Prologue. Let us begin by showing that his

all important 'Word theology' is to be found in these addresses. There are a great many passages which deal with the pre-existent nature of the Word of God, for example:

'For a word is not merely the utterance of the mouth; rather it is the thought of the heart. Without this thought the external word is not spoken; or if it is spoken, it has substance only when the word of the mouth is in accord with the word of the heart. Only then is the external word meaningful; otherwise it is worthless. Thus God, too, from all eternity has a Word, a speech, a thought, or a conversation with himself in his divine heart, unknown to angels and men. This is called his Word. From eternity he was within God's paternal heart, and through him God resolved to create heaven and earth. But no man was aware of such a resolve until the Word became flesh and proclaimed this to us.' (9)

'God too, in his majesty and nature is pregnant with a Word or a conversation in which he engages with himself in his divine essence and which reflects the thoughts of his heart. This is as complete and excellent and perfect as God himself. No one but God alone sees, hears, or comprehends this conversation. It is an invisible and incomprehensible conversation. His Word existed before all angels and creatures existed, for subsequently he brought all creatures into being by means of his Word and conversation. God is so absorbed in this Word, thought, or conversation that he pays no attention to anything else.' (10)

'St John thus declares that there was in God a speech or Word (Wort) who occupied all of God, that he was God himself, that he had preceded the existence of all creatures, even of the angels. No one saw or heard him, not even the angels, since at that time they had not yet been created. Thus it must be a Word or conversation, not of any angel or any creature but of God himself, the Creator of all creatures. This we here term "The Word", not any ordinary Word but a Word that is as great as God himself. Indeed, the Word is God himself.' (12)

Having stressed the pre-existent nature and the creative function of the Word, Luther emphasizes the role of the Word in creatio continua and says that there exists so intimate a link between the Word and the world that man is dependent on the Word for his true light and life.

'God the Father initiated and executed the creation of all things through the Word; and now he continues to preserve his creation through the Word, and that forever and ever.'  
(26)

'Furthermore, this Word is also the light and life of man. Thus all animate beings, particularly man, derive their life from him; and all men whoever were, are now, and ever will be illumined receive their light from him, who is the true, eternal Light. Those who possess life and light must acquire it all from him. And since the beginning this Word has always spoken through the mouths of the patriarchs and prophets down to the time of John the Baptist.'  
(37)

Having said this about the Word, Luther has to distinguish between the Father and the Word:

'It is true, I make mention of two, namely God and the Word, i.e., the Father and the Son. But this Word was with God, yet not as a separate, distinct God; no, he was the true eternal God, of one essence with the Father, equal in might and glory. The distinction is that the Father is one Person, and the Son is another Person. Although the latter is a different Person, he is nevertheless the same God as the Father. Although there are two of them, yet the Son remains the one true God with the Father. The two Persons are distinguished thus: it is the Father who speaks; the other Person, the Son, is spoken.'  
(15)

There are, furthermore, a number of passages in his sermons that speak of the Incarnation of the Word of God:

'And now John turns to the humanity of Christ. He says that the Word, the Creator of all, the light and life of mankind, became flesh. That is: Christ assumed human nature, and



consequently two natures, the divine and the human, are now united in one Person.' (37)

'This means that he ate, drank, slept, awakened, was tired, sad and happy. He wept and laughed, hungered, thirsted, froze, and perspired. He chatted, worked, and prayed. In brief, he required the same things for life's sustenance and preservation that any other human being does. He laboured and suffered as anyone else does. He experienced both fortune and misfortune.' (73)

So far in Luther's sermons on John there are all the essential points that are present in his Word theology. An allusion to Scripture as the Word of God, in a derivative sense, completes the picture:

'If this conclusion is founded on Holy Scripture, which is the Word of God and abides forever (1 Peter 1:25 ...)' (14)

Before we conclude this part of the section, dealing with the way in which Luther interpreted the Prologue in accordance with his preconceived theological ideas, a brief digression is appropriate. Origen thought that the light of Christ was for all rational creatures, of which man was just one kind. Christ came, said Origen, for the salvation of demons, men, and angels. Luther, however, shows that he is concerned only with man, which is hardly surprising since we do not find in his thought anything like Origen's complex system to explain the fall and redemption. The following passages illustrate the difference:

'He wants to say that the life in him was not only for itself, for he imparts life to all creatures, particularly to man, that man may live eternally.' (30)

'The cows and the pigs, to be sure, also enjoy the universal light of the sun by day and the

light of the moon by night. But man alone is endowed with the glorious light of reason and intellect.' (30)

Speaking of the Light shining in the darkness, Luther says:

'John now disregards all other creatures, lets them go unheeded, and confines himself to human beings, all of whom are in darkness.'  
(32)

We have seen that Luther incorporated all the most important elements of his Word theology into his interpretation of John 1:1-18 (in much the same way that Origen's commentary incorporated his whole system). Although we have confined ourselves to only the barest outlines of the Word theology contained in Luther's interpretation, it should be noted that it is a much more diffuse entity, the influence and presence of which is to be found throughout the sermons. One of the 'subsidiary' areas in which the Word theology is demonstrated is in the discussion of law and grace. Christ, the Word of God, is the one who reveals God to us. But, in order to understand and appreciate the Word fully, one has to be aware of the difference between law and grace.

'... the Word, who is God's only-begotten Son, rested in the bosom of the Father and revealed him to us.' (8)

The above passage is the presupposition of Luther's frequent statements, both within these sermons and elsewhere, about law and grace and their relation to each other.

'The beginning of the eternal kingdom of Christ and the New Testament are coincident with the time of John the Baptist. And simultaneously the regime of Moses, of the prophets, the priests, and the Levites terminated .... The Ten Commandments, which

deal with holy life and conduct toward God and man, cease too, in the sense that they cannot damn us believers in Christ .... However, the Ten Commandments are still in force and do concern us Christians so far as obedience to them is concerned. For the righteousness demanded by the Law is fulfilled in the believers through the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit, whom they receive.' (38)

'This grace and truth were not taught by the Law or given by Moses. Grace and Truth draw a line of demarcation between Christ and Moses. The Law is not to be discarded as useless.' (140)

'... the Law cannot do or grant; its sole function is to point.' (145)

'It is proper that the law and God's Commandments provide me with the correct directives for life; they supply me with abundant information about righteousness and eternal life. The Law is a sermon which points me to life; and it is essential to remember this instruction; but it must be borne in mind that the Law does not give me life.' (143)

'The Law, however, is not to be discarded; for if we cast the Law aside, we shall not long retain Christ.' (146)

These quotations show that a view that Luther expresses in many of his other writings is also voiced in these sermons. The law, says Luther, is intimately bound to grace. The law and grace coexist inseparably. The law is always the essential prerequisite to the reception of grace, just as grace is meaningless without law. The law points and grace fulfills. If one has not first heard the demands of the law one will not know what to make of the grace brought by Christ. In Origen's commentary there is no similar discussion on law and grace. The emphasis there is always an education. The Old Testament and the philosophers provide a type of preliminary education that paves the way for the complete

education by Christ, leading to the deification of man.

Another important element in Luther's theology is his insistence on the appropriation of grace by faith and not by reason. Before we deal with this, however, let us examine the way in which Luther's concept of the people of God also comes to expression in the sermons on John 1:1-18. As far as Luther was concerned, both Christians and Old Testament Jews faithful to God belonged to one group - the people of God. The Church, therefore, is, for Luther, the body of those who belong to God in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. It has always been the Word of God who has brought revelation, and those who have heard and responded in faith to the Word addressing them as grace and revelation in both Testaments may be said to belong to the Church. This makes it possible for Luther, on page 63, to refer to Old Testament figures as being responsible for the restoration of true doctrine. This also makes it possible for him to speak about the Church and Saints in the Old Testament:

'Therefore the devil's church and the pseudo-saints always persecute and murder the true saints of God. Thus Cain killed his brother Abel, Ishmael persecuted Isaac, Esau persecuted Jacob, Saul persecuted David.' (81)

Let us now move on to discuss the presence of statements about faith and reason in these sermons on the Prologue of John's Gospel. It is not at all surprising, bearing his theological background in mind, that Luther should spend much time discussing faith in his sermons.

'This Jesus Christ, our Lord, alone imparts this birth, granting believers in him the privilege, the right, and the power to become God's children. He alone bestows sonship. Therefore they and only they are children of God who are born of God, that is, who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of Mary.' (101)

'And now God is pleased also with us, who believe in Christ and who thereby became partakers of his grace and truth. But if this grace were to terminate for us and if God were to enter into judgment with us, our gross deficiencies would come to light. God must pardon our iniquities and folly. Therefore our only source of comfort must be the knowledge that if we believe in his name, we are children of grace and truth, receive the Holy Spirit, and have no reason to doubt that God loves us and takes pleasure in us for the sake of his only-begotten Son in whom we believe .... For since the person is not aright with God - and his righteousness can be attained solely through faith in Christ - his works, be they ever so holy and good, cannot be instrumental in acquiring salvation.'

(121)

While Luther makes mention of faith, he also refers to the opposite of faith - the evil of self-assertion. Man either gratefully acknowledges that Christ has paid his debt or else tries to pay his own debts, little realizing that it is an impossible task that is merely more deeply entrenching his sin.

'The blinded and accursed world which lies in wickedness (1 John 5:19) does not believe this, much less the hypocrites and pseudosaints; indeed, they regard their entire doctrine, their life, and their deeds as upright and holy and as a service rendered to God, although, in reality, it is all deceit and a lie.' (125)

The discussion on the importance of faith is itself based on the understanding of the difference between law and gospel and the sort of knowledge promoted by each. Reason can appreciate the law, but faith is required to grasp the full import of grace. A sequence of lengthy, inter-related references is appropriate at this point, as it illustrates the difference between law and gospel and sets the scene for the explanation of the antithesis between faith and reason in Luther's thought.

'There are two kinds of knowledge of God; the one is the knowledge of the Law; the other is the knowledge of the Gospel. For God issued

the Law and the Gospel that he might be known through them. Reason is familiar with the knowledge of God which is based on the Law. It almost got hold of and sniffed God, for from the Law it saw the difference between right and wrong (150) .... Reason can arrive at a "legal knowledge" of God. It is conversant with God's commandments and can distinguish between right and wrong. The philosophers, too, had this knowledge of God. But the knowledge of God derived from the Law is not the true knowledge of him, whether it be the Law of Moses or the law instilled in our hearts (151) .... The other sort of knowledge emerges from the Gospel. There we can learn that the world is by nature an abomination before God, subject to God's wrath and the devil's power, and is eternally damned. From this the world could not extricate itself except through God's Son, who lies in the bosom of the Father. He became man, died, and rose again from the dead, extinguishing sin, death, and devil .... This is the true and thorough knowledge and way of thinking about God; it is called the knowledge of grace and truth, the "evangelical knowledge" of God. But this knowledge does not grow up in our garden, and nature knows nothing at all about it. Reason has only a left-handed and partial knowledge of God, based on the law of nature and of Moses; for the Law is inscribed in our hearts. But the depth of divine wisdom and of the divine purpose, the profundity of God's grace and mercy, and what eternal life is like - of these matters reason is totally ignorant.' (152)

According to Luther human reason can only have a poor, small and distorted understanding of God. The full revelation of God in the Incarnation of his Son, and the grace that comes to man in this, is beyond the feeble and fallen powers of the human intellect. The Incarnation calls man to faith, not to rationalization. It is interesting to observe that, in his sermons on the Johannine Prologue, Luther spends much more time warning against the inappropriate use of the intellect than he does urging people to faith. While faith is not always explicitly mentioned in the passages that caution against too rational an approach, the call to faith is the ultimate aim since, in Luther's thought, faith and

reason are the opposite sides of the same coin. At this point let us compare Origen's position in this regard. According to Origen human reason is an essential part of the salvation process. Reason serves as an important part of the educative process, but it needs a confrontation with the incarnate Logos to be perfected. Both Origen and Luther display in their interpretations of the Prologue attitudes that are consistent with sentiments expressed throughout their other works. These different understandings of the value of reason in the process of salvation may be expressed diagrammatically as follows:

Origen: Perfected education leads to deification and perfection

Christ as educator provides vital impetus

Some progress by 'unaided reason'

In Origen's thought salvation is completed as the incarnate Logos perfects the knowledge that will lead ultimately to deification. Up to the direct intervention of Christ man has been advancing slowly in the right direction - upwards - by means of his reason, which is intimately connected with the Logos, who is the source of reason. This unaided reason, however, needs the intervention of Christ to lead it to its conclusion.

