

**The Theology of Judgement in the Fourth Gospel**

**Christology and Eschatology in John 5**

**Submitted by**

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**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
to the department of Theology and Religious Studies  
in the School of Divinity and the Faculty of Arts  
of the University of Glasgow**

**July, 2005**

## Declaration and signature

I, Alan Charles Blackwood, affirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all significant quotations have been acknowledged in the footnotes. No part of this thesis has been submitted for consideration for any other degree in this or another University.

*Alan Charles Blackwood* ..  
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## Abstract

This thesis addresses the apparent puzzle of the theology of judgement in the Fourth Gospel. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus is presented as both judging and not judging while eschatological scenarios are presented and alluded to in which humanity will be judged at the last day and also in which there will be no final judgement. This puzzling theology is particularly apparent in John 5 as has been noted many times in Johannine scholarship. In order to resolve this puzzle a hypothesis is initially proposed and the remainder of the study is devoted to affirming that the hypothesis does, in fact, provide a resolution.

The hypothesis which is proposed at the beginning of this thesis is that John 5 presents a unified theology of judgement which is bicameral in that it consists of two eschatological compartments – one for Christian believers and one for the rest of humanity. The eschatology which John 5 presents for Christian believers is one in which they have been exempted from any end-time judgement process, but have already obtained the salvific benefit of eternal life which they shall continue to enjoy in a heavenly realm following bodily death. In parallel, John 5 presents a more traditional eschatology of a judgement tribunal for the rest of humanity at the eschaton where Christ, as God's appointed judge, will sit in judgement of those who have rejected him and those who have not had the opportunity to accept him. The salvific benefits of such a bicameral eschatology are directed entirely in favour of Christian believers. In addition, the hypothesis proposes that the christology of the Fourth Gospel has developed specifically to empower the Johannine Christ to act as the bringer of life to Christian believers and as the deliverer of judgement to the non-Christian portion of humanity.

The thesis seeks to substantiate the validity of the hypothesis by firstly establishing three prerequisites for its applicability to the text of John 5. Firstly, it is necessary to establish that the christology and eschatology which the hypothesis addresses are indeed to be found in the Gospel and in John 5 in particular. Secondly, it is necessary to search through Johannine scholarship to establish how the problem has been addressed before and whether any proposed solutions can successfully stand as obstacles to the application of the hypothesis. Thirdly, the hypothesis requires that John 5 is a unified text with no redactional insertions by secondary editors. All three of these prerequisites are addressed and a case is made for proceeding with the application of the hypothesis.

The thesis then seeks to further validate the hypothesis by seeking to establish that the distinctive christology and eschatology are the product of a self-consciously Johannine community which was locked into an acrimonious dialogue with a Synagogue community with which it may have been previously allied. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to establish that the Johannine community held a distinctive dualistic worldview with a cosmology of a heavenly realm separated from the world inhabited by humanity. This cosmology had abandoned all belief in the imminence of the parousia, which it now held to be a distant event of significance only to non-Christians. Additionally, the thesis seeks to demonstrate the nature of the distinctively Johannine ethos which accompanied and reflected the worldview – a particularly elitist and judgemental ethos which allowed the Johannine Christians to see themselves as especially separated from the rest of humanity, to be privileged in terms of salvation and to have used identifiable



apologetic arguments in their dialogue with the Synagogue. The thesis proposes that these various aspects of the community behind the Fourth Gospel reflect a belief in a bicameral eschatology – one fate for the privileged Johannine Christians – another less attractive fate for everyone else.

Lastly, the thesis seeks to propose a mechanism by which the Johannine worldview, ethos, theology and apologetic stance came about. The proposal is that in the face of the dual challenge of hostility from the Synagogue and a dawning realization that the parousia-eschaton was not about to happen imminently, an earlier Christian worldview developed into the distinctively Johannine worldview by a process of legitimation in which newer christological formulations, eschatological beliefs and apologetic arguments were developed as worldview maintenance. The Johannine worldview, ethos, theology and apologetic stance are all detectable in John and this thesis seeks to show how they are not only compatible with a hypothesis of a unified bicameral eschatology, but indeed help to validate the hypothesis which proposes such an eschatology.



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## **Acknowledgements**

During my time as a post-graduate student at the University of Glasgow I have been indebted to many individuals and groups for their invaluable support as my studies have progressed. It would be impossible to list here all those who have contributed their time, support, encouragement, care, concern and ideas to the collective effort which has resulted in the production of this Ph.D. thesis. To all those who expressed their faith that the project would reach its completion I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks.

It would, however, be remiss of me to fail to acknowledge those bodies which have contributed financially to my studies during my years of post-graduate research. Within the University of Glasgow I wish to express my thanks to the members of what was initially the Faculty of Divinity and later the School of Divinity for the award of the Hannay Scholarship in 2002, the Millar Scholarship in 2003 and the unnamed scholarship awarded to me in 2004. My thanks go also to the trustees of the Church of Scotland's Moffatt Bequest for their generous award at the commencement of my studies. I am greatly indebted to the Minister and congregation of Glasgow Cathedral for their generous financial support during the first two years of my research when I also served as their assistant minister. During my final year of study I was the recipient of the scholarship provided through the Miss May Orr Legacy of Hamilton Old Parish Church and my thanks are due to the Minister and congregation of that Church. Indeed, to the Very Reverend Dr William Morris, Minister of Glasgow Cathedral, and the Reverend John Thomson, Minister of Hamilton Old Parish Church, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for their friendship and spiritual support throughout the course of my studies.

For academic support I wish to thank Professor John Barclay, formerly of the University of Glasgow, now at the University of Durham, and Professor Ronald Piper of the University of St Andrews for their encouragement and inspirational support during the second year of my research. Thanks must also be expressed to Miss Janine Fitzpatrick for her invaluable help in reaching a clear understanding of some tricky German texts. However, the lion's share of my thanks must go to my academic supervisor, Professor John Riches, for his contribution to guiding this project from its initiation to its conclusion. Without John's inspirational guidance and his unswerving belief that the project would result in the production of a thesis and the award of a doctorate, I can say with certainty that my research would not have reached a satisfactory conclusion. To John Riches, therefore, I express my sincere gratitude for staying the course with me, for an invaluable training which will stay with me for the rest of my life and for all the friendship, hospitality, inspiration and guidance which brought my research to a successful conclusion. Thank you, John.

Lastly, I must express my gratitude to my parents, Helen and Eric, for their belief in me throughout the course of my doctoral studies and through many years in all my many endeavours – personal, family, business, professional and academic. This thesis is dedicated to them in thanks for all their love.



## **Introduction**

### **A. The nature of the problem**

To engage in the study of John's Gospel and to grapple with the theological problems it presents us with is to enter at once into a multifaceted puzzle – a puzzle with overlapping theological, historical, sociological and literary compartments. Each of these areas has been the subject of considerable study, more traditionally in the area of theology and history and more recently with regard to the Fourth Gospel's sociological and literary problems. In this study an attempt will be made to bring together the techniques and results of research in all four areas in order to elucidate what exactly John is saying about judgement and about Jesus as a judge in chapter 5 of the Gospel. It is not the aim of this study to provide either a history of research in this area or an overview of the consensus of current scholarly opinion, although both of these will inevitably loom large from time to time. Rather our aim is to try to provide a synthesis of approaches in which various insights, some old and some new, combine to foster a better understanding of the fundamental unity of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement.

The literary problems posed by John's Gospel are too well known to need rehearsing in this introduction, as are the various solutions to these problems that have been

proposed.<sup>1</sup> However it is well known that in Johannine studies it is far from unusual to view the Fourth Gospel as a not altogether successful fusion of competing ideologies, often as the result of coming to view the Gospel as the product of an author or authors who lifted and edited existing material from various putative source documents, leaving behind the tell-tale clues of the famous *aporias* as evidence of competing or even contradictory theological, historical and literary agendas. Alternatively, and also additionally, it has been proposed that the Fourth Gospel was subjected to some form of redactional process by an editor or editors whose brief was to bring John's radical views into line with more orthodox thinking. By far the most important contributor to these theories of the literary development of John has been Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>2</sup> His proposals have been of such weighty influence in Johannine Scholarship over recent decades that they still require careful consideration, and this study will enter into a detailed dialogue with Bultmann's ideas in an attempt to assess to what extent his ideas can help us to understand the puzzles contained within the text of John 5 as it has come down to us.

In addressing the historical problems posed by John it is now widely accepted that the Gospel was produced in an atmosphere of tension and conflict between church and synagogue where some, if not most, of the Johannine Christians were involved in a dialogue with their former brothers and sisters in the Jewish community. The likelihood

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of scholarship relating to the Fourth Gospel's literary problems, the reader is referred to Ashton 1991, pp. 45-50 and pp. 76-90 where an unrivalled account is given of developments from the early work of Rudolf Bultmann in the 1920s to work published in the 1980s. A more succinct account of John's literary problems is given by Raymond Brown in the introduction to his commentary along with his assessment of the various solutions that have been proposed - Brown 1966(1), pp. XXIV-XL.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Bultmann's proposed solution to the literary problems of the Fourth Gospel is notoriously difficult to follow through the pages of his commentary as he nowhere sets out his theory in full, preferring to dispense each little nugget at the appropriate place as he comments on the Gospel's text. Ashton 1991, pp. 45-50 gives a good condensation of Bultmann's thesis, but by far the most comprehensive account is given by D. Moody Smith in his book dedicated to the subject - Smith 1965. See also Riches 1993, pp. 81-88 for a succinct account that seeks to penetrate the genius of Bultmann as both an exegete and a theologian. See also chapter 4 below where we attempt to assess Bultmann's work on John 5.



is that this dialogue turned sour, leading to claim and counter-claim before descending into conflict, expulsion, severance of ties and, it has been proposed in extreme cases, even to bloodshed. This is the position taken by J.L. Martyn in his ground-breaking monograph which has proved itself essentially convincing to many scholars.<sup>3</sup> While the basic evidence upon which he based his thesis had been dealt with in the commentaries,<sup>4</sup> it was left to Martyn to develop a hypothesis about how these factors may have contributed to the overall shape and flavour of the Fourth Gospel, a hypothesis which he was able to develop in later articles.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary with Martyn, R.E. Brown proposed in his commentary<sup>6</sup> a hypothesis in which the Gospel was composed in a series of stages over a considerable length of time. Brown too went on to develop his theories in subsequent publications, his composition theory evolving into a proposed ‘history’ of the community which produced the Gospel in his boldly imaginative monograph, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*,<sup>7</sup> and later in a commentary on the Johannine Epistles.<sup>8</sup> The present study will be conducted in dialogue with both Martyn and Brown as we seek to harness their insights as far as they have relevance to the situation of John 5.

From a theological standpoint, particularly in relation to John’s theology of judgement, the major problem that his Gospel poses centres around the following two questions: What can the evangelist mean by stating a belief in an exemption from judgement for

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<sup>3</sup> We refer here to Martyn 1979, the expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, first published in 1968. We assess Martyn’s contribution below in chapter 3 before proposing and attempting to use an adaptation of his technique in chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> For example see Barrett 1955, pp. 299-300 for his comments on the evangelist’s use of ἀποσυνάγωγος in 9:22, 12:42 and 16:2 and the possible link to the issuing of the *birkath ha-minim*. In the second edition of his commentary Barrett alludes to Martyn’s work without giving the impression of being greatly impressed – Barrett 1978, pp. 361-362.

<sup>5</sup> Martyn 1977 develops his original thesis somewhat, as does Martyn 1979.

<sup>6</sup> See Brown 1966(1), pp. XXXIV-XXXIX.

<sup>7</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 25-91. See also chapter 5 below where we attempt to engage with Brown’s theories.

<sup>8</sup> Brown 1982, pp.69-115



Christian believers upon adoption into eternal life, while also including passages in which the Gospel presents a more traditional picture of a day of judgement at the eschaton? And, what does the evangelist mean by his contention that Jesus has not come to judge while stating elsewhere that Jesus is, in fact, *the* judge? Again, the scholarship of Rudolf Bultmann dominates the answers that have been given to these questions.<sup>9</sup> Given that not all the answers Bultmann gives are theological ones, he believed that in the Fourth Gospel the Christ-event, the event of revelation (leaving aside specific questions of the content of that revelation), is portrayed as the judgement of God upon the world.<sup>10</sup> God's judgement impinges upon humanity insofar as it calls each individual to a moment of decision, a response for or against the revelation in Christ as it is presented to them. A rejection of Christ implies an alignment with the negative side of the dualistic polarities by which the evangelist describes the world of Johannine faith – darkness rather than light, falsehood rather than truth and judgement rather than eternal life. On the other hand, an acceptance of Christ immediately signifies an acceptance of light and truth, an adoption into eternal life and an exemption from judgement. This choice between the negative and positive aspects of the Fourth Gospel's dualistic polarities was believed by Rudolf Bultmann to be the defining and genuine eschatology of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>11</sup> Clearly this is not *eschatology* as it is elsewhere understood and we are quite justified in pausing for a moment to ask if the use of the term *eschatology* in this context is justified.

