The Miracles Source of John

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An Essay-Review of Robert Tomson Fortna, The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying The Fourth Gospel, (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 11, 1970), 275 pp., \$11.50. This Essay-Review is adapted from pp. 235-238, 242-252 of Chapter 7, "The Johannine Trajectory," from Trajectories through Early Christianity by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

The publication of Fortna's book marks something of a turning point in Johannine studies. The past generation of research had emphasized the unity of Johannine style, discouraging the effort to identify sources imbedded in John.

Often this emphasis on stylistic unity was apologetic in nature, directed specifically against Rudolf Bultmann's source theory, especially in view of the fact that Bultmann attributed the sublime discourses of the Lord to a non-Christian gnostic source. As a matter of fact, few within or outside the Bultmannian school have followed him with regard to this assumed source of "revelation discourses." But the general rejection of that one, most contro-

versial source tends to put into focus a trend present within the literature that has first fully surfaced in Fortna's book, which in a sense scoops Ernst Haenchen's long-awaited commentary: the gradual acceptance by critical scholarship of another of Bultmann's Johannine sources, the miracles source (σημεία-Quelle). Indeed the original proponent of unity of style, Eduard Schweizer, considers the material usually ascribed most firmly to the miracles source as an exception to his general rule that pervasive stylistic traits make source theories for John unconvincing.

D. Moody Smith's work, The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann's Literary Theory

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(1965) still tends to reflect an undiscriminating skepticism with regard to Bultmann's sources. Fortna, on the other hand, concentrates upon a detailed demonstration of the existence of the miracles source, indeed of its exact limits and contents. If in the latter regard Fortna's presentation leaves room for doubt, his book does serve to force to attention what may well have been a very important primitive Christian book practically unknown in the English-speaking world.

General acceptance of the existence of the miracles source has not only been delayed by its association with the total source theory of Bultmann; already when proposed in 1922 by Alexander Faure it was burdened with Faure's own questionable source theory. Faure used differing quotation formulae in John as a basis for distinguishing two main layers, only one of which had in his view made use of the miracles source. When in 1925 Smend disproved this general theory of Faure, interest in the miracles source faded. Yet, this was not a necessary consequence. For the existence of the miracles source did not depend on the broader source theory of Faure, but rather that general source theory depended, for one of its arguments-and not the one Smend disproved—upon the miracles source. Bultmann was alert enough to detect the solid insight imbedded within an untenable total position, and carried through the critical distinction. Fortna's work in a sense does the same for Bultmann's sources-although a residual task will be to carry through a similar operation on Fortna's own source theory. For, like its two predecessors, it tends to be

a total source theory (in this case arguing for one greatly enlarged source). Fortna's total position may well be less valid than the core of truth that survives each critical pruning of prior theories.

If the miracles source can be, even in a few generally accepted spots, "proven" in the sense of gaining general acceptance, so as to reach something like the status of O, then we will have gained a new access to the Johannine trajectory, from oral stages (perhaps from individual stories to cycles of stories), through the written miracles source and the work of the Fourth Evangelist, to the final redactor, and on into textual criticism and the history of exegesis. By identifying on this Johannine trajectory the position, e.g., of the author of the miracles source or that of the Fourth Evangelist, one could put in profile with a precision previously unattainable, just what theological stance is being advocated at a given stage of the trajectory. The study of Johannine theology could thus attain the precision that redactional history has provided to the study of Matthew and Luke in comparison with Mark.

The crucial question then, in the broader view of the history of Johannine research, is not whether the exact delimitations provided by Fortna are acceptable, but rather whether his work does not provide a turning point, after which the discipline of New Testament studies will have to include the miracles source, somewhat as it currently does Q, in standard treatments of the field. If at some points the existence of the source is established, one must come to terms with its reality, however one may delimit it in detail. Therefore,

it may be worthwhile at this point to summarize the arguments that have accumulated from Faure to Fornta for the existence of a written Greek source at two most convincing points: the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12a) and the healing of the son of the official from Capernaum (John 4.46b-54a).