Luther:

Faith as the graceful acceptance of salvation in Christ provides upward impetus

Man and his reason are hopelessly fallen - on the path to destruction

In Luther's thought man and his reason are fallen and sinful and are headed towards destruction. The Incarnation provides an unexpected option as it offers the possibility of a change in direction from destruction to salvation. Faith, without any help from reason, is the grateful grasping of this new possibility.

Having spent some time on the way in which Luther views the relationship between faith and reason, let us now examine some of the passages in which reason alone is

spoken of - inevitably in a way that complements what was said earlier when faith was the focus of the passages under investigation. As a result of his theological convictions, and possibly also as a result of the fruitless pursuits of scholastic rationalism, Luther held a disparaging view of man's rational ability, as he did of man's other natural abilities, as a factor of any importance in salvation. In our first passage dealing with the limitations of the mind Luther addresses the mysteries of the Triune nature of God:

'This must be accepted by faith. No matter how clever, acute, and keen reason may be, it will never grasp and comprehend it. If it were susceptible to our wisdom, then God would not need to reveal it from heaven and proclaim it through Holy Scripture.' (6)

Speaking about the opening words of the Fourth Gospel, Luther says:

'These introductory words to St John's sermon about the eternal divinity of Christ, so wonderful and unprecedented, were also very strange and unusual to all wise and rational people.' (7)

Speaking of the fact that the Word not only was with God, but is God too:

'This, I repeat, is a peculiar doctrine; it is foreign and strange to reason, and particularly to the worldly-wise. No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand.' (8)

Commenting on creation by the Word in Genesis 1:3, he says:

'Therefore we dare not consult reason here, but we must honour the Holy Spirit by believing his words and accepting them as the divine truth. To this end, the eyes of reason must be blinded, yes, gouged out, as it were. But he who refuses to believe,



let him go; let him continue on his path and see how he fares.' (10)

'Reason may raise its light aloft and laud it to the skies. And this light, admittedly, may be ingenious in secular and temporal matters; but under no circumstances should it presume to penetrate into heaven. Nor should we ever confer and consult with reason in matters pertaining to salvation. For in this area the world and reason are stone-blind, they will always remain in darkness and will never shed any light in that sphere in all eternity. Christ is the only light; he can and will counsel and help.' (60)

There are numerous other similar references to the reason and intellect, but let us conclude this discussion with a short quotation which summarises Luther's objection. Human reason, like man's other natural attributes, is not able to relate to God appropriately. God is beyond the scope and limitations of every attribute natural to man. But Luther's objection is not only to the inherent inadequacy of reason; it is also to the sinful self-assertion that leads man to attempt to relate to God in terms of man's feeble mental powers. At the heart of Luther's denunciation of reason is the belief that man can do nothing to help or save himself:

'The sophists and the pope also taught that man can love God above all things by virtue of his own innate strength.' (141)

Before we complete this section on Luther's theology there is one more verse to consider. It was well known that Luther believed that the Church should be subject to the authority of the state. In the following passage the same idea appears to be expressed:

'Nevertheless, the spiritual birth does not abrogate the duty of obedience to parents and government, but confirms it.' (94)

To conclude: in a discussion covering a number of themes

to be found in Luther's sermons on John's Prologue we have shown that Luther has explained the text in terms of his own preconceived theological views. Our investigation of Origen's commentary yielded a similar result. In these two interpretations of the same text we have been presented with two different theologies. From this we may deduce that the symbolic signposts of the Prologue led Luther and Origen to a destination within their preconceived theological universes.

5. Luther's approach to Scripture and its interpretation:

Under this heading we examine Luther's attitude to the Bible and the way in which he set out to interpret it. It is well known that Luther had a high regard for the importance of Scripture. His study of the Greek text of Romans had enabled him to see the abuses of the papacy - which he outlined in his 95 Theses. In consequence, he used Scripture to replace the Church as his base of authority. Since Luther regarded Romans 1:17,18 as the central thrust not only of Paul's writings but of the whole New Testament, he inevitably arrived at his sola fide position. This attitude to Scripture is fully expressed in his sermons on John's Prologue. In the first quotation Luther characteristically plays down the importance of Church tradition while pointing to Scripture. All of Scripture, he says, points to Christ, who alone is the source of grace and truth:

'Thus all of Holy Scripture, from beginning to end, points solely to Christ as our Source of grace and truth, ignoring all the Saints in regard to this matter. If grace and truth are to be acquired at all, Christ's fullness must perform this. Our few morsels and crumbs, our odds and ends, are not adequate.'  
(124)

This quotation is a clue to Luther's regard for Scripture. Scripture is so all-important because it always points

beyond man to Christ. Christ is God's first and last Word and the Bible always refers to this Word. Scripture is itself also, in a derivative sense, the Word of God and preaching exists to make what once was the Word of God to the people of Biblical times the relevant Word of God to people of the preacher's own day.

'For all our sermons tend toward this one goal, that you and we know and believe that Christ is the only Saviour and consolation of the world and the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. (1 Peter 2:25).' (60)

'Therefore I make bold to go back to the beginning with my commentary on the evangelist. For the world - and particularly we in the Church, who possess, preach, and confess God's Word - must remain conversant with this evangelist; to this end we must familiarize ourselves with his way of speaking.' (5)

The spoken word of testimony is God's chosen way of leading people to faith. Preaching is thus of central concern to Luther. But preaching does not exist in a vacuum. It always points to Christ and it must always rest firmly on, and draw tirelessly on, Scripture, which is the Word of God. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that we should find references of awe and pleasure with regard to Scripture. The Bible is the source of comfort and truth and brings joy:

'St John's Gospel was not the product of human volition. No, the evangelist was impelled by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth and, therefore, will not deceive us.' (88)

'But now let us look at the text, for it is wonderful ....' (7)

'We must treasure this text and take comfort from it in hours of sadness and temptation. Whoever lays hold of it in faith is lifted out of his distress, for he is a child of eternal bliss.' (115)

Commenting on John 1:8, Luther says:

'This is an extraordinarily beautiful text; it directs us to the only Saviour, Christ. The evangelist St John is very painstaking in his choice of words; hence each word is replete with meaning.' (56)

In his sermons on John Luther has demonstrated his characteristic regard for Scripture and, as we shall see in the following extracts, has promoted diligent investigation of these writings with attention to detail and meaning:

'We Christians must learn to familiarize ourselves with this phraseology or diction of Holy Writ; indeed of the Holy Spirit, which is so strange to the heathen, to the worldly-wise and to all unbelievers.' (119)

Speaking about God in his eternal conversation, Luther demonstrates his attentiveness in the following extract:

'In fact, since the days of Moses, St John the evangelist is the only one to refer and point to this. Admittedly, the prophets, and particularly David in Ps 33:6, also alluded to it; but their words lacked the lucidity and distinctiveness of Moses and St John in this passage.' (12)

At this point it would be interesting to compare Luther's and Origen's position in this regard. As we have seen, the Bible held a theologically important position in both Luther's and Origen's thoughts. Both men devoted much time and effort to interpreting it. It is probably true that Origen was more painstaking in his interpretation of the New Testament than Luther was, if only perhaps because for him each word could have many spiritual meanings, whereas Luther tried to confine himself to the more common-sense and literal meanings. Another conclusion which may perhaps, cautiously, be drawn is that Luther's sermons on John reflect a more spontaneous enthusiasm

for the Bible than does Origen's commentary, which suggests less spontaneity than sober self-control.

We come now to the point at which we look at the way in which Luther actually set about interpreting John chapter one. While Luther undoubtedly ushered in a new epoch in biblical interpretation, it is also true that he could never quite break free from his Medieval background. This is reflected in these sermons in a number of allegory-like interpretations of the Old Testament, sometimes with a strong flavour of the legendary present.

'For it is he (Christ) who seizes the devil and crushes his head; then the devil, in turn, takes hold of him and bruises his heel. In this world the struggle will never cease between Christ and the devil, the struggle in which the seed of the woman will crush the head of the snake and the snake will bruise his heel (Gn 3:15).' (17)

'In the Garden of Eden he revealed himself to Adam and Eve shortly after their fall; he cast a bright ray of this light into their hearts; he illumined and comforted them. After the sorrow inflicted by the serpent, he again gladdened their hearts when he said (Gn 3:15): "The woman's seed (that was he) will bruise the head of the serpent on your behalf." Regarding this Light Adam and Eve preached to their children and children's children, saying that he would come into the world in due time.' (31)

Luther continues this line of thought in the following quotation, which expresses an idea in St Augustine's City of God:

'That is to say, the light shone from the beginning of the world. God's Word was preached everywhere. Before the deluge it began to shine through Adam and the other patriarchs. For soon after receiving the promise Adam began to proclaim that God would send forth his Son, through whom he had created the world, to crush the serpent's head, to illumine mankind, and to

give it eternal life and salvation. This was his sermon. He preached it every day. But the great multitude of his time were in darkness. The Word shone and spread its light in their midst by means of his sermons, but they scorned it and remained in darkness. It is terrible to contemplate that Cain, his own son, soon became apostate, murdered his brother Abel, and established a new church.' (33)

It may also be the allegorist's desire to find developed Christian doctrine in the Bible that leads Luther to interpret the first three verses of John's Gospel in terms of credel formulae:

'From the very beginning the evangelist teaches and documents most convincingly the sublime article of our holy Christian faith according to which we believe and confess the one true, almighty, and eternal God. But he states expressly that three distinct Persons dwell in that same single divine essence, namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.' (5)

There are many other indications of Luther's Medieval background, but we will mention only one more - one that has a decidedly dated flavour. In this passage Luther is commenting on the idea of the Word becoming flesh:

'This elicited the awe of St Bernard and gave rise to many fine thoughts, found especially in his devotions. He gave it as his opinion that this had caused the archfiend Lucifer's fall and eviction from heaven. Perhaps Lucifer, so St Bernard supposed, had foreknowledge of God's eternal resolution to become man in time, and not an angel. This provoked his insolence against God. He was aware, of course, that he was a creature more beautiful and excellent in appearance than man. This also aroused his envy of mankind; he begrudged man the high honour of God's assumption of human nature. This vexed him and his companions. They became envious when they learned that God would despise them and assume human nature. Therefore Lucifer and his hosts fell and were driven out of heaven.' (103)

Just as there are many traces of Luther's Medieval interpretation in these sermons on John, so too are there many diverse indications of the revolutionary change that he introduced into the sphere of interpretation. The sermons bear the marks of Luther's own individual approach to interpretation. In most of the passages in these addresses Luther leaves behind the legendary and forsakes allegory and turns to a way of interpreting John based on man's experience of God in history. This results in a greater emphasis on the realm of the historical than is found in most other commentators prior to him. The following passages, with their attempt to take seriously Jewish national aspirations, may well illustrate this point since Luther does not slip into allegory but confines himself to the historical plane. Nothing of a similar nature is to be found in Origen's commentary. On page 38 Luther attacks the mistaken Jewish notion of the Messiah's kingdom as an earthly one, and on page 42 he says:

'Thus they attempt to restrict and bind the kingdom of the Messiah to the earthly Jerusalem. There the Messiah is to reside; and from there - so they suppose - he is to send forth Jews into all the world, appointing them masters and governors over Rome, Babylon, Constantinople, etc. From these cities they are to bring great treasures, gold and silver, to Jerusalem, where their Messiah, the all-powerful king and lord over all the world - so they dream - is to hold court.'