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<sup>9</sup> In his commentary Bultmann makes it clear that it is his opinion that futuristic eschatology plays no part in the theology of the Fourth Gospel's evangelist and that references to the eschaton have been added to the Gospel by an editor. See Bultmann 1971, p. 261. However, it is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of his *Theology of the New Testament* that Bultmann explains in full his interpretation of the evangelist's eschatology – Bultmann 1955, pp. 15-92.

<sup>10</sup> Bultmann 1955, pp. 33-69.

<sup>11</sup> Bultmann 1955, pp. 75-92.

In the Synoptic Gospels the *Kingdom of God* forms the basis of Jesus' kerygmatic message. The loaded urgency of this preaching was charged by a widespread belief in some kind of more or less imminent cataclysmic event (ἔσχατον) heralding the end of the world – the end of the present age – and the commencement of a new age in the *Kingdom of God*.<sup>12</sup> Thus the Synoptic kerygma can be said to be *eschatological* in the proper sense of the word, an understanding that was augmented by the widespread early Christian belief in the parousia – Christ's coming in judgement at the eschaton. In the Fourth Gospel, however, only vestigial traces of these futuristic beliefs are to be found. They are for the most part replaced by the promise of the gift of a new kind of life, *eternal life*, and an exemption from judgement commencing here and now in the present age with the acceptance of the Johannine Christ. Furthermore, the *Son of Man*, whose eschatological coming on the clouds of heaven is well known from Mark, Matthew, Luke and elsewhere in the New Testament,<sup>13</sup> is barely distinguishable in John from Jesus of Nazareth, the man from Galilee. In John 9 Jesus asks the man who was formerly blind if he believes in the Son of Man, before going on to tell him that he is seeing him and speaking to him now.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Fourth Gospel brings the eschatological judgement associated with the Son of Man forward into the present age – into the moment of choice for or against Jesus Christ. In some senses John can be said to be de-eschatologizing the concept of judgement if not, indeed, the whole Christian message. On the whole, though, most writers on the Fourth Gospel have been content to agree that *eschatological* is an appropriate way to describe the Johannine encounter

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<sup>12</sup> In Mark's Gospel this is presented as the kernel of Jesus' early preaching – ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ - Mark 1:15, with echoes in Luke 21:31 and in the Baptist's preaching in Matthew 3:2. The flavour of an impending eschatological catastrophe is given more clearly by passages such as Mark 9:1, Matthew 16:28 and Luke 9:27.

<sup>13</sup> See Mark 13:26, Luke 17:24 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

<sup>14</sup> John 9:35-37.



with Christ<sup>15</sup> and even the subsequent life of faith which has been described as 'eschatological existence.'<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of God's revelation in the Christ-event, it remains legitimate to ask about the content of that revelation – what is the significance of the man, Jesus of Nazareth and what he has to say? How do his death and resurrection relate to the salvation that is promised? Bultmann's answer was that these factors are all swallowed up in the one event of 'the Revelation of God's "reality" (ἀλήθεια) in the earthly activity of the man Jesus combined with the overcoming of the "offense" in it by man's accepting it in faith.'<sup>17</sup> This answer is consistent with Bultmann's belief that the Johannine Christ has little to reveal in terms of his message beyond the fact that he is the revealer.<sup>18</sup> As we shall see in the course of this study, the Johannine revealer's message reveals a great deal more than Bultmann is popularly understood to have granted. Is Bultmann right, therefore, to emphasise the Fourth Gospel's revelation as *eschatology*? Is there another side to revelation in John which Bultmann has underplayed? Does what John has to tell us about Jesus Christ lead to the conclusion that perhaps eschatology is part of an equation which has other equally important factors? The answer to this may lie in the fact that on any interpretation the Johannine revelation presents each human being with a choice which has to be made. How does one choose? What factors come into play for the prospective believer when weighing

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<sup>15</sup> This is not to imply an uncritical and wholesale acceptance of every aspect of Bultmann's interpretation. His existential and demythologizing agendas have been challenged and modified many times, as has what has been perceived as a lack of emphasis on christology and pneumatology leading to a heavily imbalanced eschatological understanding. See Ashton 1991, pp. 70-76.

<sup>16</sup> See Bultmann's 'Faith as Eschatological Existence' - §50 in chapter 4 of the second volume of his *Theology of the New Testament* – Bultmann 1955, pp. 75-92.

<sup>17</sup> Bultmann 1955, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> See Bultmann 1971, pp. 176-202 where he introduces this theme in his coverage of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. In his *Theology of the New Testament* Bultmann develops his thesis considerably in §§ 46 and 48, beginning his conclusion of chapter 3 with: 'Thus it turns out in the end that Jesus as the Revealer of God *reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer.*' Bultmann 1955, p. 66.



up the arguments on each side – to accept or to reject Christ? If all we had available to us to help us make that choice was the Fourth Gospel itself along with those who are able to expound its message for us – not an inconceivable set of circumstances for those for whom the Gospel was produced – then we would find ourselves relying heavily on what John has to say about the person of Christ – the Johannine christology. Thus the christology of the Fourth Gospel is surely just as important as its eschatology in terms of reaching the decision that has to be made in the face of the Johannine revelation. This was the conclusion reached by Josef Blank, who believed that eschatology is in fact secondary to – or a function of – christology in John’s Gospel:

Das eschatologische Christusergebnis gründet in der Person seines Trägers, im göttlichen Logos, der Mensch wurde, in der mit dem Vater eins seienden und doch von ihm unterschiedenen Person des Sohnes. Auf diesen christologischen Grund mußten die Aussagen, wenn sie genau genommen werden sollten, zurückgeführt werden, weil sich ohne diesen Grund die Christusoffenbarung weder als eschatologisches Heilsereignis noch als göttliche Offenbarung im genauen und klassischen theologischen Sinn erweisen läßt.<sup>19</sup>

Thus we see that post-Bultmann the Johannine eschatology is not to be understood apart from a clear picture of the Fourth Gospel’s christology. Accordingly, this study will enter into dialogue with both Bultmann and Blank as we attempt to establish whether or not a secure christological foundation underpins the theology of judgement presented in John 5.

From a sociological point of view it can be argued – and has been<sup>20</sup> – that the world of the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel and his readers is a closed book because we have no

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<sup>19</sup> Blank 1964, p. 346. Earlier, on p. 38, Blank had succinctly stated that “die Christologie ist keine Funktion der Eschatologie, sondern umgekehrt, die johanneische Eschatologie ist eine Funktion der Christologie.”

<sup>20</sup> Holmberg makes a specific allegation of circular reasoning in response to Meeks 1972 – see Holmberg 1990, p. 127. Further cautions about the use of sociological approaches include that of Neyrey, who warns of the impossibility of inferring the existence of only one single social situation from a text which he believes has been subjected to various redactions at different times – Neyrey 1988, pp. 96-98. Milbank cautions against heavy reliance on sociological investigation to a degree that excludes

firm external evidence on which to base any sociological models which we may wish to use to help us explain how, for example, the theology of a passage such as John 5 came to develop from the more primitive post-Easter kerygma. Such arguments allege a circularity of approach in which scholars do no more than construct interpretative sociological models using the unreliable pages of the Gospel itself in order to use these inherently suspect models to further interpret the self-same Gospel passages. An argument such as this would carry far more weight if there happened to be any sociological evidence independent of our chosen text which could be used to construct a sociological model which could then be applied to the text for interpretative purposes. However, the reality of biblical scholarship is that the scholar who is interested in the historical and social circumstances which lie behind a given text's production usually has little option but to search for clues illuminating these issues within the text itself. These clues may be all that the scholar can obtain in order to enable a plausible background to the text to be postulated in a way that is congruent with what is already known about the general historical and geographical loci believed to be associated with the document being studied. In the absence of specific external information about a text and its original social setting, only thus may scholars propose readings of a text which integrate what the text says with the generality of what is known about the ancient world in which it was produced. While it is arguable that there is a degree of circularity to this process, scholars can do little more than proceed with caution in an awareness of the limitations that must be applied, as they seek to reconstruct the historical and social circumstances behind their chosen texts.

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recognition of the genius of a particular author – Milbank 1990, pp. 117-118. Talbert believes that the Gospels, as distinct from the Epistles, were not necessarily written in response to specific social circumstances and that sociological analysis of their content may lead to erroneous inferences being made concerning problems which no longer pose a threat to the author's community and from potential problems which the author hoped to forestall – Talbert 1992, pp. 62-63. The very fact of the geographical spread of early Christianity has led other scholars to question the degree of social isolation in which the Gospel communities were located – see Barton 1998 and Bauckham 1998b.



To look at John's Gospel from a sociological perspective is to regard the Gospel and its distinctive features as the product of a specific social environment. Such an approach goes beyond the historical analysis of Martyn in that it enables scholars to use the techniques of social-science modelling to attempt to explain why and how doctrine may have evolved in a particular direction. This study will attempt to engage with two scholars<sup>21</sup> who have used social-science modelling in attempts to interpret the Fourth Gospel's situation and also we shall apply a particular social-scientific model<sup>22</sup> to the text of John 5 in the hope of gaining a clearer understanding of the development of the Gospel's theology of judgement.

While the present study intends to look specifically at John 5 as a means of unravelling the complexities of John's theology of judgement, it is hoped that this investigation will shed light on the theology of judgement as it is found throughout the Fourth Gospel. It seems appropriate, therefore, to look briefly at the motif of judgement as it is found throughout the pages of the Gospel and to highlight the difficulties the various Johannine propositions present.

The motif of judgement occurs in the Fourth Gospel at the following loci:

3:17-18; 5:22, 24, 27-30; 7:24, 51; 8:15-16, 26, 50; 9:39; 12:31, 47-48; 16:8 -11; 18:31.

There is a degree of christological tension between some of these passages as they are not entirely consistent about the role of Jesus in divine judgement. In some passages

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<sup>21</sup> These are Wayne Meeks and James McGrath and in particular with their theories as expressed in Meeks 1972 and McGrath 2001.

<sup>22</sup> The social science model we shall use is that of *legitimation* as described in Berger and Luckmann 1966 and outlined below on pp. 19-23.



Jesus is not himself acting as a judge and the arbiter of the implied judgement is whether or not an individual believes in Jesus. For example:

3:17-18 It was not to judge the world that God sent his son into the world, but that through him the world might be saved. No one who puts his faith in him comes under judgement. But the unbeliever has already been judged because he has not put his faith in God's only son

8:15-16 You people judge according to appearances. I do not judge anyone. But even if I do judge, my judgement is valid because I am not alone – I have the Father who sent me.

12:47-48 But if anyone hears my words and disregards them, I am not his judge. I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for anyone who rejects me and does not accept my words. The words that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.

In contrast there are some passages where Jesus is clearly acting as a judge or is identified as an agent of divine judgement:

5:22 The Father judges no one, but has delegated all judgement to the Son.

5:26-30 The Father ... has given to him the power to hand down judgement because he is the Son of man ... as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just because I do not seek to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me.

9:39 It is for judgement that I have come into this world...

On the surface at least there is a clear tension between these two sets of passages. Jesus is not the executor of divine judgement in the first set, but in the second set he is identified as part of the agency of divine judgement.

In addition to this christological tension, the Fourth Gospel displays tensions between its various statements of belief in different eschatologies, some passages showing a belief in a form of realised eschatology in which judgement takes place in the here and now. For example:

3:18 Whoever believes in him is not judged. But whoever does not believe is already judged for not believing in the name of the only son of God.

5:24 Truly, truly I say to you people that whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come to judgement.

Other passages, however, seem to cling to a more traditional eschatology, presumably inherited from the parent religion of Judaism, where there will be a great assize at the last day. For example:

5:28-29 An hour is coming in which all those in their graves will hear his voice, and they will come forth – those having done good things to a resurrection of life; but those whose deeds are evil to a resurrection of judgement.

This study will examine these clear tensions in the Fourth Gospel's christology and eschatology of judgement. In simple terms the questions to be asked are: Is the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel a direct agent of divine judgement or is he the provider of a choice in which those he confronts judge themselves? And, what is the belief of the author of the Gospel in terms of a 'day of judgement' – is his eschatology realised or futurist and how does Jesus fit into this belief? In an attempt to answer these questions, it will be necessary to propose a hypothesis and a methodology. The hypothesis, if substantiated, will be used as a hermeneutical tool to ask questions of the text of John 5. The methodology, as proposed below, will be used to test the hypothesis against competing proposals of theological, historical, literary and sociological natures.



## **B. A hypothesis**

As a means of commencing this study and as an analytical tool with which to probe the text of the Fourth Gospel, we propose the following hypothesis. The methodology which will follow on from the hypothesis will attempt to define an approach to the Gospel's text by which the hypothesis can be substantiated or refuted.