First, one may consider the point at which the two stories are thought to join in the source. For here one has evidence of the Fourth Evangelist's awkward efforts to restore the connection broken by his interpolation of 2:13-4, 45. The Evangelist conceived of the setting of the first miracle as Jesus having come from the area of the Baptist's activity (Bethany beyond the Jordan, 1:28) to "Cana of Galilee," which presumably involved carrying out the intention of going "into Galilee" (1:43). But one finds an analogous movement for the second miracle, in 4:43: "But after the two days (sc. in Samaria, cf. 4:40) he went out from there into Galilee." This movement is restated in 4.45: "When then he came into Galilee ...", and 4:47: "Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee." This analogy to the situation of 2.1ff. is then made explicit in 4:46a: "So he came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine."

In the text as it now stands—in Chap. 4—the trip to Galilee is a repetition of an earlier movement (cf. 4·3· "again into Galilee"). Yet one can sense that this repetition is motivated in part by the Evangelist's desire to return to an interrupted narration, and is not unambiguously thought of as a distinct second trip. For if the reference in 4:54 to a "second miracle" "on

coming from Judea into Galilee" were really referring to a new trip (to which 4:43, 45, 46 seem on the surface to refer), then 4:54 should not speak of the healing of the official's son as the second miracle performed on a clearly distinct instance of "coming from Judea to Galilee;" rather it would be a first and only miracle on such a second trip. The language of 4:54 makes it clear it is "second" only in relation to the "beginning" of miracles in 2:11. That is to say, it is such a second miracle only if the trip to which 4:54 refers includes the changing of water into wine (2:1-11) as the first miracle. It could be the second miracle on the first trip, or the first miracle on the second trip, but not the second miracle on the second trip! Thus the Evangelist betrays the fact that what he actually presents as two trips is still in his product in a sense a single trip. He has not fully obscured his source's (Synoptic-like) concept of a single Galilean ministry. John 4.43-46a thus seems to be a redactional seam, functioning to restore a broken context in a rather clumsy way (cf. also the difficulty of 4:44 in its present position).

When one then turns to the end of the first story, the wedding in Cana, one finds an almost equally awkward anticipation of the second (4:46b-54a), again best understandable as reflecting the severing of an original connection. The first story ends (2:12-13): "After this he went down into Capernaum, he and his mother and his disciples, and there they remained not many days, and immediately there was the passover of the Jews, and Jesus went up into Jerusalem." That is to

say, a trip to Capernaum is narrated, a sojourn providing a context for a story is provided, and yet a Capernaum story justifying the mention of such a setting is omitted; the subsequent narration, a trip to Jerusalem, begins immediately. Thus one misses at 2:12 such a Capernaum story as is provided at 4:46b-54a. precisely the same story which had been introduced at 4:46a by a flashback to 2:1-11, without this flashback playing any more useful function in the present text than does 2:12. Both 2:12 and 4:43-46a are primarily "useful" as blanks still betraying where the other story originally stood, thus alerting the critic to the seam in the Evangelist's editorial activity.

It would seem to be redactional policy, when splitting up a source in order to interpolate material, that one provide an overlapping or repetitious comment, as if one ought to resume the source with some reference to where one left off. Fortna (p. 78) recognizes this policy, and identifies it at 11.3b+11.5-6a; 11.7a+11.11a; and 5:9a+5:14b (p. 53, note 4). One may compare the way in which the editor of II Corinthians interrupted (at II Cor. 2:13) one letter in order to interpolate another letter (2:14-7:4), and then at 7:5 rephrases from the original letter the last sentence he had recorded before breaking off, thus producing the doublet II Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5. Perhaps I Cor. 12:31a and 14:1 is a further instance of such a redactor's habit In John, one may compare the way in which, when the narration of Peter's denial is interrupted to insert the interrogation of Jesus by the High Priest (18.19-24), the story of Peter is resumed with the last words ("Peter standing and warming himself") that had been quoted before the interruption (18:18b, 25a).