Luther has largely turned his back on the realm of the unchanging and perfect heavenly sphere of pure reason and detached souls and now concentrates his energies rather on the level of man's existence in history. He is, therefore, concerned to see how historical people in the past received or misunderstood the Word of God. It may well be this concern which drives him to ask:

The true Light enlightens every man coming into the world:

'St John employs a peculiar expression, and whoever is not conversant with Christian doctrine and faith will find these words dark and obscure. Is this the meaning that every man is to be enlightened through him? This sounds strange in view of the fact that not every man, but only a minority in the world, believe in him.' (66) 15

In these sermons, in accord with his desire to determine what the original address meant to the historical recipients of the Word, Luther begins by attempting to ascertain what the writer was endeavouring to communicate. This is the essential preliminary to his attempt to apply this meaning to the situation in which he, and his congregation, finds himself.

'In Scriptural parlance "flesh" denotes a complete human being ....' (110)

'Holy Writ employs its own peculiar mode of expression, and we must familiarize ourselves with it. Here we have to ascertain the meaning of the phrase "to sit in the bosom of the Father."' (148)

Luther's sermons on the Johannine Prologue are commentary-like in that they set out to explain the meaning of the text in a sequential way that follows the progress of the text itself. Origen's commentary, like Luther's, also aims at interpreting the text, but in a very different way. This difference does not reside simply in Origen's large scale adoption of Platonic allegory. In Luther's commentary there is a definite effort to apply the understanding gained from the text to the realm of everyday life. This is not the case with regard to Origen's interpretation. For Origen it would appear that the liberation of higher spiritual meaning is all that is necessary; the soul must itself appropriate this meaning which does not really have anything directly to say to the historical situation of the interpreter. In keeping with this, the final elements that we shall examine here



are those obvious indications of the sermon context of Luther's interpretation - sermon illustrations:

'I am want to submit a rather plain and crude illustration in an effort to make this birth of the Son of God somewhat intelligible ....'  
(6)

In illustrating creatio continua, he says:

'By way of illustration: we who are assembled in this place today were not here a century ago; but in due time each of us was born, and now we have our being. However, a hundred years hence none of us will be here any longer; in our stead others will be born who are not yet alive today. No one yet unborn even knows who his parents will be or where his abode will be to shelter and sustain him.' (27)

To conclude: we have shown that Luther's sermons on John accord with his sentiments expressed elsewhere both with regard to his regard for Scripture and his method of interpreting it. We have also shown that the sermon-context of his interpretation played a part in determining the way in which he interpreted the Prologue of John's Gospel.

### Conclusion

Our investigation of Luther's interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel has revealed that, even as an innovator, he was a child of his own age and that he interpreted Scripture in a way that reflected both his age and his innovations. It has been shown that he used his customary methods and procedures in interpreting this passage and that his interpretation resulted in meanings that accorded with the theological convictions he expressed in his other works prior to his sermons on John. This implies that, as some modern theorists have suggested, the text, in this case John 1:1-18, may serve as a series of sign-posts that guide

the interpreter, in this case Luther, to discover a meaning that lies not so much in the text as in the interpreter's semantic universe. Our findings so far would, therefore, support the theory that the reader creates the meaning of a text in relation to his context, under the direction of the text itself.

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### Footnotes

1. 'Note the influence of Latin translations of the Scripture: Acts 2:38, μετανοήσατε is translated by poenitentiam agite, which could well mean "do penance", and could then be interpreted with reference to the whole penitential system. (cf Mt 3:2, 4:17, 11:20, 12:41; Mk 6:12, Lk 11:32 etc.)  
The verb in classical Latin is impersonal (paenitet me = I repent) and therefore it is more easily rendered by a compound expression, though the personal form of the verb is found occasionally in the Vulgate - e.g. Mk 1:15, Lk 10:13.' - Comment by Prof. Suggit.
2. The principle of sola scriptura, and its essential prerequisite in the closely related principles of solus Christus, sola gratia and sola fide, is expressed here.
3. Opinions contrary to the official papal ones were not encouraged - as these two extracts from Exsurge Domine suggest:  

'Purgatorium non est probari ex sacra Scriptura, quae sit in canone.' (Kidd 1911:78)

and

'Si Papa cum magna parte ecclesiae sic vel sic sentiret, nec etiam erraret; adhuc non est peccatum aut haeresis contrarium sentire,

praesertim in re non necessaria ad salutem, donec fuerit per concilium universale alterum reprobatum, alterum approbatum.' (Kidd 1911: 78)

4. cf. Luther 1967:128: 'Dr Usingen, my teacher, said to me when I loved the Scriptures so much, "What is the Bible? One must read the ancient doctors, for they sucked truth out of the Bible. The Bible is the cause of all sedition."'
5. cf. Augustine 1950:362: '... whatever is said to be meant by an obscure passage should be either confirmed by the testimony of obvious facts, or should be asserted in other less ambiguous texts.'
6. Luther 1960.a:20: 'They wish to be the only masters of Holy Scriptures, even though in their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority, and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith, and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, nay, even unnatural ordinances have a place in canon law...'
7. cf. Luther 1960.b:275: 'They err who ascribe to you alone the right of interpreting Scripture.'
8. cf. Luther quoted in Greenslade (1963:13): 'There are many questions which I am not going to try to settle. Some people are so hairsplitting and meticulous that they want to have everything absolutely precise. But if we have the right understanding of Scripture and hold to the true article of our faith that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died and suffered for us, it won't matter much if we can't answer all the questions put to us.'
9. Interestingly enough throughout the debates the canon stood, the text was generally accepted and translation never became a major issue. The question of interpretation was, however, always in

- the forefront.
10. It is strange that Luther never gave a detailed explanation of his attitude to the Bible. There are many isolated passages and casual references, but nowhere did Luther give any systematic account of his attitude to Scripture.
  11. cf. Aquinas (1920:18): 'The parabolic sense is contained in the literal, for by words things are signified properly and figuratively.'
  12. It is a tribute to Luther that he embraced the historical view of the Bible in spite of the fact that it raised so many perplexing issues.
  13. cf. Luther's Lectures on Genesis (1958:19): 'This Word is God; it is the omnipotent Word, uttered in the divine essence. No one heard it uttered except God himself, that is, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And when it was spoken light was brought into existence, not out of the matter of the Word ...'
  14. cf. Luther (1974) in his commentary on Psalm 2:9 where, in his discussion of 'Rod of iron', the twofold nature of the Word is stressed.
  15. This is evidenced by Black's (1985:341) findings. He examined commentaries, on Ps 51, written by Luther at three different periods of his life, in an attempt to ascertain whether Luther had undergone any obvious development in his exegetical method. He came up with the following results: 'With traditional medieval methods of exegesis, Luther exhibits in these three commentaries both continuity and dissimilarity. In 1513:1515 Luther is still wedded to the classical division of complete gloss and selective scholion as well as to the sort of dialectical argumentation often associated with scholasticism. By 1517 the heavily analytical procedure has dropped out (at least from that commentary); nor does it reappear in the 1532 lectures. In his later two commentaries there is no sharp demarcation between gloss

and scholion the former has become entwined with the latter, and the extended theological concerns of the scholion are clearly in the ascendent. The selective 1513 scholion has become, by 1532, a far more systematic, thorough and elaborate theological treatment. However, with the possible exception of anagogy, all the elements of the classical Quadrige remain fluidly in play throughout the development of Luther's exegesis .... In short, Luther's interpretative procedure from 1513 to 1532, insofar as it may be gauged by these three commentaries, indicates a creative, highly personal recasting of older exegetical methods; yet Luther remains all the while very much a child of his age, continuing throughout his career to employ, with flexibility, tried and tested expository procedures.'

16. It would be interesting to know whether Luther was using a Greek text or the Vulgate in his interpretation of 1:9. Unfortunately, however, there are no clear indications in the sermons as to which text he was using. It would seem, all things considered, that Luther was simply following the Vulgate.

## CHAPTER FOUR

- BULTMANN -

## I

The aim of this section of the chapter is to examine the way in which Bultmann interpreted the New Testament. While it is undoubtedly true that his approach to the New Testament was radically new, it is also true that he did not arrive at the position that he adopted in isolation. Certain currents of thought provided him with invaluable ideas while others, by virtue of their inadequacy, served as stimuli that prompted him to search for more satisfactory solutions. It follows, therefore, that mention will be made of most of the decisive stimuli to Bultmann's thought. By including this background information one makes it possible to understand something of the true meaning and significance of Bultmann's method of interpreting the New Testament.

In dealing with Bultmann's characteristic way of interpreting the New Testament, one should begin by examining his understanding of history. The New Testament, like any other document, has a history. It was not written in some timeless zone of eternal and unchanging truth. It was written at a specific time, and in a specific context, in history. As soon as one concedes that the Bible was written in a specific historical context, one comes face to face with the problem of history. To acknowledge that the New Testament was written a long time ago means at the same time the acceptance of the necessity of explaining the meaning of the term 'history'. The possible relation between the past and the present needs to be clarified before one begins to interpret a text like the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> At around the turn of the century the liberal theologians had a very fixed view

as to the meaning of history. Adolf Harnack is an excellent example of a liberal theologian in the way in which he understood history and in the way in which this understanding of history influenced his interpretation of the New Testament. Harnack held a positivist view of history. For this he was indebted to the influential historian Leopold van Ranke. Van Ranke was concerned with wie es eigentlich gewesen ist. History was seen to be the study of what had actually happened in the past. It was concerned with events that could never be relived - events that could, by virtue of their 'pastness', never have any direct influence on the present. While history could never have any direct bearing on the present, van Ranke maintained that it could be of indirect significance in that it could engender moral education in the historian. Harnack, in agreement, said that the New Testament was essentially historisch - that the events recorded there were part of the past and that the task of biblical criticism was merely to uncover the past without appropriating any direct meaning from the text. The result was that the decisive nature of God's act in Christ was overlooked and Christianity was reduced to a set of timeless ethical and religious truths.<sup>2</sup> It was Karl Barth who first seriously challenged this view of history and theology. Barth was convinced that history, as understood by the liberal theologians, was interfering with the proclamation of the true meaning of the New Testament. The Word of God in the New Testament, he maintained, was of vital present significance. Historical criticism could not be allowed to interfere with the life-changing challenge of the kerygma, or central thrust of the New Testament.

'Nevertheless my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavour to see through and beyond history into the Spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit. What was once of grave importance is so still. What is today of grave importance - and not merely crotchety and incidental - stands in direct connexion with that ancient gravity.