The Gospel is the product of an author or authors who were originally the inheritors of a form of Christianity that would have been clearly recognisable as a parallel development to that which is found in the Synoptic Gospels. This pre-Johannine Christianity contained a relatively undeveloped christology and adhered to the traditional eschatology of Judaism. However, the Gospel was being written in a changing cultural milieu where developing christological propositions were being proposed, accepted and incorporated into the doctrine of the new faith. Thus the Gospel also contains newer elements of a more developed christology where the earthly Jesus is empowered by God as a life-giver and as an agent of divine judgement. It would appear that the Gospel's christology is undergoing a process of development insofar as there is evidence of newer and more exaggerated claims about Christ along with the traditional and more modest claims.

Similarly, the Gospel's eschatology seems to be undergoing a process of development whereby the traditional eschatology still has a place in the Gospel while newer, more specifically Johannine ideas are being proposed. Thus the Gospel has not two competing eschatologies, but rather a single unified bicameral eschatology – an eschatology with two 'compartments,' one compartment being the eschatology of a day

of judgement at the eschaton (applicable to humanity as a whole) and the other being an exemption from judgement and immediate entry into eternal life (applicable to those who accept Jesus and his message). In the Gospel's theology, the scenario of judgement is applicable to non-Christians and perhaps the evangelist is proposing that the moment of judgement for those who reject Christ is foreordained and postponed until the eschaton. Thus there is a suggestion that to reject Christ renders one subject to a negative judgement – a condemnation with implied punishment – at some stage.

Christians, however, are exempted from the judgement process. The Gospel seems to be proposing that Christians have by-passed any eschatological judgement process by entering into eternal life simply by their acceptance of Jesus and his message. Furthermore, the eternal life they have gained will continue beyond physical death in the heavenly realm to which Jesus has returned.

If it is accepted that the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement shows evidence of christological and eschatological development, it might be possible to explain the processes of these developments by using the sociological theory of legitimation. This theory proposes a mechanism whereby institutions (in this case the Johannine Church or Churches) develop new doctrines to deal with criticism from internal factions (heretics) or external threats (non-believers). This mechanism of legitimation proposes the evolution of altered worldviews and justification through new apologetic arguments.

It might be possible to demonstrate that the Fourth Gospel reflects the symbolic cosmology of the evangelist of the Gospel and that the new heavenly eschatology is a reflection of his worldview – a worldview in which the followers of Jesus live in an



altered spiritual dimension in opposition to the world and its inhabitants. In this worldview the universe is divided into two realms. There is a heavenly realm above from which Christ came and to which he has returned and there is the earthly realm below in which humanity lives and dies. Christ's glorification (his death, resurrection and ascension) has brought about some change in the heavenly realm whereby humanity now has access to this realm through belief in Jesus Christ. However, the earthly realm remains as it was before. Thus the world is still subject to death, sin and tribulation and those who belong to the world remain subject to the same fate as before – they will be raised to the resurrection of judgement at the eschaton. Christians are not subject to this process, for by accepting Jesus they are no longer of this world. They now belong to the heavenly realm of God and Jesus and they are exempt from judgement because they have entered into eternal life. Christ's glorification has created a channel between the heavenly realm and the earthly world. Christians have accepted the offer of entry to the heavenly realm and are no longer of this world. The rest of humanity remains chained to the physical world.

It may be possible to describe a Johannine worldview using sociological theory to demonstrate a cosmology that has grown as part of a legitimating process out of an earlier worldview as a result of attitudes and beliefs changing in order to accommodate fresh appraisals of the physical world and also in response to external threat and criticism. Thus it may be possible to show that christological and eschatological developments in the Gospel's theology of judgement have legitimating functions. In addition to the early Christian tradition which the evangelist and his community have inherited, it may be possible to suggest that their worldview has been shaped by specific pressures impinging upon their social and historical situation. In particular, we suggest

that the judgement theology of the Fourth Gospel was formed in response to ongoing and acrimonious dialogue with synagogue Jews and was also shaped by an abandonment of a belief in the imminence of the parousia.

### **C. A methodology**

Our investigation will begin with an examination of the scholarship of recent decades on the subject of the Johannine theology of judgement. The first three chapters of our study will examine various types of approach to the subject, including theologies and christologies of the New Testament before moving on to more specific works on the Fourth Gospel and its eschatology. We shall take a close look at some of the major commentaries on John with a view to gaining some insight into any link there may be between theories of synchronic or diachronic composition and christological and theological developments. Because we are convinced that chapter 5 of the Fourth Gospel is of central importance to an understanding of the Gospel's theology of judgement, we shall examine four recent studies which have focused on John 5. These four studies offer a mix of historical-critical, sociological and literary approaches to the study of John. The examination of these studies combined with insights from the broad theological and historical-critical approaches of the commentaries and other works we shall examine may give us a good idea of what has been the broad thrust of much of the work done in recent years in our area of interest as well as giving us valuable insights that will inform the remainder of this study.



Given our belief that John 5 is the crucial chapter for understanding the theology of judgement in the Fourth Gospel, chapters 4, 5 and 6 of our study will be devoted to establishing that we are justified in this belief. John 5 contains a number of christological statements that indicate a belief in a functionally developed christology that is specifically linked to the Gospel's eschatology. Also in John 5 are a number of eschatological statements that sit well neither together nor with the eschatological claims that have preceded them in the Gospel. Do these christological claims and eschatological statements form a coherent theological argument or have they been put together by different authors perhaps from different sources? If so, then our hypothesis will be facing grave difficulties. If, however, it can be shown that John 5 could be the work of one hand and that it forms a coherent argument throughout, then we shall be on firmer ground. Chapter 4, therefore, will be an attempt to establish whether or not John 5 could be a unitive text by examining Rudolf Bultmann's source theory as it affects the chapter. If the evidence presented in support of Bultmann's proposals holds, then again our hypothesis is in difficulty as it relies on the unity of John 5. If, on the other hand, Bultmann's source theories for John 5 can be successfully challenged then our hypothesis can be taken further.

Chapter 5 will be devoted to establishing to what extent the Fourth Gospel text implies the existence of an identifiable Johannine community. We shall seek to establish to what extent the text of John 5 may allow us to infer that the community was responding to external criticism of its theological claims and also whether we are justified in suggesting that John 5's christology and eschatology has to some degree been shaped by such criticism. If we are able to demonstrate that our hypothesis is compatible with our findings, we hope to be able to suggest that an understanding of how the Johannine

community's christology and eschatology could have been shaped by such processes will help to resolve the puzzle of John 5's theology of judgement.

In chapter 6 we shall examine aspects of the text of the Fourth Gospel which allow us to construct a Johannine ethos and cosmology. In particular, we shall be looking for evidence of sectarian attitudes and stances which may indicate that the Johannine Christians saw themselves as in some way separated from the world around them. We shall look for evidence that such separation was the result of particular beliefs and pressures – in this case the dialogue with the synagogue and a fading belief in the imminence of the parousia. We hope to be able to show that a sectarian stance driven by these two specific pressures may have helped to shape the christology and eschatology of John 5 in a way that is compatible with our hypothesis.

Chapter 7 of our study will form an exegetical examination of John 5. Using the results of chapters 1 to 6 of our study, we hope to show by exegesis of this chapter that nearly all the elements of our hypothesis can be found therein either explicitly or by implication. The exegesis will assess the Greek text using a variety of appropriate approaches including, grammatical analysis, a search for a coherent theological argument, the techniques of literary criticism, a search for confirmation of our postulated historical and sociological background to the text's production and also a search for clues which will confirm the ethos and cosmology which we believe underpins the Gospel's expression of the story of Christ.

The methodology proposed here attempts to address the problems of John's theology of judgement in terms of theological, historical, literary and sociological questions. The



first three of these areas are, of course, firm ground for anyone with an interest in New Testament scholarship. The last area – the area of sociological investigation – has about it, however, more of the feel of *terra incognita*. It is perhaps relevant, therefore, to round off this introduction by outlining the approach to sociological questions that this study will adopt.

One of the reasons the Fourth Gospel stands apart so distinctly from the other New Testament documents is that its christological and eschatological statements seem to have developed considerably from the more primitive kerygma to be found elsewhere and from the Synoptic Gospels in particular. A recognition of this is nothing new. John's theology has always been understood to be more developed than that of the earlier Gospels. However, the process by which the Fourth Gospel's doctrines came to be more developed has until recently been poorly understood and often ignored. Raymond Brown's criticism of J.L. Martyn's failure to account for the growth of the unique 'high' christology he (Martyn) had identified in the Fourth Gospel<sup>23</sup> was not only an illustration of this relative lack of concern with the processes of doctrinal development, it was a warning that the time had come for New Testament scholarship to engage fully with this difficult subject in an attempt to recoup the deficit in this area. One of the fruits of this engagement is that it has become apparent in recent years that it can be the interaction of religious beliefs with prevailing social conditions in a dialectical manner that may result in the development of particular theologies. Such a process can be described as dialectical insofar as the interplay between belief and environment may require arguments to be formulated in defence of a particular set of beliefs with the result that the beliefs themselves develop and grow. Thus the impetus

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<sup>23</sup> Brown 1979, p. 174 with specific reference to Martyn 1977.

for doctrinal development is found to have been not only the social setting in which the doctrine was held, but also the quality of the arguments produced to defend the doctrine from attack. In order to view this process from a sociological standpoint it is necessary to produce a sociological model that explains this process in terms of new theologies developing from earlier ones as a result of modification (growth, development, evolution) in response to external stimuli.

Just such a sociological model was produced in the 1960s by Berger and Luckmann in their research into the sociology of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Their work proposes the objective reality for both individuals and groups of the 'worldview' as not only a human creation but also as a 'social construction.' They go on to describe how, by a process of *legitimation*, worldviews are defended and augmented in response to challenges from the holders of alternative or opposing worldviews. Such 'worldview maintenance' can take place in response to challenges from heretics within a particular group or from separate groups or societies. When the legitimacy of a particular worldview is challenged by a deviant understanding of the world, legitimation is the response which seeks to maintain the plausibility of the original worldview.<sup>25</sup> Berger and Luckmann define this process with an illustration thus:

Historically, the problem of heresy has often been the first impetus for the systematic theoretical conceptualization of symbolic universes. The development of Christian theological thought as a result of a series of heretical challenges to the 'official' tradition provides excellent historical illustrations for this process. As in all theorizing, new theoretical implications within the tradition itself appear in the course of this process, and the tradition itself is pushed beyond its original form in new conceptualizations. For instance, the precise Christological formulations of the early church councils were necessitated not by the tradition itself but by the heretical challenges to it. As these formulations were elaborated, the tradition was

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<sup>24</sup> See Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp. 110-146.

<sup>25</sup> Esler, for instance, was able to use the theories of Berger and Luckmann in his work on Luke-Acts, confirming that such social-science modelling can be used to obtain a clearer understanding of a particular text – see Esler 1987, p. 50. Legitimation was also used as an interpretative tool by Watson, without reference to Berger and Luckmann, in his study of Paul and Judaism – Watson 1986.



maintained and expanded at the same time. Thus there emerged, among other innovations, a theoretical conception of the Trinity that was not only unnecessary but actually nonexistent in the early Christian community. In other words, the symbolic universe is not only legitimated but also modified by the conceptual machineries constructed to ward off the challenge of heretical groups within a society.<sup>26</sup>

Berger and Luckmann's "heretical groups" is, of course, a loaded term in the context of religious discourse. But it is clear that in terms of dialogue between groups, whether one be the offshoot of the other or not, the legitimating process can work in both directions – group A's attack on the beliefs of group B may stimulate the formulating of legitimating arguments from group B resulting in the development of group B's beliefs. This, however, might not be the end of the process, as the newly developed beliefs of group B may be the stimulus for the formulating of legitimating arguments and development of belief within group A – and so on.

The legitimation model as proposed by Berger and Luckmann<sup>27</sup> stipulates that dialogue between groups over ideas – or dialogue over doctrine between religious groups – stimulates legitimation, causing the doctrines to develop in ways that could not have been predicted at the outset. It is possible to map out the different stages of this process as follows:

#### Initial stage: Divergent Beliefs

The process begins with two groups holding divergent beliefs. The groups may always have been entirely separate or one group may be an offshoot or sub-group of the other. In either case, each group holds to a worldview which is foreign to the other – an alternative worldview. In the case of groups which have had no contact prior to the commencement of the dialogue in question, this may be because of a history of isolation

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<sup>26</sup> Berger and Luckmann 1966, p.125.

<sup>27</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 1966, pp. 122-134.

due to geographical or even linguistic factors. In the case where one group is an offshoot or sub-group of the other, the divergence of belief is likely to have arisen where ambiguities or uncertainties in matters of doctrine as presented by the parent group have led to fresh interpretations by individuals or groups.