Such a technique is simplest when a quotation formula provides the seam: Rather than the original quotation following the quotation formula, a new quotation with its consequences is interpolated. Then, by simply repeating the quotation formula, the original context can be restored. In Mark 2:1-12, the quotation formula ("he said to the paralytic") provides both the point at which the discussion on the forgiveness of sins is interpolated into the healing of the paralytic (2:5), and the point at which the latter story is resumed (2:10). In a quite similar way there is apparently a Johannine interpolation into the first miracle story, the wedding at Cana. In 2:3 one finds the quotation formula mother of Jesus said (to him)," and in 2:5 its variegated repetition, mother said (to the servants)." The intervening material is recognized by both Ernst Haenchen and by Fortna (p. 30-32) as typically Johannine: The unwillingness of John to have Jesus' work motivated by human rather than divine plan, as well as the Johannine engrossment with Jesus' coming "hour", recurat 7:6 in a similar Johannine rebuff to Jesus' kin (with his brothers here alternating with his mother), followed, as in Chap. 2, by Jesus in fact doing what he refused to do at human instigation. Furthermore, were one to assume the unity of the story, it would be difficult to understand why Jesus' mother, after the rebuff in verse 4, proceeds (in verse 5)

as if the intervening material did not exist. This problem is most satisfactorily explained in 2:3b-4 is considered an interpolation by the Evangelist into the miracles source.

When one then looks for similar redactional activity within the body of the Capernaum story in Chap. 4, one notes a redactional overlapping seam at the end of 4:47 and 49. Verse 47b reports in indirect discourse that the officer asked Jesus to go down and heal his son, since he was about to die; verse 49b quotes in direct discourse the officer: "Sir, go down before my boy dies." It looks as though the intervening material has not advanced the story one bit, but that the Evangelist in verse 49 is simply recalling the point where he had interrupted his narration. As a matter of fact, the intervening comment by Jesus is rather gratuitous, seemingly unmotivated by and unrelated to the father's request that his son be healed. And the apparent rebuff seems ignored in what follows, since Jesus does in fact heal the son. The inference is that verses 48-49 (or 47b-49a, with Fortna, p. 41) are not from the source, but were added by the Evangelist. This explanation is also suggested by two traits distinctive of the interpolation: A different word is used for the sick child (paidion) than the term used in the rest of the story (which uses the term huios four times when the father and Jesus speak, and the term pais once when the servants speak). Furthermore, whereas in the source Jesus addresses the father in the singular, he addresses him within the interpolation in the plural, a slight inconsistency not only indicating the secondary nature of the interpolation but also suggesting that it is actually addressed to the church.

Such interpolations as 2:3b-5a and 4:47b-49a into the middle of stories are the way one would handle a written source, which had its own fixity; for in the case of oral transmission one could have been freer with the antecedent layer, and built one's own interpretation more integrally and invisibly into the whole. Thus on purely literary-critical grounds one can disengage a few traces of a written source behind John.

A further question concerning the status of the miracles source has to do with its extent; its existence seems to depend upon such literary-critical considerations as those just described, but its limits are not yet set by the analysis confined to two miracle stories. Fortna's study has sought to combine into a single source both Bultmann's miracles source and his passion-resurrection narrative source. Fortna also includes, as the third miracle story, 21:2-14. which Bultmann attributed to the redactor who reworked the Evangelist's Gospel. The outcome is a relatively large source, comprising about a fifth of the total size of the Fourth Gospel (p. 215, note 4). Fortna attributes Bultmann's separation into two main narrative sources to the influence of Faure's division at the end of Chapter 12, a division Fortna regards (p. 217f., note 3) as refuted by the pervasiveness of stylistic traits assembled by Schweizer and his followers. Fortna for his part not only argues for the distinctiveness of his source from the Fourth Gospel in terms of such stylistic traits; he even argues for the integrity of his source on the grounds that all but one

of the pericopae he assigns to it contain at least one characteristic of its style.

Fortna uses this as his basic argument also for the inclusion of the passion narrative in his source, which is in fact his most important departure from the main line of previous research on the source. (On a previous but unsuccessful attempt, by Wilhelm Wilkens, see my review, IBL, LXXVIII [1959], 242-246.) But when one looks in Fortna's lists of traits distinctive of the source (pp. 214-217) for traits that would bind the passion sections (Chapter 18-20 preceded by 2.14-19, 12:1-15; and so on) to the rest of his source, such connecting links turn out to be rather meager evidence to justify the inclusion within the miracles source of a passion and resurrection narrative.