If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, these answers must be ours.' (Barth 1953: Preface to the First Edition)

The shortcoming of Barth's revolutionary stand was that he was unable to place his understanding of Scripture on a sound historical foundation. He could not integrate his understanding of the kerygmatic nature of the New Testament with a convincing explanation of history. It remained for Bultmann to integrate historical criticism and the kerygmatic nature of the New Testament. Bultmann appears to have been dependent upon Heidegger, and Collingwood who held a very similar view on the nature of history, for his understanding of history. Heidegger was convinced that man, in recording history, was not indulging in a time-bound activity. The world and the events in it are not, said Heidegger, simply there and recorded as such. Man and history go together because man and the world go together. The world does not exist for man as something external - it exists in relation to his existential possibilities. Consequently, history is not something that can be written or studied as something external or removed. History is an encoded expression of man's self-understanding. In accepting this view of history, Bultmann was able to place kerygmatic theology on a sound historical foundation.

Once Bultmann had established for himself the nature of history and the nature of historical documents, he then had to determine how these documents were to be interpreted. He believed that texts were encoded messages of self-understanding and that the best way of interpreting them was the hermeneutic circle. Demythologization, which we shall discuss shortly, was a circular process. One comes to the text with a certain understanding of human existence and as one reads on this understanding of existence is modified. One returns to the text with a modified pre-understanding of human existence which is



again modified as one puts these new questions to the text. In so doing the reader's own self-understanding is gradually modified by the dialogue with the text. This change in self-understanding leads to a definite change in the existence of the reader. The hermeneutic circle was not, however, Bultmann's own discovery but had appeared in a number of different forms in the history of philosophy. Schleiermacher was responsible for significant advances in New Testament study by doing away with the special interpretive systems used by New Testament scholars and by replacing them with something approximating a general hermeneutic principle. True understanding of a text, he said, does not come from simply observing hermeneutic rules. As a result, he employed two circles of understanding. The first one dealt with the text itself. In order to understand any part of a text one must first have some idea as to the meaning of the whole text. The whole, however, consists of the sum of the parts. As one's knowledge of the parts accumulates, so one's knowledge of the whole is altered. Eventually, after several readings, one's knowledge of the parts and the whole coincide. The second hermeneutic circle gave rise to Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutic. In this circle there is a movement between the psyche of the reader and the psyche of the author. A shared human nature is chiefly responsible for facilitating this dialogue across time. The reader imagines himself in the position of the author and then listens to the author's words. A living bridge of thought between the author and the reader is built as the reader projects himself back into the author's context and allows a dialogue to take place between his understanding and the author's belief. It is this living bridge of thought, said Schleiermacher, which is responsible for comprehension - for making it possible truly to understand the text. Dilthey greatly admired Schleiermacher's work but felt that, though he had made a valuable pioneering contribution, much still remained to

be done. He tried to go beyond Schleiermacher by expanding his psychological hermeneutic in such a way that understanding became a personal art.<sup>3</sup> He agreed with Schleiermacher that the common basis of all humanity made comprehension possible. He thought, though, that Schleiermacher had not gone far enough, and so he said that the text had to be regarded as the product and expression of one man who, in it, was revealing his existential possibilities and opening up the possibility of new self-understanding to the hearer. The stage was set for Heidegger, who would give the hermeneutic endeavour a more solid grounding. Bultmann was himself greatly influenced by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, but Heidegger provided him with what he needed to pursue his hermeneutic task more effectively. In the early 1920's Martin Heidegger delivered a series of lectures at the University of Freiburg. The aim of the lectures was to ascertain the meaning of Aristotle's writings for Heidegger's own day. These lectures evidenced a shift in emphasis from the text itself to the nature and situation of man. The aim was not so much to ascertain what Aristotle was saying as to find out how to prepare the individual to hear what was being said. The message itself was, in fact, the clue to the problem of preparing people to hear it. The eternal call of the meaning of human existence was the message and, as such, was also seen to be the key to the problem of preparing people to hear the message. In these lectures Heidegger was not proposing anything radically new so much as refining what Dilthey had said. What Heidegger meant by 'to destroy what is in our intellectual history' (Waterhouse 1981: 54) in these lectures is a virtually identical process to Bultmann's later demythologization.

The time has now come to examine Bultmann's demythologization hermeneutic in detail. Bultmann was, in his attempt to demythologize the New Testament, endeavouring to present Christianity as a live option for modern man.

Christianity, as it has been traditionally presented, and as we find it in the Bible, is meaningless to modern man said Bultmann. Historical criticism, while an invaluable tool, is not enough to make a text intelligible. The task of demythologization is, therefore, to rephrase the Gospel in terms understandable to our time and also to ensure that salvation is really still by faith, through grace, by revealing the true stumbling-block and offence in the Christ event.<sup>4</sup>

Bultmann begins by stating that the world view of the New Testament is mythological:

'The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character. The world is viewed as a three-storied structure, with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath. Heaven is the abode of celestial beings - the angels. The underworld is hell, the place of torment. Even the earth is more than the scene of natural, everyday events, of the trivial round and common task. It is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his daemons on the other. These supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that men think and will and do. Miracles are by no means rare. Man is not in control of his own life. Evil spirits may take possession of him. Satan may inspire him with evil thoughts. Alternatively, God may inspire his thought and guide his purposes. He may grant him heavenly visions. He may allow him to hear his word of succour or demand. History does not follow a smooth unbroken course; it is set in motion and controlled by these supernatural powers. This aeon is held in bondage by Satan, sin, and death (for "powers" is exactly what they are) and hastens towards its end. That end will come very soon, and will take the form of a cosmic catastrophe. It will be inaugurated by the woes of the last time. Then the judge will come from heaven, the dead will rise, the last judgement will take place, and men will enter into eternal salvation or damnation.'

(Bultmann 1964:1,2)

The mythological world view, however, no longer holds

currency both because the end of the world anticipated by it did not come to pass and also because the influence of science and technology seems largely to have refuted it.<sup>5</sup> Man no longer views the world in the same way as he used to. The problem then arises as to what to make of Christ, whose saving activity is expressed in terms of this world view. Because this world view is no longer acceptable to modern man, does it mean that Christ, whose saving activity is expressed in terms of this world view, is no longer relevant? Bultmann believed in the relevance of Christ, but at the same time thought that it was futile to try to understand him in terms of the mythological world view. It is impossible for man to return to this view of the world. Mythology has to be interpreted - not eliminated.<sup>6</sup> Bultmann found in Heidegger's thinking the key to interpreting mythology. What man was doing in formulating his mythological world view was not attempting to describe the world as it was in itself, but how he understood himself in relation to the world. This means that mythology is not to be interpreted cosmologically, but existentially - as a series of statements about man's own existential self-understanding.<sup>7</sup> In his existential demythologization, Bultmann claimed not to be initiating a radically new method of interpretation but simply to be continuing a process started in the Bible by both Paul and John (realised eschatology is a sign of this early demythologization).<sup>8</sup> According to Bultmann no knowledge can be gained from a text unless the reader first poses a question to the text under examination. In the case of the New Testament one should interrogate it as to its understanding of human existence.<sup>9</sup> By interrogating it along those lines one's own self-understanding is gradually changed; which changed self-understanding leads to a change in one's existence - one becomes a different person.

Bultmann claimed that anyone wishing to interpret the New Testament in terms of human existence would have to make

sure that he was thoroughly acquainted with the meaning of 'human existence'. It would not do to base one's interpretation on some vague and uncertain understanding. One had to use the best analysis of human existence available.<sup>10</sup> For this analysis Bultmann turned to Heidegger's Sein und Zeit. He believed that it provided him with the best conceptual structure for the clarification of the Gospel for his time.<sup>11</sup> It follows, therefore, that if one wants to understand Bultmann's process of demythologization it is imperative that one examines Heidegger's Sein und Zeit.

Martin Heidegger's book Sein und Zeit was published in 1927 and was in keeping with the general trend of the time in that it was ontological in nature.<sup>12</sup>

'The central problem of metaphysics was no longer the subject-object relationship, nor the relation between mind (soul) and body, but that of ontology, the investigation of the being of being things.' (Moenkamer 1962: 99)

Heidegger was interested in the problem of being in general and the analysis of the being of man that we find in Sein und Zeit was intended as an introduction to the wider, unfinished task. In Sein und Zeit Heidegger claims simply to be revealing the essence of what we are and do. Heidegger begins this convoluted volume by constructing an ontology based not on cosmology, but on man. He uses man as his starting point because man, as opposed to everything else in the world, has an awareness of his own existence.<sup>13</sup> Man (Dasein - Being there) is the recipient of the revelation of Being. 'Being' is the universal which all existing things exemplify and man, by virtue of his existential self-awareness, is Heidegger's point of entry into an understanding of Being itself. Individual and inexchangeable man steps out of Being to reveal it. By definition, Heidegger does not start with an ideal picture of human existence; he

looks at everyday man to ascertain both what sort of Being we have who are investigating Being and to investigate the relationship between Dasein and Being - with a view, ultimately, to understanding Being. Heidegger begins his examination of human being by acknowledging that man's context is the world. Human being exists in the world. The world, however, is not something only vaguely related to man - human being is not above the world. Human being and the world are intimately linked. Human being sees the world as a resource - providing it with all that is necessary to attain its ends. It is because human being does not exist in isolation that it has possibilities. Because human being exists on a stage of resources it is continually faced with all sorts of possibilities. Human being is essentially possibility of Being (Existenz). While human being is essentially possibility and potential, this potential and possibility is not limitless. Dasein is characterized by Faktizität - thrownness (Geworfenheit). Human being finds that it exists in a certain context - its position in this context was not chosen by Dasein, hence its thrownness. Faktizität (or factuality) means that human being is not presented with unlimited possibility. Human being is possibility - but Faktizität means that the possibilities of Dasein are determined and limited by the context in which Dasein finds itself. It follows, therefore, that human being may gain or lose its true self, depending on how it responds to its possibilities. Human being is both freedom and necessity and minute by minute decisions have to be made which should lead to an integration of Faktizität and Existenz in the attainment of the true potential of Dasein. Heidegger speaks of inauthentic and authentic existence and says that inauthentic existence is the basic and most prevalent form of human being and that authentic existence is a modification of that. Human being is time bound and has both a beginning and an end. Human being is sein zum tode - being unto death. Death is the ultimate possibility and human being can only come

to terms with what it is by coming to terms with its possibilities.<sup>14</sup> By making decisions now, in the light of the past and in the awareness of the possibilities of the future, Dasein may either gain or lose its true self. Death is Dasein's ultimate possibility, but the thought of ceasing to be Dasein fills human being with anxiety (Angst).<sup>15</sup> Dasein, by ignoring death, shut itself off from its ultimate potential and the attainment of its true self. Dasein tries to overcome the anxiety of the fact that it is sein zum tode by losing itself in the hubbub of the crowd. In that state Dasein is guilty of sin and the conscience calls Dasein to strive to attain its true potential in the light of its possibilities.<sup>16</sup> Sin does not mean guilt in a moral or religious sense - it is simply Dasein's failure to exist responsibly. This inauthenticity is characterized by care (Sorge) - it is a feeling of heaviness in the light of the true possibilities and meaning of Dasein. Sorge may be either negative or positive in value - it may either drive a man to embrace his possibilities, or else it may linger on as a heavy burden of guilt. Authenticity, by contrast, requires courage and honesty. It is the resolution to attain the true potential of Dasein by making Faktizität one's own and by disposing of one's potential in an honest and courageous way.