#### Intermediate stage: Dialogue over Beliefs

Regardless of the nature of the previous relationship between the two groups and regardless of exactly how they came to hold their alternative worldviews, once contact has been made and the worldview of one group has been received as a challenge to the worldview of the other, a dialogue is likely to ensue in terms of conflict. Contact and dialogue between historically separated groups can occur when military conquest of one people by another or migration of peoples over significant geographical areas results in alternative worldviews being brought into close enough proximity for one or both groups to feel that their worldview is being threatened by that of the other. In the case of groups which have been historically associated by allegiance to a common worldview, dialogue may result when one group (or even an individual) proposes an alternative understanding or interpretation which is attractive to some but not all adherents of the existing worldview. The alternative understanding will be viewed by its opponents as an alternative and threatening worldview just as the traditional position will be similarly viewed by those who are attracted to the new. Dialogue between the two groups is likely to result in conflict once entrenched positions have been adopted.



### Final stage: Legitimation

Once dialogue between the two groups has commenced, each group will engage in legitimation in order to demonstrate not only the validity of its own particular worldview, but the superiority of its worldview over that of the opposing group. Apologetic arguments are likely to be proposed with references to scriptural texts, to the teachings of influential scholars and prophetic figures and possibly even to the possession of direct revelation. The formulation of such arguments will necessitate the rethinking and re-evaluation of existing beliefs with the result that fresh understanding of these existing beliefs is reached. Thus a position is arrived at in which a much more fully developed set of doctrines have constructed a new worldview whose existence could never have been foreseen at the commencement of the process.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of the Fourth Gospel we shall seek to demonstrate that this legitimating process has taken place in groups represented on the one hand by expelled adherents of Judaism amongst the Johannine Christians and on the other hand by their former brethren in a synagogue community who have refused to accept that Jesus is the Christ. The dialectical interaction between these two groups, each seeking to legitimate and defend its beliefs in the face of a challenge to its worldview from the other, forms part of the social background to the community which produced the Fourth Gospel. We hope to be able to show that the Gospel's theology of judgement – particularly as it is

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<sup>28</sup> Watson 1986, pp. 19-20, 40, sets out an alternative schema for mapping the process of legitimation. He divides the process into stages of Denunciation, Antithesis and Reinterpretation. In broad terms Watson does not deal with our initial stage describing the initial diversity of belief, while our intermediate stage effectively covers his first two stages. Esler 1987, pp. 205ff. stresses the need to differentiate clearly between the appearance of apologetic arguments and the actual process of legitimation on the grounds that the former is aimed at converting outsiders to the group while the latter is aimed at confirming the beliefs of insiders. However, leaving aside questions of intended purpose which can be notoriously difficult to answer, we believe that the formulation of apologetic arguments is an integral part of the legitimation process itself because the need to legitimate informs and gives impetus to the formation of the apologetic arguments just as the apologetic arguments inform and help to shape the final legitimated position.

presented in John 5 – contains evidence of a legitimating response to dialogue with the synagogue.

We also hope to be able to demonstrate that John 5's theology of judgement has been partly shaped by what Berger and Luckmann call *worldview maintenance* due to an acceptance amongst the Johannine Christians that the parousia was not going to occur as imminently as previous generations of Christians had perhaps suspected or hoped. We suspect that a realization that the physical world and the unfolding of its history was likely to continue (uninterrupted by divine intervention through eschatological events) into the indefinite and perhaps distant future was responsible for the development of a new theology in which the salvific benefits of the parousia for Christian believers have been brought forward into the present-day of the Johannine community. We shall look for evidence of this development in the christology and eschatology of John 5.

Importantly, though, we wish to move beyond the identification of legitimating processes and attempt to assess the resultant Johannine ethos.<sup>29</sup> The relationship between worldview and ethos is described by Clifford Geertz in terms of 'mutual confirmation' where the worldview (consisting of mythologies, cosmologies, the universe of religious symbols) acts as a 'model of' reality for the community of faith. In parallel, the ethos of that community (its "tone, character, and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood") acts as a 'model for' reality such that "the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the

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<sup>29</sup> Geertz describes the interaction of 'ethos' and 'world view' in his essay, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols" (Geertz 1973, pp. 126-127). His use of the idea of 'models of' and 'models for' reality is to be found amongst the unpacking of his definition of religion in sociological terms in the essay, "Religion as a Cultural System" (Geertz 1973, pp. 90, 93-94). Geertz defines religion as: "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."



actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression.”<sup>30</sup> If it is possible to posit a specifically Johannine worldview, we hope that it will, by extension, be possible to describe a specifically Johannine ethos by which the evangelist’s community lived its life and faced the communities which surrounded it.

#### **D. The eschatological tradition - Judaism**

The difficulty of attempting to identify a consistent pattern or single commonly held belief in the writings which contribute to the eschatological inheritance bequeathed by Second Temple Judaism to the New Testament writers has been well observed by Robert Carroll.<sup>31</sup> For our purposes in this study it is necessary, therefore, to examine a selection of texts which may help to identify the various eschatological themes current in Judaism at the turn of the Common Era. Thus we shall attempt to elucidate the various understandings of divine judgement, as well as the idea of resurrection from the canonical and apocryphal biblical books, some pseudepigraphical works and from Josephus. Our purpose in this section is, therefore, the identification of *themes* which may have *contributed* to the eschatological thinking of Second Temple Judaism. It is

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<sup>30</sup> Geertz 1973, p. 127. Geertz’ work has been taken up more recently by John Riches who writes of a Geertzian relationship between ‘ethos’ and ‘cosmology.’ “The more people act in accordance with the ways of conceiving the world which are suggested by their shared narratives, rituals and other symbolic products, the more such patterns of action seem to confer on their conceptions of the world an ‘aura of factuality.’ The more realistic a society’s conceptions of the world become, the more its members will be constrained to act in accordance with them.” Riches 2000, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> “Composed of multivariate metaphors, images and figures, often inconsistent, contrary, and contradictory, the different books constituting the Hebrew Bible provide impressionistic and paradoxical elements lacking a unifying structure. .... A reading of all the biblical and extra-biblical texts bearing on thoughts and images of the future will demonstrate the multiplicity of discrete and disparate viewpoints entertained in the circles which produced or maintained these writings.” Carroll 1990, p. 200.

not our intention to propose a comprehensive ‘theology of the last things’ or to investigate in detail the ethos underlying these beliefs – such treatments are represented in our bibliography.<sup>32</sup> Rather, our intention is to provide a summary of the eschatological background against which the New Testament in general and the Fourth Gospel in particular came to be written.

The principal interest of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament in the events of the future is manifested in *the day of the Lord*.<sup>33</sup> While the events associated with a coming day of the Lord are often concerned with an apparently military overthrow of the enemies of the nation, it is clear that this was not the sole concern of the prophetic tradition. Notions of judgement and punishment for not only the enemies of Israel, but also for the unrighteous within the Jewish people, along with some recognition of the blessings to follow from prior repentance and a favourable judgement, suggest that the day of the Lord was considered to be an eschatological event – an end to the current order of things, beyond which would be a new and different world in which the people of God would play a dominant role.<sup>34</sup>

Amongst those passages which deal with the day of the Lord in the prophetic writings, the following are representative: Isaiah 13:9-16 and 34:2-8; Ezekiel 7:2-27 and 30:1-19; Joel 2:1-11 and 2:12-3:21; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15-18; Zephaniah 1:1-3:20; Zechariah 12:1-14:21; and Malachi 3:2-12 and 3:16-4:3. These passages indicate a belief in or at least a hope for a day of the Lord, a coming day, in which the Lord will

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<sup>32</sup> For an examination of not only the themes of eschatology in the Old Testament, but also an analysis of the ethos and ethic accompanying identifiable beliefs, see Gowan 2000. For a detailed examination of the theme of divine judgement in the books of the Hebrew Bible and in other early Jewish literature, see Reiser 1997, pp. 26-163 and Brandon 1967, pp. 56-75.

<sup>33</sup> See Reiser 1997, pp. 26-32.

<sup>34</sup> See Reiser 1997, pp.144-145.



inflict a terrible visitation on the peoples of the earth.<sup>35</sup> The approach of such a day will be known because its nearness will be tangibly felt.<sup>36</sup> On that day the Lord will deal out death and destruction by fire and by sword.<sup>37</sup> The sky will be dimmed amidst clouds and great darkness.<sup>38</sup> The judgement of the Lord on this day will be known as a punishment by destruction;<sup>39</sup> in some cases upon the nations with accompanying vindication for Israel,<sup>40</sup> in others upon Israel and the nations.<sup>41</sup> The Lord's judgement may be directed against a particular nation and yet, at least in the context of judgement upon the Hebrew people themselves, there may be the possibility of escape through repentance.<sup>42</sup> On the whole and perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of some kind of judicial proceeding through which judgement is dispensed is absent from these violent images. Ezekiel, however, and Malachi both indicate that the day of the Lord will incorporate some kind of inquest – in the case of the Ezekiel passage<sup>43</sup> in terms of the customs and practices of those being judged and in Malachi<sup>44</sup> at a hearing where the Lord sits in judgement.

Outwith the motif of the day of the Lord, the idea of the Lord's judgement upon the Hebrew people specifically within Jerusalem, but with plainly universal implications, is graphically dealt with in Isaiah 65-66. Here, the offences of the unrighteous portion of the Hebrew nation are spelt out in detail and they are promised destruction by the sword.<sup>45</sup> But for the righteous portion, the servants of the Lord, their inheritance will be

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<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 13:14-16; Ezekiel 7:8, 30:2; Joel 2:1; Malachi 3:2.

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 13:4; Joel 2:10.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 13:15; Ezekiel 7:15, 30:6-8; Joel 2:3.

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 2:30; Amos 5:18-20.

<sup>39</sup> Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 7:4, 9; Zephaniah 1:8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 13:1; Ezekiel 30:4-19; Joel 3:1-21; Zechariah 12:5.

<sup>41</sup> Obadiah 15-16; Zephaniah 1:4, 2:5, 8, 12; Malachi 3:1-15.

<sup>42</sup> Joel 2:12-14; Zephaniah 3:12-20.

<sup>43</sup> Ezekiel 7:27.

<sup>44</sup> Malachi 3:5.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 65:1-12.

a blessed existence in Palestine centred around Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> There they shall know nothing but joy, health and long life. It seems that a reminder of the fate of those who had offended the Lord will always be with them, though, for nearby will be the tormented remains of their bodies, forever on view for all to go out and see.<sup>47</sup> While the central focus of Isaiah 65-66 is clearly Jerusalem, the scene does widen out considerably with the creation of the new heaven and the new earth and, ultimately, with the invitation to all the nations to come and join in the enjoyment of the blessings centred on the holy place of Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup>

The Psalms contain numerous instances of a belief in and a desire for divine judgement, including allusions to the motif of judicial proceedings.<sup>49</sup> Psalm 1, for instance, in its contrasting of the qualities of the righteous and the sinner, mentions a judgement in which the wicked will not stand.<sup>50</sup> Psalm 7 is a prayer for the convening of a hearing which is already appointed in which God sits as a righteous judge dispensing judgement over the nations.<sup>51</sup> Yet the Psalmist prays concerning his own judgement, that he personally be judged according to his own righteousness (verse 8). While the consequences of conviction at this court for the wicked are clearly described in terms of a violent end by God's whetted sword and strung bow and consignment to a pit which the wicked dig for themselves, still there is the suggestion that through repentance such a terrible fate may be avoided (verse 13). Psalm 9 also sees God as a righteous judge

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<sup>46</sup> Isaiah 65:13-25.

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah 66:24.

<sup>48</sup> Reiser believes that while Isaiah 65-66 remains firmly within the Hebrew tradition of prophecy, these two chapters lay the foundations for later developments in eschatological thinking leading to the development of apocalyptic thought and literature. See Reiser 1997, p.32.

<sup>49</sup> See Reiser 1997, pp. 32-38.

<sup>50</sup> Psalm 1:5. Does to 'not stand' in the judgement mean not being present or does it mean the inability to endure the proceedings and the verdict? Or does it mean the loss of the right to stand and offer a defence? Reiser, in noting this ambiguity, cautiously opts for the third possibility. See Reiser 1997, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Psalm 7:7-9. This Psalm is a rather odd combination of the two notions of God acting in judgement through both juridical proceedings and through military action. Craigie suggests some kind of military context for the accusations made against the psalmist. See Craigie 1983, pp. 101-102.



who sits enthroned and judges not only in favour of the Psalmist in his just cause, but also against the nations, the wicked and the world (verses 5-9). Psalm 50 suggests the convening of a court in which God is not only judge, but also prosecution witness against those who seek to honour God through temple sacrifice while dishonouring God through otherwise living unrighteously (verses 4-6, 16-22). Psalm 82 presents the idea of a divine council in which God sits as judge amongst other gods. The Psalm is a prayer for the commencement of just decisions in favour of various groups of the afflicted and dispossessed and it ends by acknowledging that all the nations belong to God.<sup>52</sup> Psalms 96 and 98 make use of the motif of the Lord who comes in judgement over all the earth (Psalms 96:13 and 98:9), while Psalm 97 mentions rejoicing in Zion and amongst the daughters of Judah because of the judgements of God (Psalm 97:8).