It may be significant that the basic methodological dissent between the otherwise rather similar views of Haenchen and Fortna lies here. In his commentary Haenchen appeals to E. C. Colwell (The Greek of the Fourth Gospel, 1931) to overcome "the basic damage of the work begun by Schweizer." Colwell classified Johannine Greek as common Koine Greek: on comparing it with other instances such as Epictetus, he found that what had been regarded as distinctive of John (and attributed to Semitic roots) is simply distinctive of Hellenistic Greek Thus Haenchen uses Colwell's evidence to weaken the list of distinctively Johannine stylistic traits to such an extent that this approach ceases to be for him a major consideration in regard to Johannine sources. tends to concede this point with regard

to Johannine style, but maintains that the earlier source should be expected to be nearer "the rest of the New Testament" (as also early?) than to "later" Koine (p 203f.)—presumably with the effect that a Johannine source might be distinguished from the Evangelist in that the source would have more New Testament traits and fewer late Hellenistic traits. Such an appeal to minor chronological divergences would seem to be a council of despair

Fortna himself seems to recognize the independence of the two bodies of materials at the preliterary stage, for he considers the cleansing of the Temple in the source as a connecting link which "appropriately joined a cycle of miracle stories to a traditional passion narrative" (p. 146) It is very difficult, on the basis of the material provided by Fortna thus far, to move beyond this weak position, which tends to concede Bultmann's two main written narrative sources to be independent as oral cycles, without a compelling reason to justify the claim that they were united into one written source prior to the Evangelist.

Fortna's assumption that we have to do with a single source is perhaps due ultimately, though not intentionally, to the Synoptic pattern. He reasons in given cases from the fact that a phrase or detail is from "the" tradition or has Synoptic parallels to the attribution of such ingredients to his source. Finding such Synoptic-like materials both in the miracle stories and in the passion sections, he is inclined to identify both types as belonging to "the" source. For example his reconstructed sequence 18:38c; 19:15a; 18:39-40 within the passion narrative is de-

scribed as "undoubtedly from the source: it parallels the synoptics with just the degree of dissimilarity we have repeatedly found" (p. 124). Apparently the Synoptics represent "the" tradition and thus function to reconstruct "the" tradition behind John. "Because the episode of the temple cleansing has a fundamental connection to the events of the passion (even though now separated from them) in the Synoptic gospels, it is possible that this connection is traditional and obtained also in John's source" 144f). Such far-from-demonstrated "mere" possibilities end up printed in the Greek text of the source with which the book concludes, which, not surprisingly, is rather Synoptic in type.

Since Fortna's work and the anticipated publication of Haenchen's commentary, already accessible in part in manuscript, mark the growing edge of Johannine research, a comparison of the general lines of similarity and dissimilarity may suggest the course of the debate to come. Fortna and Haenchen agree in including in their source considerably more than had been previously assumed. Not only do both include narrative materials other than miracle stories; both also assume a passion (and resurrection) narrative. Significantly, both Fortna and Haenchen tend to shift from the term source to the term Gospel. This is apparently due to the fact that the kerygma-type genre, including cross and resurrection, is the one among the several genres used for Jesus traditions that in the more specific sense is to be called Gospel, compared with which a mere collection of miracle stories might seem only a part, a source, but not itself a Gospel. But whereas Fortna simply classifies the source as a Gospel "in the narrower (sc. Synoptic) sense" (p 221, note 2), Haenchen refers materially to the miracles source as "a Gospel of non-Synoptic type." For him it is only "a sort of crude version of the Gospel of Mark," since it is "a Gospel that no longer showed Jesus' glory in secret epiphanies, but rather as visibly and tangibly as possible." Both Fortna and Haenchen agree further that there was only one written source for the Johannine traditions. Fortna tends, as we have seen, to attribute most traditions to the source, but Haenchen often leaves this question open. Both assume the source, like the Fourth Gospel, was not dependent on the Synoptic Gospels; parallels are due to shared traditions. But Fortna again is more inclined than Haenchen to use the existence of a Synoptic parallel as a reason for including Johannine material in the Source.