Bultmann claimed that in this work by Heidegger was the essential prerequisite for making the Bible intelligible for his own day. It provided him, he said, with the categories necessary for interpreting the Bible and making it available to modern man in terms that he could understand. Here was the key to making it possible for modern man to hear the challenging Word of God addressed to him in the life-changing preaching of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Bultmann set about interpreting the New Testament in the light of Heidegger's analysis of human existence, showing how the Christ event, and its subsequent preaching, made it possible for man to

realise the true meaning of his life and to begin to live an authentic life. The influence of Heidegger led him to divide man in the New Testament into two categories - the New Testament, he said, speaks of the man without Christ and the man with Christ. This division is not in itself particularly Heideggerian - Bultmann used his analysis to illuminate the existential meaning of each of these two types. The man without Christ corresponds to the state of inauthentic existence in Heidegger's thought. Man prefers to ignore his indebtedness to God. God is the Creator of all things and is man's true Master. Man, however, ignoring his true position, tries to be independent of God as he tries to create his own security. Man's life is not something over which he has complete control and this fills him with anxiety.<sup>17</sup> This anxiety in the face of the unknown future leads him to an attempt to create his own security. Man shuts himself off from God and devotes his time to creating illusory security for himself. This self-assertion is the essence of inauthentic existence because it is based on a false understanding of man's potential. Man, by making decisions as to his course of action in the light of a false understanding of his true position, falls into a state of inauthentic existence. On the human level, this inauthentic existence leads to strife and competition as man feels that others are threatening this illusory security. To facilitate the transition from inauthentic to authentic existence - to become the man of faith as opposed to the man without Christ - Bultmann employs Heidegger's category of decision. Man, however, is not able, in the New Testament understanding, to make this decision on his own. This sets Bultmann's understanding of authentic and inauthentic existence apart from that of the philosophers. The philosophers maintain that man has the power in himself to make the transition, while Bultmann is convinced that it is only God's action in Christ which makes this possible. The death and resurrection of Christ is the saving event



which makes the life of faith possible. It shows man his true position by underlining the folly of his self-assertive ways and by showing him who his true Master is.<sup>18</sup> The saving event is the Cross which breaks into man's consciousness and calls him to the realisation of the meaning of his life. Man has no security, no authentic life, until he acknowledges his true position and opens himself to the unknown future which reveals itself, in faith, as love in Christ.<sup>19</sup> The Cross is therefore also forgiveness because it frees man from his inauthentic life-style. The Word of God is, by its very nature, the ever-present revelation of God which day by day calls man to a true assessment of his position and possibilities as, day by day, Christ the crucified and risen is presented. The Christ event makes new self-understanding possible. This changed self-understanding leads to a concrete change in one's existence. The man of faith no longer finds security in his own efforts.<sup>20</sup> In agreement with his true position he opens himself in faith to the unknown future which is revealed, in Christ, as loving certainty. Authentic man is freed to serve God and to live in harmony with his fellow man.

In conclusion, Bultmann was a kerygmatic theologian. He believed that in the person of Christ God had performed an act of decisive importance with regard to salvation. The account of the saving significance that one finds in the New Testament is, however, expressed in terms no longer intelligible to modern man, maintained Bultmann. The New Testament has to be interpreted in such a way that, in the Word of preaching, modern man finds himself forced to make a life-changing decision with regard to Christ, whose true and personal significance is properly understood. This can only be done by existential demythologization.

## II

The aim of this section of the chapter is to demonstrate

that Bultmann's background has determined, to a large degree, the meaning which he attributes to the Prologue of John's Gospel. We will show that Bultmann's context has led him to find certain meanings in the text - meanings which were not attributed to it by Origen and Luther, who existed in different contexts. The sources upon which the findings will be based are: Bultmann's commentary on John and his Theology of the New Testament.

Contextual factors instrumental in the creation of meaning:

1. The form of the commentary as an indicator of the operation of contextual factors:

A brief glance at Bultmann's commentary on the Prologue will reveal that the piece is divided into two sections. There is the main body of the commentary and there is the extensive body of footnotes. In the footnotes Bultmann outlines various conflicting theories and then states his own position and, more often than not, his reasons for arriving at his conclusions. In the main body of the commentary, which has a sermon-like flavour, he rather dogmatically presents his interpretation of the text. The whole commentary seems to embody the sentiment expressed early in the book:

'It goes without saying that the exegesis must expound the complete text, and the critical analysis is the servant of this exposition.' (Bultmann 1971:17)

The division of the task of exegesis, not to mention the terminology itself, into critical analysis and exposition is itself context determined in that, at the time of writing, critical scholarship had blossomed and there were already a great many conflicting theories on any given approach of the Johannine Prologue. Mere repetition of these theories is not interpretation, nor can

interpretation ignore these ideas. The fact that there is an attempt to present both aspects in a suitable relation is indicative of a context involving highly developed critical scholarship - which critical faculty was only in its infancy in Origen's writings and only slightly more developed in Luther's works.

As one continues to read Bultmann's interpretation one is struck by the fact that there are no direct historical references of the type found in Luther's, and to a lesser extent in Origen's writings. In Origen's writings there are a few obvious and direct references to Heracleon and the threat posed by the Gnostic menace. In Luther's writings there are many direct references to the papacy, to the proliferation of breakaway groups, and to various aspects of everyday life at the time. In Bultmann's commentary, on the other hand, there are none of these direct historical references and discussion is restricted to a timeless philosophical and academic realm. This detached style appears to be context-dictated in that it would seem that Bultmann regarded it as the best way of communicating the existential import of the text. This detached style ensured that nothing of peripheral interest would distract the reader from the life-changing existential truths of the passage.

As one reads on, one becomes aware of the fact that Bultmann was thoroughly acquainted with ancient as well as modern learning. Both Origen and Luther demonstrated a knowledge of what others both prior to them and contemporary to them had said about the text and other related matters. Bultmann evidences the same acquaintance with ancient matters on, for example, page 14 of his commentary.

'In its form the Prologue is a piece of cultic-liturgical poetry, oscillating between the language of revelation and confession. On the one side, as a revelation discourse, the Naassene Hymn provides a parallel; it too

starts with the very beginning of all things, and recounts the fate of the soul in the world, and then describes how Jesus asks the Father to send him down in order to bring the Gnosis of the soul. On the other hand, in the style of a confession, the 7th Ode of Solomon sings of how the Son of God became man ...'

As for the evidence of modern learning, one simply has to look at his footnotes to see how thoroughly familiar Bultmann is with the thought of his contemporaries. Bultmann's learning, and therefore his interpretation, is context-related in that it takes into account factors that would have been unknown to Origen and Luther. Bultmann's interpretation has been influenced, therefore, by factors which, without the benefit of more recent discoveries and theories, were unknown to Origen and Luther.

Furthermore, almost every page of Bultmann's interpretation reveals an intense desire to take the text and the language of the text seriously. He tries to explain the words of the text in terms of the meanings that they would have had at the time of their writing.

'If the absolute use of the concept  $\delta$  Λόγος shows how far the Prologue is from the Old Testament the same holds good for its relation to Judaism .... On the other hand, the figure of Wisdom, which is found in Judaism, and also in the Old Testament itself, does seem to be related to the Logos-figure in the Johannine Prologue .... The Wisdom myth is however only a variant on the Revealer-myth, which is developed in Hellenistic and Gnostic Literature; and the kinship of the Johannine Prologue to the Judaic Wisdom speculation is due to the fact that both go back to the same tradition for their source. But we do not need to analyse the whole tradition, or trace it back to its origin in order to understand the Johannine Prologue; it is enough to recognize that the mythological figure of the Logos has its home in a particular understanding of the world, namely the Gnostic.' (Bultmann 1971:21,22,23f)

Whether or not one agrees with Bultmann's conclusion is

not important here; Bultmann has attempted to attribute original meanings and associations to the Words of the Prologue. This is also a context-induced approach since, at the time of his writing, it was generally agreed among scholars that before one could understand a text anew one had to determine what it had originally meant to those for whom it had been written. One does not find the same approach in Origen's writings. Origen was intensely interested in the meaning of the words - he was not, however, particularly concerned to go back to their possible original meanings. He was interested in exploring the depth of meaning which the words had at the time of his writing. In Luther's desire to interpret the text in terms of the grammatical sense of the Words we have something that approaches what Bultmann is doing, but without the same intense desire to understand the words in terms of the original meanings. In Bultmann one sees the fully developed form of what is only in its infancy in Luther's interpretation.

Bultmann's commentary on John also betrays its context, in the broadest historical sense, in that it communicates a highly differentiated view of the New Testament. The New Testament is not a smooth, unbroken whole - it evidences a number of different styles and viewpoints. Some parts of the New Testament are more authoritative and meaningful than others.

'The Baptist refers back to one of his own sayings ... which the evangelist assumes to be well-known; it is the saying which we know from the Synoptic tradition (Mark 1:7f parr), expressed admittedly in a typically Johannine way.' (Bultmann 1971:75)

'... thus the contrast between νόμος and <sup>χρῆσις</sup> is introduced; the contrast is otherwise foreign to John and comes from the Pauline school ....' (Bultmann 1971:79)

'In John, Jesus appears neither as the rabbi arguing about questions of the Law nor as the

prophet proclaiming the breaking in of the Reign of God. Rather, he speaks only of his own person as the Revealer whom God has sent.' (Bultmann 1971:4)

In Bultmann's interpretation of the Prologue each of the books of the New Testament has a unique character and viewpoint. This is not true in the case of Origen's interpretation. In his work the New Testament is viewed as a uniform whole. In Luther's work there is the beginning of the process of differentiation but, again, it is only at a very early stage of development. A differentiated view of the New Testament is a contextual clue since it places Bultmann later in time than Luther. Bultmann's understanding of the New Testament places him in a highly critical age.

We have noted that the form of Bultmann's commentary on John's Prologue is filled with evidence of his context. We may conclude, therefore, that his context has led him to interpret John in a certain way.

## 2. Form criticism and Gnosticism:

Bultmann was a well-known form critic. He believed that even the individual books of the Bible were not smooth wholes. The authors of the New Testament gospels did not simply write their books unaided by sources. They were not authors so much as editors who relied heavily on written or verbal sources. The gospels, he believed, were composed of chains of fragments from these sources linked together by copulative sections of the author's own creation. It followed, therefore, that, to understand the text, one had to discover not only what fragments the whole consisted of, but also the origin of those pieces. To understand what the writer was saying one had to know what he was drawing on and to what he was alluding. There are many examples illustrative of Bultmann's form critical approach to the Prologue:

'A preliminary glance tells us that 1:1-18 forms a whole, and has been placed at the beginning of the Gospel as a kind of introduction.' (Bultmann 1971:15)

Bultmann begins his analysis by marking out the parameters of his field of research. There are certain compelling factors that lead him to believe that John 1:1-18 is a literary unit that, as such, has a certain amount of independence and which can, therefore, be analysed in detail without the interpreter having to concern himself with too much beyond the parameters of the unit. He begins to investigate the Prologue in terms of its form:

'The form of the Prologue is not loose or haphazard, but rigid and even minor details are governed by strict rules. The construction is similar to that of the Odes of Solomon; each couplet is made up of two short sentences. Sometimes both parts of the couplet express one thought (vv9,12,14b); sometimes the second completes and develops the first (vv1,4,14a,16); sometimes the two parts stand together in parallelism (v3), or in antithesis (vv5,10,11). This form is not foreign to Semitic poetry ....' (Bultmann 1971:15)

'It is concluded, therefore, that the evangelist has made a cultic community hymn the basis for the Prologue, and has developed it with his own comments. It is further clear that in vv1-5, 9-12 the source spoke of the pre-existent Logos, and in vv5,11f it described his fruitless or almost fruitless effect as Revealer in this form, before going on to tell of his incarnation in v14 .... The motive for the insertion of vv6-8, 15 is clear from their polemical character. For their purpose is not only the positive one of proclaiming the Baptist as witness for Jesus; it is also polemical: to dispute the claim that the Baptist has the authority of Revealer .... This authority must therefore have been attributed by the Baptist sect to their master .... This suggests that the source-text was a hymn of the Baptist community .... For without doubt the narrative 1:35-51 bears witness to the fact that one section of the disciples of the Baptist went over to the Christian community; and must we not therefore assume that Baptist tradition was taken over by the Christians?' (Bultman 1971: 18)

'At this point the evangelist leaves his source, which he will take up again in vv 9-13 ... to insert vv6-8 .... Its insertion here shows how important this witness is for him .... For he is concerned here to oppose those who also proclaim the  $\rho\omega\varsigma$  of the Logos, and its appearance in a historical figure, but who venerate none other than the Baptist as the incarnate Logos.' (Bultmann 1971:49)

'With this confession of thanks (v16) the hymn reaches its proper conclusion; what follows are the Evangelist's own additions, antithetical statements put in to bring out more clearly the meaning of what has been said and to guard against error.' (Bultmann 1971:78)

Bultmann has divided the Prologue into two sections. It consists primarily of the Logos-hymn with the insertion, at various points, of the author's own comments. Some of John the Baptist's own disciples joined the Christian community and brought with them their cultic observances - among which was the hymn upon which the Prologue is based. John used this hymn to introduce his gospel but inserted sections of his own to ensure that John the Baptist's position was seen to be that of a witness to Jesus Christ, who now became the focus of the hymn.