The dominant trend in the passages quoted above is one of nationalistic salvation; a decisive stroke by an almighty God that would lead to the vindication of the chosen people of the Lord.<sup>53</sup> Even although traces of interest in personal salvation emerge occasionally, the general ethos of the prophetic tradition is one in which the fate of the individual is unimportant – salvation will be effected by the glorious fate of the nation as a whole, not of the person.<sup>54</sup> The insignificance of the fate of the individual is perhaps reflected in Genesis 3:19, where a simple return to the dust from which the individual is formed is promised. However, as we noted above, there are passages which express a concern with the salvific fate of the individual and it seems that such a concern was to become an increasingly important theme in the developing traditions of

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<sup>52</sup> See Tate 1990, pp. 332-341, for a discussion of who is being addressed in verses 2-7 of Psalm 82.

<sup>53</sup> So Reiser 1997, pp. 145-148.

<sup>54</sup> So Brandon 1967, p. 56: "Yahwism was in origin and essence an ethnic religion. Its *raison d'être* was the relationship between Yahweh and his Chosen People, Israel; in this relationship the individual Israelite had significance only as a member of the holy nation, whose conduct could affect the nation for good or ill."

Judaism.<sup>55</sup> That death perhaps meant more than the complete extinction of the individual is reflected in passages such as Job 10:21-22 and Psalm 88:18-19 which hint at some form of shadowy post-mortem existence in a place of darkness. Isaiah 38:18 names this place as Sheol and indicates that those who have gone there are beyond the hope of salvation from the Lord. Isaiah 14:3-20 seems to indicate the fate of those consigned to Sheol was a common one, for even the mightiest of humanity – in this case the ruler of Babylon – are brought down to share in the communal wretchedness. However, Ezekiel 32:18-32 indicates the development of the idea of an increased degree of discomfort in Sheol for the uncircumcised in general and in particular for those nations that have waged war on Israel.

The probable exilic context of the Ezekiel text is not without significance,<sup>56</sup> for it may be indicating the development of an acute awareness of a problem of theodicy in Judaic theology.<sup>57</sup> Under the circumstances of widespread suffering, misfortune and unfulfilled aspirations of the exilic period, there may have developed a preoccupation with how or why a God who is both good and all-powerful could allow such widespread and readily observable suffering amongst his chosen people. How could the Hebrew doctrine of humanity, in which the individual is unimportant, help in dealing with the deep and apparently undeserved hurts being suffered by so many? This is a problem that is addressed, without answer, in Job 14, where Job laments the finality of death and

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<sup>55</sup> Brandon notes a tension between religious faith at the popular level, with some interest in personal salvation, and the practitioners of the cult, whose tendency was to wish to suppress such interests. See Brandon 1967, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> May and Metzger 1977, p. 1000, Allen 1990, p. XX and Allen 1994, pp. XXIV-XXV all take the text of Ezekiel at more or less face value and date it some thirty five years into the exile, i.e. around 563 B.C.E.

<sup>57</sup> Brandon believes that the probable disillusionment of the exilic period is directly responsible for the relative decline of the idea of a purely national salvation and the consequent growth of interest in exploring ideas of personal salvation. Uffenheimer sees in the decline of the prophetic tradition the beginnings of an “internalization” of redemptive thinking which paved the way for later mystical traditions. Brandon 1967, pp. 60-63 and Uffenheimer 1997, pp. 216-217.



argues for the seeming need for an eventual resurrection from Sheol in the apparent certainty that there will be no such resurrection.<sup>58</sup>

The germ of the idea of a personal resurrection, including a physical resurrection of the body, may be found at least as an allegory on the fate of the resurrected nation at Ezekiel 37:7-14. Here in the famous prophecy concerning the valley of the dry bones and their resuscitation, there is perhaps an indication that the theology of national salvation was beginning to be thought of in terms where not only the generations of the future would enjoy the salvation that the day of the Lord would bring, but that the individual members of the nation, past and present, would be revived in order to share in that enjoyment. As S.G.F Brandon notes in commenting upon Ezekiel 37,

... the vivid imagery of the resurrection and re-animation of the dead bodies is significant; for it indicated that the idea of a divine *post-mortem* vindication could now be envisaged, and also the manner in which it would be achieved. The physical re-constitution of the dead, and their re-animation, were demanded by the Hebrew conception of man as essential pre-conditions for such an act of vindication. For a living person was essentially a psycho-physical organism, and, if after death, life was to be renewed, both the physical body and its animating spirit has to be restored and re-integrated into the living individual.<sup>59</sup>

However, as Brandon goes on to point out, even if this allegorical passage from Ezekiel gives the first hints of the resurrection in the Old Testament, there is a considerable passage of time before we are able to detect firm evidence of the development of such a doctrine.<sup>60</sup> It is in the passage 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 that we find explicit confirmation of a belief in not only the resurrection of the dead, but also a post-mortem judgement with God as the judge.<sup>61</sup> In this passage there is a suggestion that the sin of idolatry was responsible for the death in battle of a number of Jewish soldiers. In order

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<sup>58</sup> Gowan 2000, p. 91.

<sup>59</sup> Brandon 1967, p. 64.

<sup>60</sup> So Brandon 1967, pp. 64-65 and Gowan 2000, p. 91.

<sup>61</sup> For an English translation of the text of 2 Maccabees, see May and Metzger 1977, pp. [263-293], where a date later than 110 B.C.E. is proposed for its composition.

to atone for their sin, Judas Maccabeus organizes not only prayers of supplication, but a collection of money to be sent to Jerusalem to pay for appropriate sin offerings in the hope that the fallen comrades would find a favourable judgement and be able to participate in the benefits of the resurrection. As the passage itself succinctly puts it, “In doing this he [Judas] acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.” (2 Maccabees 12: 43-45)

Confirmation of these kinds of beliefs can be found in the roughly contemporary Book of Daniel.<sup>62</sup> Daniel 12:1-2 indicates a belief that at some future time of great trouble for the nation there will be a general judgement involving both the living and the dead, although there is some confusion in the idea of not all the dead being raised and not all those who are raised being judged favourably.<sup>63</sup> The significance of this passage lies to some extent in the development of the idea of individual judgements leading to only the participation of the righteous in the future salvation of the nation. The unrighteous seem to fall into two categories – those judged not even worthy of the resurrection at all, and those who will be resurrected but to a judgement of “shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2) Still the emphasis in these passages is on the salvation of the nation, rather than as the individual as a member of wider humanity. Daniel’s interest in national salvation is also reflected in the apocalyptic judgement scene of Daniel 7,

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<sup>62</sup> Goldingay tentatively places the composition of the Book of Daniel at around 160 B.C.E. See Goldingay 1989, p. 326.

<sup>63</sup> The vague nature of Daniel 12:1-2 is remarked upon by both Brandon and Reiser, although Brandon sees it as “a landmark in the development of Hebrew religious thought.” See Brandon 1967, pp. 65-67 and Reiser 1997, pp. 41-42.



where representations of the nations which had oppressed the Hebrews are judged before God. In this passage, and not without significance as we shall see, there is the introduction of the motif of a figure in human form (a son of man) into the Judaic eschatological scenario.<sup>64</sup>

Also roughly contemporary with the Maccabean texts and the Book of Daniel is the First Book of Enoch.<sup>65</sup> 1 Enoch 21-22 provides a description of Sheol as a compartmentalized dwelling for the dead, who although already divided into graded groups depending upon their moral character, are awaiting a final judgement. Something of the nature of this final judgement is given in 1 Enoch 51 in the context of the introduction of a Messianic figure (1 Enoch 48-51) – again a son of man or one in human form – who will act as judge on God’s behalf. While this judgement scenario presupposes some kind of immediate post-mortem judgement or separation into groups depending on the degree of righteousness or otherwise of the life of the deceased, at the final judgement it is clear that only the “righteous and the holy ones” can expect to be saved. (1 Enoch 51:2)<sup>66</sup>

Further insights from later writings into the development of the concept of a final judgement are given in Jubilees 5:12-19, where the whole of humanity is called for judgement (Jubilees 5:13-16) but where perhaps only the members of the children of

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<sup>64</sup> In describing the humanlike figure as “enigmatic,” Goldingay notes that the role of the figure is of much greater importance than its identity, particularly in view of the failure of the interpretative sections of Daniel 7 to deal with the figure at all. See Goldingay 1989, pp. 167-172.

<sup>65</sup> For an English translation of 1 Enoch, see Isaac 1983, pp. 5-89 and particularly pp. 6-7, where the difficulties of dating such a composite document are discussed. While Isaac cannot be certain that 1 Enoch was in its final form prior to the end of the First Century C.E., he seems confident that most of the work’s constituent parts were composed during the Second Century B.C.E.

<sup>66</sup> See Brandon 1967, p. 69.

Israel may be given the chance of forgiveness through repentance.<sup>67</sup> Wisdom 6: 1-11 suggests that the standard of judgement will be tougher for those who have set themselves up in positions of authority in human life, while Wisdom 4:20-5:8 indicates that the vindication of the righteous at the last judgement will be a source of acute discomfort to those who persecuted them during their lives.<sup>68</sup>

Lastly, it is worth noting in the historical writings of Josephus a clear indication of Pharisaic belief which may well indicate the nature of popular Judaic belief in the first century of our era. In *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18:14-15 Josephus notes that the Pharisees believed that “souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards and punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people.”<sup>69</sup> While it is clear that Josephus himself held the Pharisees in some measure of contempt, his comments indicate the popularity of their doctrine of post-mortem reward and punishment amongst the generality of the population, if not amongst the educated and ruling classes and the religious elite.<sup>70</sup> It seems that the struggle between a popular belief in and desire for personal salvation, in the face of a cultic orthodoxy which wished to deny such a possibility, was a feature of the eschatological developments in Judaism from the time of the exile up to and into the beginning of the Christian era.

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<sup>67</sup> See Wintermute 1985, pp. 35-142, for a translated text of Jubilees and pp. 43-44 for an estimation of a date of composition of around 150 B.C.E. See also Brandon 1967, p. 71 and Reiser 1997, pp. 69-74.

<sup>68</sup> See May and Metzger 1977, pp. [102-127], for an English text of the Book of Wisdom (or The Wisdom of Solomon), where a general date of composition is estimated to be “in the latter part of the first century B.C.” McGlynn notes a dialogue in the Book of Wisdom between the severity of the judgement of God upon the wicked and the vivid presentation of God’s mercy towards those who repent – McGlynn 2001, pp. 220-221. See also Reiser 1997, pp. 43-47.

<sup>69</sup> From Whiston 1998, p. 572.

<sup>70</sup> Neither Josephus’ attitude to the Pharisees, nor his probable writing for a pagan audience, need be taken as a reason to doubt what he has to say in this passage. See Brandon 1967, p. 72.



### **E. The eschatological tradition – Paul and the Gospels**

It is not our purpose in the present study to enter into the debate about the reliance of the evangelist of John upon the Synoptic Gospels in the composition of his Gospel. D. Moody Smith provides an excellent overview of twentieth century scholarship in this area, while the work of T.L. Brodie is representative of recent proposals suggesting that the composition of John was a process which was dependent on a degree of familiarity with the other canonical Gospels.<sup>71</sup> Our study makes no assumptions about the dependency of John upon the other Gospels themselves. Rather we simply recognise that the Fourth Gospel is plainly a Christian document produced within the traditions of early Christianity. In terms of documentary evidence of what those traditions may have been, our sources are the Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels. While this study makes no specific proposals as to which early Christian traditions were inherited by the Johannine Christians, or in what form they may have inherited them, we propose to briefly look at the eschatological traditions in Paul and the Synoptic Gospels in order to establish, in broad terms, what the early Christian eschatological traditions may have been.<sup>72</sup>

We begin by examining the Thessalonian correspondence of Paul, before examining the letters to the Churches at Corinth and at Rome. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:2 gives us what may be our earliest glimpse of eschatological thought in the New Testament.<sup>73</sup> In this

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<sup>71</sup> See Smith 1992 and Brodie 1993a.

<sup>72</sup> For a concise overview of the eschatology of both Paul and the Synoptic Gospels, see Witherington 1992, pp. 147-231. For a close examination of the motif of judgement in the Synoptic Gospels, see Reiser 1997, pp. 167-323.

<sup>73</sup> Scholarly consensus places the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, in that order, in the period around 50-51 C.E., for which see Bruce 1982, pp. XXXIV-XXXV, although a number of scholars have expressed doubts about the authenticity of the second epistle. Wanamaker, however, has argued convincingly that not only is 2 Thessalonians an authentic Pauline document, but also that it was written and sent prior to 1 Thessalonians – Wanamaker 1990, pp. 37-45.

passage Paul addresses the concerns of the Thessalonian congregation regarding those of their number who have died and will, therefore, not be present to take part in the events of the (imminent) parousia. He does this by describing a scenario in which those who have already died will rise again to meet the risen Christ descending from heaven. This meeting in the air will precede those who remain alive also being taken up to be with the Lord.<sup>74</sup> Although Paul makes it clear that the exact timing of the parousia he has described is uncertain, it seems clear from his inclusion of himself amongst those who will still be living that he expected the event to take place at least within his own lifetime. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 indicates that Paul believed the parousia of Christ would be accompanied with judgement and destruction of those who have no knowledge of God or who disobey the teachings of the gospel proclaimed by the Christians. On the other hand, Paul believes this event will result in the glorification of the saints.