Haenchen conceives of the Fourth Evangelist as having lived with the Miracles Source as the Gospel used in the worship services of his own congregation, so that the relationship is more oral and recollective than literary; Fortna proceeds in the scissors and paste method, presupposing a comparably detailed literary activity on the part of the Fourth Evangelist. Hence Fortna is bold enough to publish a word-by-word reconstruction of the source, which even in the case of O would seem courageous, whereas Haenchen is usually elusive in delimiting the source. Haenchen also emphasizes that redactional activity involves not only accretion, which when removed, leaves the Vorlage relatively intact; it also involves pruning or compressing, with an irretrievable loss of text, to an extent greater than Fortna in practice recognizes.

Although in Haenchen's case it is not only the presence of distinctive theological traits that are responsible for the inclusion of traditions within his source; nonetheless, the absence of such theological traits in traditions that in any case have in his view lost their verbal exactitude makes him hesitate to associate them with his source. Conversely, for Fortna material distinctions are hardly thought to be necessary in making rather exact source distinctions. Furthermore, Fortna tends to bring the theological position of the source and that of the Fourth Evangelist closer to each other than does Haenchen, for which reason he speaks of a Gospel of Signs, rather than a Miracles Source.

The usual English translation of Semeia-Quelle has been "signs source." However Alexander Faure, upon whom Bultmann was dependent, used the term Wunderquelle ("miracles source") (ZNW, 21, 1922, 112). Bultmann himself usually left semeia untranslated, but could on occasion (RGG, 3rd ed., 3, 1959, 842) refer to it as "a collection of miracle stories." In his commentary (p. 79, note 1) he translated miracle as the common meaning, but then adds that the Evangelist was still aware of the original meaning "sign" (John 6,26; cf. p. 161). Haenchen has proposed that the distinction between material source's understanding of semeia and that of the Evangelist be brought to expression by translating semeia in the first case as "miracles," in the second as "signs," and in this regard I have followed him, although Fortna has not.

In his essay "Source and Redaction in the Fourth Gospel's Portraval of Jesus' Signs," (JBL, 89, 1970, 151-166), Fortna points to some inadequacies of the terminological distinction, e.g., that for the source as well as for the Evangelist miracle stories point beyond themselves and thus have a sign function. Yet he concedes that for the source they have virtually no symbolic meaning, whereas for the Evangelist they have relatively little importance as acts in themselves. Ravmond E. Brown, in his critique of Fortna's book at the SBL Gospels Seminar in Toronto, in November, 1969, even criticized Fortna for going too far in describing the source's view in a way that the terminological distinction would suggest. Yet Fortna in turn obscures this distinction, in not making use of the distinguishing terminology. His reason may ultimately rest in a harmonistic tendency to affirm that the the Evangelist nowhere contradicts the source. Yet it is precisely this claim that, e.g., Haenchen finds hard to accept. Haenchen considers, e.g., 3:3,5 to be a Johannine correction of the tradition about miraculous proof in 3:2b (with the redactor subsequently returning to visible proof by inserting water baptism into the Evangelist's purely spiritual regeneration, 3.5). Haenchen considers 20: 29 a Johannine correction of the tradition's view reflected in 20:25,27. Fortna for his part omits both the Nicodemus and the doubting Thomas stories from his source. To be sure, the question of harmony or contradiction goes deeper than the level of surface agreement or

disagreement, and has rather to do with the direction in which the two authorsredactors (of the miracles source and of the Fourth Gospel) are moving, i.e., whether they are on a collision course, when the implications of their positions are drawn out, as they must be drawn out in any attempt to translate them into relevant positions today. Of course the larger the source becomes, and the less it is restricted to miracle stories, the less profile it retains, and the more heterogeneous and Johannine its theology would tend to become.

To be sure, one need not assume that an aretalogy, or collection of miracle stories, would be materially inconsistent with the inclusion of a passion narrative, for the fact of a passion narrative does not imply necessarily a theology of the cross A Hellenistic portrayal of a divine Man can readily include his death and apotheosis. Luke illustrates well the possibility of transforming Mark's tragic passion narrative into a triumphalism worthy of a miracle worker. And, in fact, the Johannine passion narrative is in this regard more comparable to Luke than to Mark. Hence the theological nature of the source is not basically challenged by the issue of the presence or absence of a passion narrative. But it would be of considerable interest, in terms of tracing the origins of the various genres into which Jesus traditions were cast, to know whether the miracles source is in outline (although not necessarily in tendency) more comparable to Mark, or whether this parallel in outline is first the contribution of the Fourth Evangelist.