Without over-emphasizing the point, one may say that Bultmann's form critical approach to the Gospel of John does not have parallels in the interpretations of Origen and Luther. Origen was convinced that the New Testament was, from first to last, word for word, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The writer, even though his mind was not blurred by irrational ecstasy, was a pen in the Spirit's hand and, as such, produced a verbally inspired text. The Holy Spirit, who knows all, did not need sources upon which to base his inspired Gospel. There is no evidence, therefore, of anything like Bultmann's form criticism in Origen's commentary - and it is extremely doubtful, bearing in mind his idea of inspiration, that anything of that nature would have crossed his mind. Luther's sermons



show no signs of anything approaching form criticism either. It is true that his stress on sola scriptura led to the development of biblical critical methods, but there is no sign of form criticism in these sermons. It could of course be argued that sermons would not be the place to look for the details of form critical analysis but, even so, all things considered, there does not appear to be even the faintest trace of the results or conclusions of form critical analysis at any stage of development.

The form criticism which has been discovered in Bultmann's commentary is context related in that, at the very least, it points to a period in history, and an environment, in which scholars were familiar with the critical skills and knew how to implement them. It is more specifically contextual in that Bultman, a well-known form critic, brought his favoured type of analysis to the text to prepare the way for his interpretation.

The above discussion paves the way for an examination of Gnosticism in Bultmann's commentary. As we have seen, Bultmann believed that a Baptist hymn lay at the heart of the Prologue. In this Baptist hymn Bultman also believed that he had found ample evidence of Gnosticism. Bultmann was certain that the Baptist sect was Gnostic in nature. On almost every page of his commentary there is reference to Gnosticism.

'As redeemer the Logos betook himself to the lower world in human form. He disguised himself in a human body, in order to deceive the demonic powers of darkness, and at the same time not to alarm those who are to be saved.... In Christian Gnosticism, the redeemer who becomes man was held to be Jesus.' (Bultmann 1971:25,26)

'The Johannine Prologue, or its source, speaks in the language of Gnostic mythology, and its Logos is the intermediary, the figure that is of both cosmological and soteriological

significance; it is the divine being that, while existing from the very beginning with the Father, became man for the salvation of men. This proposition will be confirmed by the Evangelist's presentation of the figure and work of Jesus in the terminology of Gnostic mythology as the Gospel develops. The evangelist was not the first to make use of this mythology for Christian proclamation and theology. Paul had preceded him, with his frequent exposition of the eschatological and soteriological meaning of Christ in the terminology of the Anthropos myth, even if he doesn't use the title Logos himself. The Gnostic mythology was put to the service of Christology and soteriology to a greater extent in the deutero-Pauline literature (Col. and Eph.)' (Bultman 1971:28)

'The result of this inquiry is that the Prologue's source belongs to the sphere of a relatively early oriental Gnosticism, which has been developed under the influence of the Old Testament faith in the Creator-God. This development has taken the following direction: the mythology has been severely pushed into the background; the Gnostic cosmology has been repressed and has given way to the belief in Creation; and the concern for the relation of man to the revelation of God, that is to say the soteriological concern, has become dominant. The Odes of Solomon prove to be the most closely related. The figure of the Logos, as Creator and Revealer, is to be understood in terms of this Gnosticism, on the basis of a characteristically modified dualism, which sees not the world's origin, but rather its actual condition at the moment as the reason why it stands over against God as the darkness.' (Bultmann 1971:31)

In these passages Bultmann presents, in summary, the corner stone of his interpretation. Not only the Prologue, but the whole of John's Gospel, expresses the person and work of Jesus Christ in terms of Gnostic mythology. John was not the first to do this but followed Paul who, although not actually using many of the more obvious Gnostic keywords, depended to some extent on Gnostic concepts, suitably modified, to present something of the fullness of the Gospel. John has relied on a Gnostic-Baptist

source for the hymn which forms the basis of his Prologue, but has suitably modified it to avoid the teachings regarded as erroneous by 'orthodoxy'. The most obvious modification, according to Bultmann, is that he has modified Gnostic cosmological dualism (that the world is evil because that is how it was made - or rather, that it came into existence, from the very beginning, in opposition to God) and has made it an acceptable dualism of decision - in which the world is evil because it chooses to be in opposition to God, not because it was created thus. After the summary-like statements that we have included above, Bultmann goes on to interpret the Prologue in terms of a Gnostic foundation that his form criticism has revealed to him:

Speaking of the God who reveals himself, Bultmann says:

'And yet this kind of language, taken over from Gnosticism, is more strongly mythological than that found in the Old Testament because it has to express still more: the revelation that the community has received in its historical Revealer, has its origin before time.' (Bultmann 1971:35)

The hymn which forms the basis of the Prologue is Gnostic in nature. This Gnostic terminology was used because it, more effectively than any Old Testament concept, was able to convey the import and significance of the Revealer as the One whose revelation extended back to the beginning of Creation - and even before that. There are further examples of this Gnostic interpretation.

'If Logos is to be translated, the translation can only be "Word", the meaning already given to it through the Gnostic myth. It is nevertheless the appropriate translation - however much the conceptual meaning of the term  $\Lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  has disappeared - in so far as the authentic function of the  $\Lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  is that of Revealer; that is to say, in so far as the Logos makes God known.' (Bultmann 1971:36)

While John relied on Gnostic concepts and terminology to

express his understanding of the Gospel, he was also, says Bultmann, eager to point out what he believed were the errors of the Gnostics:

'It is easy to see that in John revelation (and redemption) is not understood as a cosmic process; one has only to consider the fact that the idea of the pre-existence of souls, which has a central role in the Gnostic myth ... finds no place here. Equally there is no speculation whatever on the destiny of the soul, or on its heavenly journey. Rather the destiny of the soul is determined by faith or unbelief, not by its  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  ....' (Bultmann 1971:65)

As we have seen, Bultmann interprets John in terms of an underlying Gnostic-Baptist hymn which the evangelist has suitably modified to meet his demands. The commentary is filled with fragmentary allusions to Gnosticism. Bultmann's Theology of the New Testament, however, since it is not a verse by verse commentary, provides the clearest cohesive explanation of John's relation to Gnosticism:

'It is true ... that in regard to the current religious atmosphere Paul and John have certain things in common. Both come within the sphere of a Hellenism that is saturated with the Gnostic stream, so that a certain agreement between them in dualistic terminology is not surprising.' (Bultmann 1955 II:6)

'The stylistic form of the Revelation discourses expresses the basic dualistic view which they presuppose. Also in keeping with this dualistic view are the antithetical terms which run through these discourses: light and darkness, truth and falsehood, above and below ... freedom and bondage. We are led into the same sphere of dualistic Gnostic thinking by the symbols which characterize the Revealer in contrast to the "world" and his meaning for salvation or which describe the gift he brings.' (Bultmann 1955 II:11)

'In short, then, the figure of Jesus in John is portrayed in the forms offered by the

the Gnostic Redeemer-myth ... which had already influenced the Christological thinking of Hellenistic Christianity before Paul and then influenced him. It is true that the cosmological motifs of the myth are missing in John, especially the idea that the redemption which the "Ambassador" brings is the release of the pre-existent sparks of light which are held captive in this world below by demonic powers .... But otherwise Jesus appears as in the Gnostic myth as the pre-existent Son of God whom the Father clothed with authority and sent into the world.' (Bultmann 1955 II:13)

'John's concepts, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, freedom and bondage, life and death, come from Gnostic dualism, but they take on their specific Johannine meaning only in their relation to the idea of creation.' (Bultmann 1955 II:17)

'Just because John makes use of the Gnostic Redeemer-myth for his picture of the figure and activity of Jesus, a demarcation of his own position from that of Gnosticism is particularly incumbent upon him .... It is clear to begin with that for him the incarnation of the Son of God is not, as it is in Gnosticism, a cosmic event which sets into motion the eschatological occurrence (the unfolding of redemption) as a process of nature by which the union of the essentially opposite natures, light and darkness, is dissolved. The Gnostic Redeemer releases the pre-existent human selves, who by virtue of their light nature are related to him, out of the matter ... that trammels them, and then leads them to the world of light above. John eliminated both the Gnostic notion of the pre-existent human selves and their unnatural imprisonment in the material world. He does not accept the Gnostic trichotomy of man .... Neither is the incarnation of the Son of God for John a device for transmitting "Gnosis" to men in the form of teachings about cosmogony and anthropology or for bringing secret formulas and sacraments, on the strength of which their selves can safely make the journey to heaven .... He does not communicate anything but calls men to himself .... God himself encounters men in Jesus, a Jesus moreover who is a man in whom nothing unusual is perceptible except his bold assertion that in him God encounters men.' (Bultmann 1955 II: 40,41,50)

According to Bultmann, John lived and wrote in a world saturated with Gnostic understandings of reality. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that John should have expressed the Gospel in terms of Gnosticism. John used Gnostic concepts because they provided him with a conceptual framework that was able to incorporate all the aspects of the Gospel in an integrated and meaningful way. While he used this terminology, however, he did not share fully all the Gnostic beliefs. He did away with the cosmological dualism and, therefore, also with much of the activity attributed to the Revealer. The Revealer no longer came, in John's thought, to call the few sparks of light from a world created evil. There was no more teaching of secret things and keywords in John's Gospel. Christ, the Word, came to call men to himself, in whom, he said, God encountered them. Jesus had come to call all men, all of whom, together with the world, were created by God, out of their self-imposed exile and darkness to a life-changing encounter with God in him.

'In the Gnostic myth, whose language John uses as his means of expression, it suffices that the Revelation consists of nothing more than the bare fact of it ....' (Bultmann 1955 II: 66)

In Gnosticism the Revealer redeems by awakening the slumbering, forgetful selves to the half-forgotten knowledge of their origin. A few words and secret reminders are enough to free the selves from the soporific hold of evil matter and to start them on their way back to their heavenly home. Much the same is true of the Johannine Revealer - except that the cosmological dualism is absent. Again the Revealer brings knowledge, but this time it is a word in which God encounters the person and brings him to a true self-understanding, which changed self-understanding is sufficient to lead to a changed state of existence in the world.