1 Corinthians 15 provides us with an extended argument by Paul defending his belief in the resurrection of Christ and of the relevance of that to the resurrection of the Christian believer.<sup>75</sup> In this passage the resurrection of Christ is seen as of crucial importance to the basis of Christian faith. Because Christ was raised from the dead, all Christian believers can have faith that they too, although they die just as Adam died, will be raised again, just as Christ was raised again.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly though, Paul's conception

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<sup>74</sup> Plevnik notes a difference between Paul's use of imagery here and what might otherwise be termed as an apocalyptic passage. "Paul here comes closer than usual to depicting the future completion in apocalyptic language. But he is not taken into heaven, like Enoch, and shown in detail the drama of the ultimate completion. He is not feeding their curiosity. His depiction gives to the Thessalonians only what they need in order to live in confident hope of the completion." Plevnik 1997, p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> See Martin 1986, pp. XXXIV-XXXV, where 1 Corinthians is dated to May of 54 or 55 C.E.

<sup>76</sup> The mythological and cosmological elements of Paul's thinking in this passage are discussed by de Boer, who concludes that Paul has characterized "death" as a "power" which is now defeated: "Paul's characterization of death and the powers is thoroughly and purposely cosmological-apocalyptic: They are the powers of the old age which are and shall be destroyed by the reigning Christ. Death as a cosmological power whose destruction is assured by the reigning Christ, the first-fruits of the harvest of



of the nature of the resurrected body involves a new and spiritual body which, not surprisingly, is not described in physical terms.<sup>77</sup> In 2 Corinthian 5:1-10 Paul writes of his belief in the resurrection to a new and heavenly body using the metaphors of earthly and heavenly dwellings.<sup>78</sup> Habitation of the earthly body is thought of as being away from or separated from God, while being with the Lord, and therefore truly at home, involves being away from one's body. This passage follows Paul's indication in 4:16 that his own health is deteriorating and that perhaps he expects not to survive for long and 5:10 gives a clear statement of his belief that judgement by Christ will follow, at which he will have to answer for his actions.<sup>79</sup> Philippians 3:21 also indicates Paul's belief in a new heavenly body at the resurrection.<sup>80</sup>

In Romans 8:18-25 Paul's writing becomes cosmological in its scope when he likens the inner cravings of the human heart for spiritual fulfilment to a similar need for an escape from aging and decay in the whole of creation.<sup>81</sup> He sees the glory of the resurrection as the 'first fruits' of a glorification which, ultimately, will involve the whole of the created order. While Paul writes of this as the hope for something as yet unseen, he describes the outcome as one in which the whole of the created order will attain to similar blessings to those which are given to the children of God.

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universal salvation, is an integral part of Paul's argument. That in fact *is* the argument." See de Boer, 1988, p. 139.

<sup>77</sup> Yinger concludes his discussion of the motif of judgement in 1 Corinthians by noting that "Paul expected that the believers in Corinth would have to face eschatological judgement issuing in salvation or damnation, the verdict being conditioned upon their behaviour. Nowhere does Paul give a hint of tension with his doctrine of justification." See Yinger 1999, pp. 204-259.

<sup>78</sup> Martin places the composition of 2 Corinthians probably in the latter part of 55 C.E. – Martin 1986, p. XXXV.

<sup>79</sup> According to Yinger, "verse 10 is best understood in line with second temple Jewish traditions of equivalent recompense." See Yinger 1999, p. 260.

<sup>80</sup> See Hawthorne 1983, pp. XXXVI-XLIV, for a dating of the Philippian letter to around 59-61 C.E.

<sup>81</sup> See Dunn 1988, pp. XLIII-XLIV, where Romans is dated to within 55-57 C.E.

With the possible exception of 2 Thessalonians, the Pauline documents we have looked at do not present us with the difficulty of having to decide what is and is not the genuine teaching of Paul. In the Gospels, on the other hand, it is possible to differentiate to some degree between the teaching of a particular Gospel and teaching that may, or may not, be traced back to Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>82</sup> For the purposes of this study we are interested more in the Synoptic Gospels themselves as documents within the tradition rather than in their value as witnesses to what the historical Jesus actually said. Therefore, in what follows, no assumption about the historical veracity or otherwise of remarks attributed to Jesus is implied. However, in Mark's Gospel we encounter what may be the earliest account claiming to be constructed around the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>83</sup> Mark 9:1 has Jesus announce that some of the followers who are with him will still be alive at the time of a parousia referred to at 8:38. At 13:30 Mark has Jesus say that the timing of the apocalyptic events of Mark 13 will happen within the lives of the current generation, yet at 13:32 Jesus says that only God the Father knows when that time will be. 13:10 suggests that knowledge of the Christian message must become widespread throughout the world before the cataclysm. The passage Mark 9:43-48 suggests the physical removal of parts of the body responsible for sinful behaviour in preference to the discomforts of a fiery hell – a direct reference to the Gehenna of Isaiah 66:24. Eternal life is promised to Jesus' followers in an age to come at 10:30. Belief in some form of resurrection after death is suggested by the passage Mark 12:18-27, where Jesus, in dispute with Sadducees having no belief in the resurrection, reminds them that the God of the burning bush theophany was the God of the living and not of the dead.

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<sup>82</sup> For one methodology which attempts to assess the probability that any particular Synoptic saying can be traced back to Jesus, see Crossan 1991, pp. xxix-xxxiv and pp. 427-450.

<sup>83</sup> See Evans 2001, p. LXIII, for a dating of Mark in the late 60's C.E. in the context of the first Jewish war with Rome.



In Matthew's Gospel<sup>84</sup> at 6:14, commenting on the supplication of 6:12 in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus informs his listeners that forgiveness from God is dependent upon the performance of forgiveness in this life. 7:1-2 continues in a similar manner, with Jesus pronouncing that judgemental attitudes in this life will be met with judgement. At 7:13-14 Jesus talks of two paths – wide and easy through a wide gate and hard and narrow through a narrow gate – leading to destruction and to life respectively. Matthew 8:11-12 contrasts the kingdom of heaven with an outer darkness. These passages are suggestive of a separation after death of the righteous and the sinful – the worthy and the unworthy – as is 13:42-42 where again the outer darkness is contrasted with the brilliance of the Father's kingdom. Some degree of physical awareness, and therefore a resurrected body of some kind, is suggested by the contrast of light and dark as well as the weeping and gnashing of teeth. 10:28 is an injunction to have no fear of physical harm in this world on the path to heavenly glory, for the only destruction to be truly feared is the utter destruction of hell.

Matthew 24 is parallel to but also an expansion of the apocalypse of Mark 13. Here, at 24:29-31 Matthew has Jesus foretell his parousia on the clouds of heaven. 24:34 suggests this will happen within the lives of those listening, while the exact timing is known only to the Father in 24:37.

Matthew 25 has Jesus paint a vivid picture of a final judgement associated with his own parousia. Verses 31-46 present the idea of a great assize at which the Son of Man sits in judgement over the entirety of humanity. Those being judged are separated as sheep and goats – sheep to the right and goats to the left – on the basis of their humanitarian

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<sup>84</sup> Hagner 1993, pp. LXXIII-LXXV, cautiously dates Matthew within the late 60's C.E. Hagner proposes that Matthew must post-date Mark, but by no more than a year or two.

(or otherwise) actions in life. Those on the right are to be rewarded with eternal life in the inheritance of a kingdom long prepared for them by the Father. Those on the left are to be consigned to a punishment of eternal fire.<sup>85</sup>

The passage Luke 16:19-31 provides another vivid image from the Synoptic views of reward and punishment in the afterlife.<sup>86</sup> The parable of the rich man and Lazarus indicates a division into two distant post-mortem destinations, which are in this instance somehow in communication with one another. After death Lazarus finds comfort in the bosom of Abraham, while the rich man suffers punishment in the torments of Hades, from where is able to call for help to Abraham whom he can see. Neither Abraham nor Lazarus are able to come the rich man's assistance though, because of a great chasm separating the two areas.<sup>87</sup> Luke 23:42-43 provides another instance of a belief in a heavenly afterlife for the deserving in the promise of Jesus to the man crucified beside him that he would be joining Jesus that day in Paradise.

Thus we have seen that the eschatology of early Christianity, as we are able to detect it in the pages of the Pauline epistles and in the Synoptic Gospels, seems to follow on from the developing eschatology of Judaism which we examined in the previous section. The concept of the Day of the Lord has become the Christian parousia, where

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<sup>85</sup> Wengst notes that the ethical criteria for judgement in the Matthean great assize – “the most elementary requirements of life, the prevention of direct material distress” – have an unusual social application in their interest in “non-familial ethics,” i.e. an interest in the unfortunate members of society as a whole, rather than only in members of an immediate kinship group. Wengst also notes that the final judgement of the Matthean great assize as a story is told with a “paraenetic intention, that is, so that the events which are told will not happen.” Thus Wengst is able to interpret Matthew in terms of a God who is both the just God of judgement and the loving God of grace. See Wengst 1997, pp. 239-245.

<sup>86</sup> Nolland 1989, p. XXXIX, suggests that it is not possible to be more accurate than to say that Luke was composed sometime between the late 60's and the late 70's C.E.

<sup>87</sup> Bauckham notes that the moral or religious qualities of the lives of Lazarus and the rich man do not seem to have been a factor in whatever judgement led them to their respective destinations in the after-life, but that their reversal of fortunes is based upon the specific social injustices about which the passage is explicit. Furthermore, in the parable's refusal to grant an apocalyptic revelation of the fate of the dead to the rich man's family, Bauckham sees a belief that “Moses and the prophets” should stand as sufficient witness against such social inequalities. See Bauckham 1998c, pp. 103-105 and 116-118.



now it is Christ who returns in judgement to vindicate his followers and to destroy their enemies. The afterlife, too, retains certain similar qualities – the ideas of a resurrection in some kind of body and a separation into those deemed worthy and those who are not. With the substitution of Christ instead of God in the role of eschatological judge, it is clear that early Christianity took over the *general* framework of contemporary Judaism. In the context of Paul, his mission and his letters, it seems that there was a movement away from a specifically Jewish context insofar as Paul's salvific horizons broadened out dramatically to incorporate the Gentile world within the Christian scheme of salvation. However, for some scholars it is less clear that this was the intent of Jesus himself, or of the writers of the Synoptic Gospels. In his study of the motif of judgement in the Synoptic Gospels, Marius Reiser has concluded that the message of these documents is directed to and for the benefit of Israel only. Reiser has found the Synoptic Jesus to be an exclusively Jewish eschatological prophet-figure<sup>88</sup> who proclaimed judgement upon the nation and the individuals constituting the nation,<sup>89</sup> but whose message of hope for the righteous and the repentant was exclusively for the benefit of his fellow Jews.<sup>90</sup> However, it must be noted that Reiser bases this thesis on the basis, not of the intended audience or recipients of the written Gospels, but on his assessment of the audience of the historical Jesus, which he assumes to be a theologically and scripturally well-informed but strictly Jewish one.<sup>91</sup> It is necessary, therefore, for Reiser to treat as a distinctive form of paraenesis all references in the

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<sup>88</sup> See Reiser 1997, pp. 206-262. Reiser's reconstruction of the message of Jesus given in the Synoptic Gospels is immediately reminiscent of E.P. Sanders' well-known reconstruction of the historical Jesus as an eschatological prophet within a strictly Jewish context. See Sanders 1985, pp. 59-156.

<sup>89</sup> It is worth noting that Reiser disagrees with what he believes is the liberal Protestant interpretation of Jesus' preaching in terms of judgement of the individual. For Reiser, the message of Jesus presented by the Synoptic Gospels is entirely consistent with what he sees as the judgement of the individual as a member of a group – whether it be a national group or a group of the repentant and righteous – as it had developed within Judaism. See Reiser 1997, pp. 161 and 304.

<sup>90</sup> See Reiser 1997, p. 305 – where he cites "Israel" as the original intended audience of many Synoptic logia "on the lips of Jesus."

<sup>91</sup> This is not an unreasonable inference, given the number of allusions to Old Testament texts which Reiser has found accompanying the judgement motif – see Reiser 1997, pp. 308-310.

Synoptic Gospels to the possible incorporation of the Gentiles into the Christian eschatological scenario – in other words, Jesus is saying to his fellow Jews, “Look, the unspeakable will happen if you do not now repent.”<sup>92</sup> Such an argument would, we feel, be hard to maintain even if all the Gospel sayings of Jesus could be shown to be genuine utterances of the historical Jesus. However, given that this is not the case, and given that Reiser fails to distinguish sufficiently between the audience of Jesus and the audience of the Gospels, we feel justified in having our reservations about his proposals in their entirety. But Reiser is correct in his identification of Jesus, as he is presented in the Synoptic Gospels, as a prophetic figure who believed in an imminent eschatological cataclysm which in some sense had already begun – perhaps in his own ministry, perhaps in that of John the Baptist<sup>93</sup> – and that through repentance<sup>94</sup> and through acknowledgement of both Jesus’ ethic<sup>95</sup> and his role,<sup>96</sup> a favourable judgement could be hoped for when the final day arrived.