If Fortna has in general enlarged his

Gospel of Signs beyond the limits to which one might conjecture Haenchen's miracles source to extend, there is another stage on the Johannine trajectory at which it is Haenchen who has enlarged and Fortna who has diminished the amount of new material. For Haenchen, the post-Johannine redactor is not only responsible for the sacrafuturistic eschatology. Chap. 21 (as in the case of Bultmann's redactor), but also for the beloved disciple and the few places where the present text is dependent on the Synoptic Gospels. Conversely, Fortna is methodologically very skeptical about attributing material to a redactor; hence, this category plays a neglible role in his presentation. Negative value judgments about attributing material to a post-Johannine redactor, present in the original manuscript, have been largely removed from the published form of the work; yet they must have been at work as a limiting factor in the actual research itself. When, however, Johannine research is not conceived exclusively as concerned with the Evangelist, but with the whole Johannine trajectory, the invalidity of many such value judgments becomes apparent, and research is at one specific and important point freed from limitations imposed by a previous conceptualization.

Raymond E. Brown, in his critique of Fortna, points out that the redactor is inescapable in the discourses, since one finds here two levels, and the older is that of the Evangelist. By limiting himself to the narrative material, Fortna was able to avoid facing this problem fully. He also attributes Chap. 21 to the Evangelist rather than the

redactor, thus facilitating his effort to derive from Chap. 21 the third "sign" of his source. Brown points out how such a view is difficult to maintain, not only because of the scholarly tradition of assigning Chap. 21 to the redactor, but also because of the difficulty in making sense of the Evangelist placing the source's conclusion at 20:30-31 and yet continuing in Chap. 21 with material from the source, as well as the difficulty of explaining the fishing story of Chap. 21 as other than a resurrection story.

The similarity in basic trends, with divergences of methods and results, makes the post-Bultmannian development of Johannine source theory a fascinating and promising enterprise. The outcome could be a sharp profile of the Fourth Evangelist's theology in distinction from that of his source, which in turn would come into profile in its own right.

Of course this is not a wholly new approach to Johannine theology. Bultmann's commentary used this method, and Käsemann in his review summarized the theology of the source. Wilhelm Wilkens, whose unsuccessful reconstruction of the source has already been mentioned, has followed it with a work intended to draw the theological inferences from his reconstruction (Zeichen und Werke: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des 4. Evangeliums in Erzahlungs- und Redestoff), reviewed by Fortna in JBL, LXXXIX (1970), 457-462. To be sure, Wilkens can hardly distinguish the theology of the Evangelist from that of his source, since he attributed both to the same (apostolic) author. Haenchen's interest lies in the Evangelist's theology, more than in that of the source. Fortna himself is actively at work on a volume which will make use of redactional criticism based upon *The Gospel of Signs* to put in relief the theologies of the miracles source and the Fourth Gospel

Indicative of the fruitfulness of this approach is the most recent publication in the field, Jurgen Becker's essay "Wunder und Christologie: Zum literarkritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannesevangelium," NTSt, 16 (1970), 130-148. To be sure, Becker (p. 134f.) alludes to and presupposes, but does not in detail present, arguments for his reconstruction of the source, which is larger (at least as far as what one is able to disengage) than Bultmann assumed, but smaller than what Haenchen and Fortna assume. Specifically his source omits a passion and resurrection narrative, and contains seven miracle stories without recourse to Chap. 21 (in distinction from Fortna). Becker assumes that this "complete" number of miracle stories, plus the survival of the beginning (1:19ff.) and end (12.37f. followed by 20:30f.), indicate that more or less the whole source is included in the Fourth Gospel. His analysis of the theology of the source (pp. 136-143) and of the Evangelist (pp. 143-148) represent the present state of the question, to which Fortna's next book will address itself.