Bultmann's emphasis on a Gnostic background to the Gospel

of John, and, in this case, the Prologue, may be said to be a contextual influence. It is contextual in the broadest sense in that it reflects a situation, under the influence of the history of religions school, in which there was a widely held interest in Gnosticism and its relation to early Christianity. It is more narrowly and specifically contextual in that it demonstrates that Bultmann, who was always an outspoken supporter of a Gnostic background to the whole New Testament, has set about interpreting John in terms of a favourite hypothesis of his. It may be, furthermore, that since both Gnosticism and existentialism are concerned with the nature and destiny of the human subject, Bultmann may have postulated a Gnostic background to enable him to interpret the gospel in terms of existentialism. In Origen's commentary there is also great stress on Gnosticism - except that it would seem that Origen is determined to demonstrate that John is anti-Gnostic in his teaching. Origen was eager to see the Prologue as an anti-Gnostic document, but it is doubtful whether he would seriously have entertained the notion that a Gnostic text may have formed the basis of John's introduction. In Luther's sermons there is no emphasis on Gnosticism. He does relate the Prologue to certain erroneous teachings about Christ, but Gnosticism as such is not of any interest to him.

### 3. The hermeneutic spiral and existentialism:

'The intention of the text cannot be unravelled by guessing or by a Faustian speculation. Two things are needed for the interpretation: firstly a view of the whole, and secondly, knowledge of the tradition out of which the assertions of the text have grown. And the exegesis has as its first task to discover what possible forms of expression were open to the author; the possibilities being those he has inherited with the tradition in which he stands. What the author intends to say here and now, is of course not simply to be deduced from these possibilities: but they have given a particular direction to what he intends to say, and have imposed particular

limits: thus a review of the tradition must be the preliminary for understanding the text.' (Bultmann 1971:20)

In this extract we see the place of Bultmann's emphasis on a Gnostic-Baptist hymn in the wider context of his theory of interpretation. Two things are necessary for the proper understanding of a text. One must begin by making oneself thoroughly acquainted with the text itself. This should be followed by a study of the background of the text. A knowledge of the background enables us to begin to put questions to a text - why, for example, from what we know of John's resources, did he include this here, but leave that out? Our knowledge of the text as a whole should provide us with the answers we are seeking - which answers will prompt the phrasing of new questions. Bultmann makes it clear that he is proposing, or rather, using, the hermeneutic spiral in his interpretation of the text. One comes to the text with certain preconceived notions as to what it says. As one reads the text one's preconceptions are challenged and one is led to a deeper understanding of the text. This new understanding leads us to modify our questions in response to our changed idea of the meaning of the text. This question and answer process continues and slowly the reader is drawn closer to the true meaning of the text.

'And yet the Prologue is an introduction - in the sense of being an overture, leading the reader out of the commonplace into a new and strange world of sounds and figures, and singling out particular motifs from the action that is now to be unfolded. He cannot yet fully understand them, but because they are half comprehensible, half mysterious, they arouse the tension, and awaken the question which is essential if he is to understand what is going to be said. The concepts *ζωή* and *φῶς, δόξα* and *ἀλήθεια* are the kind of motifs for which the reader brings with him a certain prior understanding; but he still has to learn how to understand them authentically.' (Bultmann 1971:13)



This extract takes what was said in the previous quotation a step further. The Prologue draws the reader into a strange new world in which he encounters certain familiar words and images. These words and images are, however, related to the rest of the Prologue in a surprising new way. The reader's prior understanding of certain words makes it impossible for him to see how familiar words can be used in such unfamiliar constructions or senses. The reader begins to pose questions which, in the light of his understanding of the whole and its background, receive answers which lessen the unfamiliarity of the constructions. New questions arise and in this way the reader and the text enter into dialogue. The commentary is filled with questions which are indications of the conscious effort to implement the hermeneutic spiral.

'And the listener? He is not addressed at all. Who is it who is being addressed? In one sense, no one.' (Bultmann 1971:14)

'He is spoken of as a person, in the language of mythology. But is he really to be thought of as a real person? Or has the myth become a picture, and is the Logos a personification of the power of God? The Being of God, personified, with regard to its activity in the world? The comprehensive term, as it were, for the divine powers that are active in the world?' (Bultmann 1971:19)

The presence of the hermeneutic spiral in Bultmann's commentary on the Prologue of John may also be regarded as indicative of the influence of his context in his creation of meaning for the Prologue. The understanding of interpretation as a circular process is a relatively recent one and its inclusion in Bultmann's commentary is indicative of a context in which this hermeneutic theory was known of and put to use. There does not appear to have been anything like the hermeneutic spiral in the writings of Origen and Luther - not in a conscious

sense, at any rate. It may, of course, be argued that all interpretation, or understanding in general, does follow the rules of the hermeneutic spiral, but the point is that in Origen and Luther there does not seem to have been a conscious awareness of this. Bultmann, in response to contemporary theories of interpretation, consciously set out to put the spiral into effect. Origen and Luther would, it seems, have been more inclined to believe that they were simply reading out what was obviously in the text. Their approach may well be explained as the result of their not being particularly concerned to pay over much attention to the time that had elapsed between the writing of the text and their reading of it.

We come now to the matter of the presence of existential philosophy in Bultmann's commentary. This question is closely associated with the hermeneutic spiral and, in fact, arises directly out of it. The possibility, according to Bultmann, of understanding the text aright depends on there being common ground upon which both the writer and the reader stand. If there were nothing in common between them then it would be both pointless and impossible to interpret the text. Bultmann believed that human existence was this common ground and that the text, in this case John's Prologue, was an encoded statement about human self-understanding. The key, therefore, to understanding the text aright was existential self-understanding - one had to pose questions that would free the text of its true essence, which was the change in self-understanding brought about in the writers by their encounter with Christ. It is hardly surprising that Bultmann's interpretation of the Prologue is clothed in the language and concepts of existentialist philosophy:

'... for if there is to be talk of God in a sense meaningful to men, there must also be at this point talk of the world, as the sphere in which men find themselves.'  
(Bultmann 1971:36)

In this extract Bultmann shows his allegiance to existentialist philosophy by confirming that man does not exist in unbounded space, but exists in the world which provides him with certain parameters of possibility. Any talk of God, or the Ultimately Significant, must take into account man as he is - which includes the limits placed on him by his existing in the world.

'There is no mention either of other cosmic powers, or of the Devil, although he does play a part in the Gospel. Of course he belongs to the created world as possibility, and v5 will show that he belongs to the fallen world as a reality. On the other hand, it is clear that mankind belongs to the πάντα, and mankind alone is the subject of what follows. The fact that in v10 both the πάντα of v3 and the ἄνθρωποι of v5 are taken up again in ὁ κόσμος, shows that men are not just beings who like others happen to be found in the κόσμος, but it is they who make the κόσμος a κόσμος.' (Bultmann 1971:38)

While man exists in the world, he is not like other objects in the world in that he exists with a consciousness of what it means to exist. Man does not exist as an object exists - he exists with a knowledge of his existence and the possibilities open to him. The world exists in opposition to God because man has forgotten his true situation in relation to God and chooses to stand in self-deceiving independence over against God. The world is evil before God, not because it was created as such but because man makes it that by, out of a false awareness of his possibilities, living a lie.

'In its original sense light is not an apparatus for illumination, that makes things perceptible, but is the brightness itself in which I find myself here and now; in it I can find my way about, I feel myself at home, and have no anxiety. Brightness itself is not therefore an outward phenomenon, but is the illumined condition of existence, of my own existence.' (Bultmann 1971:41)

In commenting on John 1:4b Bultmann makes clear his existentialist background by referring the light to an illumined state of existence. He continues to discuss 'light' in this next quotation:

'For just as "life" necessarily includes the definitive understanding of the self, that knows no further question or mystery, so the "light" for which man longs as this definitive state of enlightenment, necessarily includes freedom from death, from the fate that makes existence sheerly unintelligible. But the more completely φῶς is regarded as something eschatological, the stronger grows the conviction that the definitive illumination of existence does not lie within human possibilities, but can only be divine gift.' (Bultmann 1971:43)

'Jesus is the φῶς in this eschatological sense in John, he is the Revealer, who gives man that particular understanding of himself in which he has the "life".' (Bultmann 1971:44)

The 'light' enables man to have true life. The light reveals man's possibilities to him and enables him to have true life by living out his life in accordance with his possibilities. This state of life also of necessity means freedom from the fear of death. Death is man's ultimate possibility and only in realising this is he open to living a life that honestly takes into account the potential within him. In stark contrast to Heidegger, Bultmann maintains that the possibility of attaining true life is only made possible in an encounter with Christ and, conversely, that it is not a possibility for unaided, natural man.

'The integral connection between light and life is grounded in the fact that life achieves its authenticity in the proper understanding of itself.' (Bultmann 1971:45)

'And to say that he was the Light as the Creator, as the ζῶν, is to say that the possibility of the illumination of existence

(the salvation that consists in the definitive understanding of existence itself) was inherent in its very origin. Creation is at the same time revelation, inasmuch as it was possible for the creature to know his Creator, and thus to understand himself. Thus the self-understanding that would have been decisive for man, would have been knowledge of his creatureliness; only with such knowledge would he have been "in the light", and thus have had life in the sense in which created man (in contrast to the Creator) can have it.' <sup>21</sup>  
(Bultmann 1971:44)

There existed in natural man, by virtue of his creation by God, all that was necessary for authentic life. The knowledge of his creation should have been enough for natural man to provide him with a true perspective on his possibilities.

'They were in darkness; not although as creatures they had had the possibility of light; but on the contrary, just because they had this possibility. For just as light is the illumined state of existence, so darkness is that constitution of existence in which it does not understand itself, is lost, does not know its way (12:35), is blind (9) and dead, for to the real life belongs the illumined state of self-understanding.... If it is man's part to understand himself - and it is, if the  $\zeta\omega\eta$  which called him into existence is  $\delta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  - then this means that he also has the possibility of  $\sigma\kappa\omicron\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ , the possibility that instead of being illumined by his knowledge of his creatureliness, he should be darkened by turning away from his Creator and by the folly of imagining that he has his origins in himself .... For darkness is neither a substance nor the sheer power of fate; it is nothing other than the revolt against the light. The interpretation in the Gospel of the darkness of the world as the constant revolt and hostility against God has found its expression in the mythological figure of the devil .... He is the murderer and liar (8:44) because he represents the deliberate blindness of the world, which excludes everyone who belongs to it from the true knowledge of himself and thus robs him of the proper life.' (Bultmann 1971:46,47)

The possibility of true life that was man's as God's creature was lost as he sought to dismiss God and seek meaning solely in himself. This arrogance on man's part took on the nature of a strangling power that kept him from God and from himself.

'Jesus gives man the possibility, realized through faith in him, of understanding himself in the ζωή . The saving revelation brings back the lost possibilities of revelation in Creation ....' (Bultmann 1971:45)

'Thus the understanding of himself which man gains in the saving revelation is in no way different from that which he should have already derived from the revelation in Creation. There is continuity between Creation and Redemption.' (Bultmann 1971:46)

'For if the proper self-understanding of man consists in understanding himself in relation to his origin, the illumination of his existence can only come from his origin, from his Creator.' (Bultmann 1971:51)

'He (Christ) is the proper, authentic light, who alone can fulfil the claim to give existence the proper understanding of itself. In this it is assumed that human existence searches for the light, i.e. that it searches for an understanding of itself, and that in this very search it can err, can mistake a false light for the true light, that it can misunderstand its own significance. And it is claimed that only in the revelation which occurred in Jesus can man receive the proper understanding of his existence which he constantly seeks and fails to find.' (Bultmann 1971:53)

Man failed to live up to his created potential for true life - but this does not mean that he is lost and without hope. The Creator, who gave him the potential for true life is the Redeemer who, in himself, offers man anew this lost possibility.