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<sup>92</sup> Examples are Matthew 12:41-42 (par. Luke 11:31-32); Matthew 11:21-24 (par. Luke 10:13-15); Matthew 8:11-12 (par. Luke 13:28-29); Matthew 22:2-14 (par. Luke 14:16-24). See Reiser 1997, pp. 206-245.

<sup>93</sup> Reiser 1997, pp. 304-305.

<sup>94</sup> Reiser 1997, p. 305.

<sup>95</sup> See Reiser 1997, pp. 310-311, where it is argued that Jesus, while venerating the Torah, has replaced it with his own message – “The object of judgment, according to the words of Jesus, is nothing but the refusal to repent in response to his message. At the last judgment, that message will take the place of the Torah.”

<sup>96</sup> Reiser is reluctant to specify what role may be inferred for Jesus in the logia he has examined. However, he notes not only that the Synoptic Jesus believed that the eschaton had in some sense commenced in his ministry, but also that this Jesus was authorized to appoint the Twelve to positions of eschatological authority. See Reiser 1997, pp. 305 and 309.



## Chapter 1

### Approaches to Christology and Eschatology in John

Despite C.H. Dodd's claim that the role of Jesus as a judge formed part of the primitive Christian kerygma and was originally presented as a given truth central to the new faith without theological development or justification,<sup>1</sup> the Fourth Gospel's presentation of judgement and Jesus as a judge is firmly based on a christological justification of Jesus' role as both salvific redeemer and eschatological judge.<sup>2</sup> The Gospel text lays out not only the eschatological scenario in which judgement will take place with Jesus as the judge, but also the christological justification for belief in Jesus as the judge to whom all those who reject his offer of salvation will be required to answer. In this chapter we shall look at what the Fourth Gospel itself says about salvation, judgement and Jesus as a judge. In order to do this we shall attempt to separate the christology and the eschatology as far as possible, looking first at the christology on which the Gospel bases its salvific and eschatological theologies before examining the eschatology itself. However, it is necessary to clarify one methodological point before proceeding. It will become apparent that in the Fourth Gospel the term *eschatology* is not always entirely appropriate within the concept of salvation. While John presents a clear and vivid picture of an eschatological scenario, he also presents another scenario of exemption from judgement with eternal life in heaven for those who have accepted the salvation

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<sup>1</sup> Dodd 1936, pp. 7-13, where it is argued that the kerygma or proclamation of the early Church must be understood as distinct from the teaching or *didaché* which followed in its wake, a theme taken up and developed at length by McDonald 1980. It should be pointed out, however, that Dodd and McDonald are seeking to describe developments several decades prior to the probable appearance of the Fourth Gospel at the end of the first century C.E.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Blank's painstaking exegesis of the Fourth Gospel's eschatological passages firmly concludes that the evangelist bases all his eschatological propositions on clear christological foundations which seek to explain why it is that Christ – and only Christ – represents the revelation of God's love to the world and, therefore, why it is that Christ represents the choice which faces humanity. Blank 1964, *passim*.

Jesus offers. This latter scenario is not strictly eschatological in that it seems to be more concerned with the heavenly after-life of Christian believers. However, as this heavenly after-life as part of the reward of salvation is inextricably bound together with the idea of exemption from judgement, we shall consider the not-entirely eschatological fate of believers along with the Gospel's eschatology proper.

### A. Christology in the Fourth Gospel

In a study of this nature it would clearly be impossible to enter into a thorough review of the entire Johannine christology as it is broadly understood and presented elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary therefore to confine our examination of the Fourth Gospel's christology to those areas which have a direct bearing on the Gospel's eschatology. This approach is quite justifiable in terms of our agreement with the central tenet of Blank's thesis that John's eschatology is a function of his christology.<sup>4</sup> The question is, therefore, of which

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<sup>3</sup> Examinations of the Fourth Gospel's christology range from introductory essays in the commentaries, of which those of C.K. Barrett (Barrett 1978, pp. 70-75) and Rudolf Schnackenburg (Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 154-156) are good examples, to full length studies such as that of William Loader (Loader 1989). An excellent introduction to John's christology is the essay by D. Moody Smith, "The Presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel" (Smith 1984, pp. 175-189), where he argues that christology, as such, is a secondary construction not found in the Gospel itself but inferred from what the Gospel actually has to say about Jesus – hence the title of his essay. Similar excellent treatments are to be found at de Jonge 1977b, pp. 141-150 and Casey 1996, pp. 30-62. Theologies of the New Testament also offer some excellent introductions to Johannine christology, that of G.E. Ladd presenting in essay-form coverage of the topics of: Messiah; Son of Man; Son of God; Mission of the Son; the Divine Son; the Humanity of Jesus (Ladd 1993, pp. 273-289). Donald Guthrie, on the other hand, presents a series of articles throughout his coverage of christology as a New Testament theme: Humanity of Jesus; Sinlessness of Jesus; Messiah; Jesus as Servant; Son of Man; Lord; Son of God; Logos; 'I am' sayings (Guthrie 1981, pp. 222-224, 230-231, 243-246, 263-264, 282-290, 293-294, 312-316, 321-329, 330-332). William Loader lists the principal topics of Johannine christology as: Sent by the Father; Knowledge of the Father; Coming from the Father; Making the Father known; Bringing light, life and truth; Completing the Father's work; Returning to the Father; Exaltation, glorification and ascent; Sending the disciples; Sending the Spirit (Loader 1989, pp. 76-86). While these references help to give an idea of the topics of the Johannine christology, for an outline of varying approaches to the subject, in particular the development of earlier christological themes in the Fourth Gospel, see Anderson 1996, pp. 17-32 and McGrath 2001, pp. 4-47. For essays on particular theological themes in the Fourth Gospel see also Brown 1965, pp. 96-101 and Barrett 1982, pp. 1-36.

<sup>4</sup> Blank 1964, *passim*.



christological principles is the eschatology a function? In other words, on which christological doctrines has the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel drawn in his formulation of the Gospel's eschatology? The answer to these questions must obviously be given in terms of a defining list. But before presenting the list it is necessary to point out that it will quickly become apparent that there is no firm dividing line between christology and eschatology in the study of the Fourth Gospel. As we shall see, some of the topics we shall classify as christological can be thought of as being properly eschatological in terms of their content. In order to decide, therefore, whether a topic should be discussed under christology or eschatology it is necessary to decide on a methodology by which topics can be discriminated as one or the other. In this instance the methodology adopted has simply been to decide whether a given topic pertains to the attributes of the Johannine Christ or whether it is an implication of those attributes which has a bearing on the faith or the fate of humanity. Topics which we find to be christological in terms of their attribution to the Johannine Jesus we shall discuss in this section, while the next section will discuss those which we find to be eschatological in terms of their implications.

The list, therefore, of christological topics which we believe to have a bearing on John's eschatology consists of:

- Jesus as the Son
- Jesus as the Son of Man
- Jesus as God's agent
- Jesus the life-giver
- Jesus the judge

Out of the vast number of christological topics with which the Fourth Gospel presents us,<sup>5</sup> these five are the principal ones on which John's eschatology is built. The Gospel's eschatology can, therefore, be said to be a function of these christological doctrines. Below we shall examine each one these topics individually and in conjunction before going on to examine the eschatology of which they form the basis.

- Jesus as the Son

The Fourth Gospel is permeated by the presentation of Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the use of the title *Son* for Jesus himself, there is also an emphasis on his special relationship with God as the *Father*. Furthermore, the sonship of Jesus is presented in a way which shows it to be qualitatively different from the notions of sonship that may be applied to anyone else in relation to God as the Father. While the Fourth Gospel's prologue allows that others may become children of God, the sonship of Jesus is *μονογενής*<sup>7</sup> – *unique or one and only* – and, therefore, of a different order from that of the *τέκνα Θεοῦ* of 1:12.<sup>8</sup> This special or unique attribute of sonship possesses a number of qualities which the evangelist develops throughout the Gospel, only three of which need to be examined here. These are: the dependence of the Son upon the Father; the authorization of the Son by the Father; and the sending of the Son

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<sup>5</sup> See note 3 above on p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> See Kümmell 1974, pp. 268-274, Guthrie 1881, pp. 312-316 and Ladd 1994, pp. 283-285. Both Guthrie and Loader believe the presentation of Jesus as the Son to be the central christological theme of the Fourth Gospel – Guthrie 1981, p. 312 and Loader 1989, p. 30. For Marinus de Jonge, too, the motif is of crucial importance: "The real heart of Johannine Christology is found in a typically Johannine emphasis on the unique relationship between Father and Son" – de Jonge 1977b, p. 141. See also Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 172-186; Ladd 1993, p. 281. Maurice Casey argues that John's distinctive use of the 'Son of God' motif is an indicator of the late composition of the Fourth Gospel, "a development which became possible only when the Christian community ceased to be identified as Jewish." See Casey 1996, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> John 1:14; 3:14, 18. See Metzger 1994, pp. 169-170 for comment on the likelihood of scribal assimilation resulting in 1:18 being formerly thought to be a fourth example of this construction.

<sup>8</sup> So Marinus de Jonge – see de Jonge 1977b, pp. 41-42.



by the Father.<sup>9</sup> Of these only the first two will be discussed further here while the third is given a section of its own below.

The Fourth Gospel stresses the dependency of the Son upon the Father. John 5:19 tells of the Son's inability to act independently and, therefore, only in imitation of the Father.<sup>10</sup> In addition there are other passages which talk of the unity of the Father and the Son (10:30; 17:11) with the result that there is a degree of tension between these two themes running through the Gospel. However, if the idea of unity is considered to be an expression of unity of purpose (14:20) in which Jesus has no independent agendas or goals which lie outwith the domain of his relationship with the Father – then it is possible to say that having a unity of purpose with the Father does not lessen the Son's dependence on the Father. On the other hand, if the idea of unity between Father and Son is held to be primary, the idea of dependence need be no more than an assertion that the Son, who is everything with the Father, would be nothing without the Father. There are two arguments against this latter position. Firstly, the Fourth Gospel never hints at a belief in the corollary of this position, namely that the Father must be dependent on the Son and also would be nothing without the Son. Secondly, in John 5, when Jesus is accused by "the Jews" of claiming equality with God (5:18) he enters into a discourse in which he asserts his obedience to and dependence upon the Father (5:19-30). Thus we think it more likely that the Fourth Gospel's Jesus is fully dependent on the Father and that their unity is a unity of purpose. Linked to the theme of dependence upon the Father is the theme of obedience to the Father in which not only is it the will of the

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<sup>9</sup> Other themes of Jesus sonship in the Fourth Gospel include: The love of the Father for the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24); the Son is the revelation of the Father (6:46; 8:19; 10:15; 14:8-9); and of the Word of the Father (12:49; 14:24; 15:15; 16:25); the return of the Son to the Father (14:12, 28; 16:10; 16:28).

<sup>10</sup> See Guthrie 1981, p. 314, for an example of an attempt to reconcile the "absolute unity of the Father and the Son" with the "dependence of the Son on the Father." The result of such attempts to square a circle tend to be confusing. Guthrie admits to their being a paradox here, but one which is only apparent due to the "mystery of incarnation."

Father which the Son seeks, but also the will of the Son is disregarded – further implying a relationship of the Son’s dependence upon the Father (5:30).<sup>11</sup> Another insight into the tension between Christ’s dependence on and unity with God in Johannine christology is perhaps gained from an examination of agency christology. We shall be looking at agency christology below, but it is worth noting here that one of the central tenets of an understanding of biblical agency is that the one who has been sent is like the one who has sent him.<sup>12</sup> Given that in the Fourth Gospel it is the Son who has the direct relationship with God while humanity encounters God only through the Johannine Jesus, the perception of God through Christ is not dependent on Christ’s perception of his own relationship to God. What this means is that in terms of humanity’s encounter with the divine in Christ, Christ the Son and God the Father are the same – they are a unity because that is how they are presented to humanity in the encounter with Jesus. The Son’s relationship of dependence on the Father does not enter into this presentation to humanity except insofar as Jesus explains it in 5:19-20 and the reader of the Gospel is perhaps expected to do no more than take the Johannine Jesus at his word in these verses. The tripartite relationship between Father, Son and humanity is not a triangular one in John – humanity has no direct access to the Father. Rather, the relationship is linear, from the Father, through the Son to humanity – and also vice versa – from humanity through the Son to the Father. Thus humanity only looks in one direction, towards the Son and the Father who appear as one – as a unity. The Johannine Christ, however, looks in two directions – he looks towards the Father in

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<sup>11</sup> See Guthrie 1981, pp. 314, note 288 – “It is worth noting that those books of the NT which have the most explicit teaching on the subordination of the Son (especially John and Hebrews), have the highest Christology.”