'In him and in him alone the possibility is given to man to see himself as he is before God; but this also means that man has the possibility - in unfaith - of losing himself irrevocably.' (Bultmann 1971:54)

While God, in Christ, offers man a chance of regaining true, authentic life, man can also lose this possibility forever by ignoring the truth about his life that Christ reveals to him.

'For such knowledge is not a theoretical perception of truths, but recognition. It could only occur in the act of abandoning one's own chosen, false self-understandings and in receiving the gift of a proper understanding of oneself in relation to the Creator. The sin of the world, which makes it the "world", is that it rejects this gift; this is unbelief (16:9).' (Bultmann 1971:55)

'In the saving revelation the  $\alpha\delta\iota\omicron\tau$  are asked if they are willing to recognize themselves as belonging to their Creator. If they refuse, then in so doing they assign to themselves another origin; they deliver themselves into the hands of the world (15:19), the Devil is now their father (8:44).' (Bultmann 1971:56)

Man's decision in relation to Christ determines the quality of his life and also who his Father is, whether God or the Devil. Speaking on John 1:4 Bultmann says:

'It is the language of mythology that is here employed. Just as the ancient world and the Orient tell of gods and divine beings who appear in human form, so too the central theme of the Gnostic Redeemer-myth is that a divine being, the Son of the Highest, assumed human form, put on human flesh and blood, in order to bring revelation and redemption.' (Bultmann 1971:66)

'Of course it must be realised that the imparting of doctrine in Gnosticism is not simply the imparting of information about man's situation. It is also a challenge

which, by demanding that men should live out the understanding of existence which it expounds, faces them with a decision; in this way the teaching can be accompanied by the call to repentance.' (Bultmann 1971:67)

In the above references to Gnostic mythology we see that Bultmann applies the same method of demythologization that he uses to interpret the gospel. The elaborate mythology of the Gnostics is not a description of the world, but of their understanding of themselves in the world. Consequently, if the same is true of the New Testament, interpretation sets about, with the aid of Heidegger's existentialist theology, freeing the text of these encoded existential self-understandings. Bultmann demonstrates in his commentary the same belief expressed elsewhere in his writings - that his demythologization has New Testament precedents:

'Both Paul and John demythologize cosmological dualism in the fact that by both the world continues to be understood as God's creation and in the fact that the God-concept of both contains the paradoxical union of judgement and grace.' (Bultmann 1955 II:10)

Once again, as was the case with our investigation of Gnosticism in the Prologue, Bultmann's Theology of the New Testament provides us with less fragmentary explanations dealing with the existential interpretation of the Prologue.

'But the true light (1:9 ...) is not the light of the literal day, which makes orientation in the external world possible, but the state of having one's existence illumined, an illumination in and by which a man understands himself, achieves a self-understanding which opens up his "way" to him, guides all his conduct, and gives him clarity and assurance. Since creation is a revelation of God and the "Word" is at work as the "light" in that which was created, then man is given the possibility of a genuine self-understanding in the possibility of understanding himself as God's creature.



Darkness, then, means that a man does not seize this possibility - that he shuts himself up against the God revealed in creation. It means that instead of understanding himself as creature he arrogates to himself a sovereignty that belongs to the Creator alone.' (Bultmann 1955 II:18)

'Only because there is light, is there darkness. Darkness is nothing other than shutting one's self up against the light. It is the turning away from the origin of one's existence, away from that which alone offers the possibility of illumining one's existence.' (Bultmann 1955 II:18)

'The concepts light, truth, life, and freedom explain each other: so do the concepts darkness, falsehood, death, and bondage in the contrasting group. They all derive their meaning from the search for human existence - for "life" as "eternal life" - and denote the double possibility of human existence: to exist either from God or from man himself.' (Bultmann 1955 II 20)

'Thus it turns out in the end that Jesus as the Revealer of God reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer. And that amounts to saying that it is he for whom the world is waiting, he who brings in his own person that for which all the longing of man yearns: life and truth as the reality out of which man can exist, light as the complete transparency of existence in which questions and riddles are at an end.' (Bultmann 1955 II:6)

In conclusion, Bultmann's interpretation, as we have come to expect, shows the signs of a conscious attempt to put into practice his existential demythologization. Throughout the commentary on the Prologue there are references both to the theory underlying this interpretative method and to the results, in existential terms, of the inquiry. Hardly surprisingly, nothing of a similar nature is to be found in the writings of either Origen or Luther.

### Conclusion

Our investigation of Bultmann's interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel has revealed that, even as an innovator, he was a child of his own age and that he interpreted Scripture in a way that reflected both his age and his innovations. It has been shown that he used his customary methods and procedures in interpreting this passage and that his interpretation resulted in meanings that accorded with the theological convictions he expressed in his other works prior to his interpretation of John that we investigated. This implies that, as some modern theorists have suggested, the text, in this case John 1:1-18, may serve as a series of signposts that guide the interpreter, in this case Bultmann, to discover a meaning that lies not so much in the text as in the interpreter's semantic universe. Our findings would, therefore, support the theory that the reader creates the meaning of a text in relation to his context, under the direction of the text itself.

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### Footnotes

1. Turner 1975:236 - 'The most complex and important concept for pre-understanding, the concept that has dominated New Testament theology throughout this century, is "history".'
2. cf. Harnack 1957:51 - 'If, however, we take a general view of Jesus' teaching, we shall see that it may be grouped under three heads. They are each of such a nature as to contain the whole, and hence it can be exhausted in its entirety under any one of them:  
     Firstly, the Kingdom of God and its coming.  
     Secondly, God the Father and the infinite

value of the human soul.

Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the command of love.'

3. cf. Dilthey in Ermarth 1978:303 - 'Hermeneutics is possible here because between people and a state, between believers and Church, between scientific life and the university there stands a relation in which a general outlook and unitary form of life find a structural coherence in which they express themselves.'  
cf. Dilthey in Bultmann 1955:238 - 'Exegesis is a work of personal art, and its most consummate execution is conditioned by the mental make-up of the exegete; and so it rests on affinity, intensified by a thoroughgoing communion with the author - by constant study.'
4. Bultmann 1958:84 - 'Indeed, demythologizing is a task parallel to that performed by Paul and Luther in their doctrine of justification by faith alone without the works of law. More precisely, demythologizing is the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought.'
5. Bultmann 1958:14 - 'This hope of Jesus and the early Christian community was not fulfilled. The same world still exists and history continues. The course of history has refuted mythology.'  
cf. Bultmann 1958:15 - 'In any case, modern science does not believe that the course of nature can be interrupted or, so to speak, perforated, by supernatural powers.'
6. Bultmann 1958:18 - 'We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and mythological sayings as a whole contain still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology. If so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain their deeper meaning.... Its aim is not to eliminate the mythological statements but to interpret them. It is a method of

hermeneutics.'

7. Bultmann 1958:19 - 'Mythology expresses a certain understanding of human existence. It believes that the world and human life have their ground and limits in a power which is beyond all that we can calculate and control. Mythology speaks about this power inadequately and insufficiently because it speaks about it as if it were a worldly power.'
8. Bultmann 1958:32 - 'But very soon the process of demythologization began, partially with Paul, and radically with John.'
9. Bultmann 1958:52,53 - 'Man has a knowledge of God in advance, though not of the revelation of God ... of his action in Christ. He has a relation to God in his search for God, conscious or unconscious. Man's life is moved by the search for God because it is always moved, consciously or unconsciously, by the question about his own personal existence. The question of God and the question of myself are identical. Now we have found the adequate way to put the question when we interpret the Bible.'
10. cf. Paul Tillich quoted in Macquarrie 1955:9 - 'Theology, when dealing with our ultimate concern, presupposes in every sentence the structure of being, its categories, laws and concepts. Theology, therefore, cannot escape the question of being....'
11. cf. Bultmann's reply - Macquarrie 1966:274 - 'The philosophical analysis of existence has for me only propaedeutic significance.'  
cf. Bultmann's reply - Harbsmeier 1966:276 - 'I learned from him (Heidegger) not what theology has to say, but how it is to say it, in order to speak to the thinking man today in a way that he can understand it.'
12. Heidegger 1962:31 - 'Basically all ontology no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of

- categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately, clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.'
13. Heidegger 1962:35 - 'If to interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also the entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question. But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself - the pre-ontological understanding of Being.'
  14. Heidegger 1962:299 - 'Even in average everydayness, this ownmost potentiality-for-Being, which is non-relational and not to be outstripped, is constantly an issue for Dasein. This is the case when its concern is merely in the mode of an untroubled indifference towards the uttermost possibility of existence.'
  15. cf. Heidegger 1962:232 - 'Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its Being towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being - that is, its Being-free for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its Being-free for the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is.'
  16. Heidegger 1962:321 - 'What if this Dasein, which finds itself in the very depths of uncanniness, should be the caller of the call of conscience?'
  17. cf. Bultmann 1958:43 - 'Subjective freedom grows out of a desire for security; it is in fact anxiety in the face of genuine freedom.'
  18. Bultmann 1958:40 - 'It is the Word of God which calls man away from his selfishness and from the

illusory security which he has built up for himself.'

19. Bultmann 1964:32 - 'That is why faith for the Christian means faith in Christ; for it is faith in the love of God revealed in Christ.'
20. Bultmann 1955 II:75 - 'Faith is turning away from the world, the act of desecularization, the surrender of all seeming security and every pretense, the willingness to live by the strength of the invisible and uncontrollable. It means accepting completely different standards as to what is to be called death and what life. It means accepting the life that Jesus gives and is ... a life that to the world's point of view cannot even be proved to exist.'
21. cf. Prof. Suggit's comment - 'John 1:9 - ἐρχόμενον: Bultmann, like Luther, refers it to πάντα ἀνθρώπων for stylistic/grammatical reasons as well as for "existential" reasons. Luther apparently simply followed the Vulgate rendering.'

## CHAPTER FIVE

## - CONCLUSION -

In chapter one of this work the task of the thesis was defined as the endeavour to test whether what many modern theorists had been saying about interpretation was true - namely, that they believed that meaning resided not so much in the text as in the interpreter, and that the text acted as a series of signposts that guided the reader to a destination in his own symbolic universe. Our investigation has yielded interesting results that appear to support what these theorists have postulated. The commentaries of Origen, Luther and Bultmann differ greatly both in the approach that each of the commentators adopts towards the Prologue and also in the meaning that they believe to reside in the passage. Despite the significant differences in interpretation that we have discovered, there is one common denominator that underlies all three commentaries. In all of these commentaries the context of the interpreter has played a significant part in determining both how the text is approached and what meaning is to be found in it. All of these commentaries are, as the context-dictated natures of these has shown, consistent extensions of the previous work and thought of these commentators. It may be confirmed, therefore, that the text does appear to function as a series of guidelines that guide a reader to a meaning in his own semantic universe - that guide him to create a meaning that draws upon his own symbolic universe. The question arises, however, given both the inevitability and desirability of this, whether there is not the danger that writers and readers - or speakers and listeners for that matter - can become so completely isolated as to preclude any contact with others. Closer examination, however reveals that the fears that underlie and prompt this question are largely groundless. These fears arise

out of the misconception that the individual is a self-contained, independent unit. It is true, as our investigation of the commentaries of Origen, Luther and Bultmann has shown, that there is a certain uniqueness to individual interpretation and communication but, as our investigation has also shown, there is a certain consistency - community-consistency - too, which underlines the interpreter's dependence on others. The findings of this thesis, which aroused the fears of secluded isolation, should also help to allay these fears, since they also demonstrate the reliance of the individual on the wider community, or context, for the creation, or formation, of his semantic universe.



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