<sup>12</sup> See Borgen 1968, p. 84.



obedience and dependence and he looks towards humanity knowing that he appears to be as one with the Father.<sup>13</sup>

The two qualities of dependence and obedience lead into the second feature of the Father-Son relationship – the idea that the Son is authorized to perform certain tasks on behalf of the Father (5:22, 26, 30). This notion is expanded upon to make it clear that the end result will be the same – the Son will perform his duties in such a way that the outcome will be the same as if the Father had performed the task. Thus Jesus can say that it is in accord with the Father’s will that he performs these tasks (5:30). Thus we learn that Jesus is authorized to act as judge because the divine function of judgement has been delegated to him (5:22), just as earlier we were told that the Father has entrusted him with all authority (3:35) and later we are told that the Father has committed ‘all things’ to him (13:3). The idea of Jesus holding an authority which comes from the Father is closely related to the theme that he is sent from the Father which we shall discuss below. However, it is important to stress that both authority and sending are dependent upon the office of sonship – Jesus is not necessarily authorized only *because* he has been sent – he is authorized *because* he is also God’s Son.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In addressing this issue, Karl-Josef Kuschel writes that the Fourth Gospel presents the Father and the Son in a ‘unity of revelation’ as opposed to an ontological unity – see Kuschel 1992, pp. 387-389. John Ashton makes a similar point, noting the relationship between the ‘equal to God’/dependent Son dipole and the motif of “the Jewish law of agency that posits a theoretical identity between sender and sent alongside a suspended awareness of the difference between the two.” Ashton 1994, p. 88. However, for alternative views see Meeks 1990 for an analysis of how the Johannine Christians may have come to view Jesus as “Equal to God” and Ball 1996, pp. 276-279, for an argument in favour of the ontological unity of the Johannine Christ with God. We agree with James McGrath that the supposed claim of ‘equal to God’ is presented in John as a motif of misunderstanding. See McGrath 1998 and McGrath 2001, pp. 86-95.

<sup>14</sup> So de Jonge, who links the motif of Jesus’ authority in the Fourth Gospel closely to an awareness of the origins of Christ as the Son. See de Jonge 1977b, pp. 142-144.

- Jesus as the Son of Man

Statements involving the use of the term *Son of Man* in the Fourth Gospel fall into three broad categories: statements concerning the origin of the Son of Man and his eventual return to heaven; statements concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man; and statements concerning the authority of the Son of Man.<sup>15</sup>

That the origin of the Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel is heavenly rather than earthly is indicated by passages such as 1:51 where the Son of Man is cast in the role of a link or ladder between heaven and earth,<sup>16</sup> and 3:13 where the Son of Man alone possesses knowledge of heavenly things because no one has ascended to heaven and only the Son of Man has come down from heaven. The idea that the Son of Man has descended to earth from heaven allows the Fourth Gospel to hold to a doctrine of a pre-existent heavenly being incarnated as an earthly being in Jesus of Nazareth and is wholly consistent with the Gospel's spatial separation of the universe into the heavens above and the earth below – a separation which is paralleled by a belief in the spiritual world (above) and the material world (below).<sup>17</sup> That the Son of Man will return to heaven is indicated by John 6:62. The return is linked both to the idea of an ascent up to heaven and to the previous descent from where the Son of Man had been before. Thus the Fourth Gospel builds up an idea of a Son of Man whose real home is in the heavens and

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<sup>15</sup> The fullest treatment of the theme of the Johannine Son of Man remains Moloney 1976. However shorter articles by Kümmell 1974, pp. 275-277, Guthrie 1981, pp. 282-290 and Ladd 1994, pp. 280-282 give a briefer overview of the topic. Marshall 1976, pp. 63-69 provides a concise summary of the likely origins of the phrase and of its probable use in the early Christianity. See also Smalley 1968-9, pp. 297-298; Rowland 1982, pp. 178-189; Dunn 1989, p. 90; Walker 1994 and McGrath 2001, pp.56-58.

<sup>16</sup> It is well-known that this passage plays on a Hebrew grammatical ambivalence in Genesis 28:12 which allows the angels to be thought of as ascending and descending on Jacob (him) or on the ladder (it). See Burney 1922, p. 115 and Ashton 1991, pp. 342-348.

<sup>17</sup> The Johannine worldview will more fully examined in chapter 6 below.



whose sojourn in the material world is a temporary one which will come to an end when his mission is completed.<sup>18</sup>

The 'lifting up' of the Son of Man is a motif that occurs three times in the Fourth Gospel in contexts which link the Son of Man's being lifted up to the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross and also to a subsequent lifting up in glory to heaven<sup>19</sup> – an idea linked to the Son of Man's return to his former home. Lifting up as a proleptic indication of the forthcoming crucifixion occurs in John 3:14; 8:28; and 12:32-34. These uses of the motif indicate that the Johannine Son of Man christology is clearly not independent of the suffering of the passion and the cross. However, beyond this, the Son of Man is linked in 12:23 and 13:31 with a passion that leads through suffering to glory and it seems that the evangelist's use of the motif of lifting up is perhaps deliberately ambivalent, carrying both the notions of shame and glory through suffering.

The Fourth Gospel also portrays the Son of Man as one who has come bearing an authority from God which is, in essence, a divine authority and is a clear parallel to the authority of the Son as discussed above. In 3:14-15 it is the Son of Man who bestows eternal life on those who have faith in him. In 6:27 the Son of Man gives food because he has the divine authority to do so. In 5:27 the motif of the Son as the divine judge is developed by introducing the idea of the Son being authorized to judge *because* he is Son of Man. Here the term occurs in an abbreviated anarthrous form (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου as opposed to the ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as it is given rather less elegantly elsewhere throughout the Gospel) and is certainly an allusion to the υἱὸς

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<sup>18</sup> See Ladd 1993, pp. 281-282 and pp. 285-286 where the christological idea of Jesus' mission is linked to the Fourth Gospel's eschatology.

<sup>19</sup> See Smalley 1968-9, p. 298; Ladd 1993, p. 281; and McGrath 2001, p. 57.

ἀνθρώπου of the Septuagint's Daniel 7:13 where Son of Man is linked to the motif of heavenly judgement. Not only, therefore, does 5:27 link the Son of Man with a previous widely-known scenario of heavenly judgement, it also links the Johannine Son of Man clearly with the Johannine representation of Jesus as the Son of God. The two motifs of 'the Son of God' and the 'Son of Man' are linked together in a way which shows that for John the Son of Man is not to be equated with a heavenly figure independent of God in terms of pre-existence, but rather in terms of pre-existence in God as the divine Son.<sup>20</sup> This linking of the Son of Man with the Son of God occurs elsewhere. In 5:28 the authority of the Son of Man is explained in similar terms to the teaching of the Son by the Father in 5:19-20, while in the passage 6:27-40 the Son of Man is intimately bound into the relationship between the Father and the Son. Similarly, in 6:52-58 the Son of Man is linked into a discussion in which Jesus equates the flesh of the Son of Man with his own flesh and in which he refers to the Father who sent 'me.'

As Maurice Casey has pointed out, the use of the term 'Son of Man' in the Fourth Gospel has developed into the application of a specific christological title.<sup>21</sup> In the Synoptic Gospels certain uses of the term as a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *bar nasha(ā)* can be understood to mean simply 'man' or 'a man' as an oblique term of reference similar to the use in English of 'one.' John's use of 'Son of Man' does not, however, fall into this category, a development which Casey takes as an indication of the remoteness of the Johannine tradition from the historical Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief discussion of the difficulties posed by the Fourth Gospel's lack of definition of the nature of the pre-existence of the Son, see Conzelmann, pp. 339-341. However, a fuller treatment set in the context of the history of New Testament interpretation and in dialogue with systematic theology is given in Kuschel 1992, pp. 363-395. See also Walker 1994.

<sup>21</sup> See Casey 1996, pp. 59-61.

<sup>22</sup> Casey 1996, p. 61.



- Jesus as God's agent

The motif of Jesus having been specifically *sent* into the world by the Father is another theme which runs strongly through the Fourth Gospel.<sup>23</sup> At John 3:17 we learn that the primary purpose of God sending the Son into the world was salvation rather than judgement and at 5:23 we are told that the Son, having been sent from the Father, is due the same honour as the Father is due. Furthermore, the sending of Jesus from God is mentioned at 5:24, 30, 36, 37; 6:57; 7:16; 8:26, 29 and he talks of the *one* who is sent at 5:38 and 6:29. This *agency* christology is central to the role of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and the theme is developed, in terms of the heavenly origins of the Son, in a way which qualitatively distinguishes him from others also sent from or by God, such as John the Baptist.<sup>24</sup> We referred above to the authority with which the Johannine Jesus comes into the world – a divine authority – and it is as God's agent that Jesus is able to use his authority to perform certain functions. Thus Jesus, in imitation of the Father, has the power to give life – yet he does so as one who is sent from God – God's agent. Similarly, Jesus has been authorized to sit in judgement and he will do so as God's agent – as one sent from God to perform God's tasks. Agency christology carries with it the notion of Jesus as God's vice-regent – one who comes in God's name, sent from God and authorized by God with plenipotentiary powers to do what God would otherwise do himself.<sup>25</sup> This ties in with the requirement of 5:23 to accord the respect which would be due to God directly to Jesus as God's agent. This is a christology which would be comprehensible to anyone with even a vague understanding of the administration and governance of an empire or large nation-state – something which could probably be said of many people in Mediterranean cultures in the era in which the

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<sup>23</sup> See Borgen 1968; de Jonge 1977b, pp. 144-148; Bühner 1977, pp. 208-213; Harvey 1982, p. 161; Ashton 1991, pp. 312-317; Anderson 1996, p. 176; McGrath 2001, pp. 60-62.

<sup>24</sup> So de Jonge 1977b, pp. 142-143 and pp. 144-146.

<sup>25</sup> So J.-A. Bühner, who uses form-critical techniques to establish a relationship between the Fourth Gospel's "I-am" sayings and an agency christology.

New Testament documents were written. Yet, despite this obvious analogy, Malina and Rohrbaugh believe that agency christology – particularly as it is presented in John 5 – is presented using the language of patronage.<sup>26</sup> They propose that the Fourth Gospel used the language of patronage because in 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean cultures the concept of patronage was well understood and that it would have been clear to John's readers that God is the *patron*, Jesus comes as his *broker* to deal with humanity – his *clients*. However, in opposition to this view, it should be pointed out that the idea of a broker being due (never mind accorded) the same honour as is due to the patron is hard to sustain. In terms of agents who are due similar honour to those who have sent them, we feel that an analogy of political and military power structures within the Roman Empire is more appropriate – particularly in view of the emergence of a hereditary royal house where sons were commissioned with military powers in the name of their fathers and exercised political governorships in the provinces with plenipotentiary powers equal to that of the emperor.<sup>27</sup>

Besides these analogies from the culture contemporary with the evangelist, the idea that the Fourth Gospel's agency christology must have had a specific literary origin was one of the central pillars of Rudolf Bultmann's proposal of a Mandaean source document behind his *Offenbarungsreden*.<sup>28</sup> However, subsequent scholarship has shown this hypothesis to be quite unnecessary as the motif of agency, and in particular an agent of

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<sup>26</sup> See Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, pp. 115-119.

<sup>27</sup> Upon his adoption as Augustus' son in C.E. 4, Tiberius (emperor C.E. 14-37) was invested with the title and powers of *Imperium* - one able to act as a virtual dictator in military, civil and legal matters. Such powers would, of course, have been likely to have had fatal consequences for Tiberius himself had he used them in any way which was not in accord with the will of his adoptive father. Examples of sons of the Roman imperial family wielding plenipotentiary powers in the name of the emperor include Titus, the natural son of Vespasian, who was given overall military command in Palestine in C.E. 69 with full authority to prosecute the ongoing Jewish War, and Trajan (emperor C.E. 98-117), the adopted son of Nerva, who was governor of Upper Germany prior to his own accession. For an assessment of probable Johannine understandings of contemporary Roman political power structures, see Cassidy 1992, *passim*, and particularly pp. 75-82.

<sup>28</sup> See Bultmann 1955, pp. 33-40; Bultmann 1971, *passim*; and Smith 1965, pp. 15-34.



God who is like God, is found in various rabbinic documents and in Philo.<sup>29</sup> Thus an agency christology is readily understandable in terms of the theological traditions which Christianity inherited from Judaism and, as we saw above, it helps to explain the motif of the unity of the Father and the Son in terms of their relationship with humanity in the Fourth Gospel.

- Jesus the life-giver

In John 5:21 Jesus says that as the Son he has life giving powers in consequence of his unique relationship with the Father and that the Son *makes alive whomsoever he wishes*, the *making-alive* being expressed in Greek by use of the compound term ζωοποιεῖ.

This is clearly linked to the statement that follows later in 5:26 that the Father *allows the Son to have life in himself*, where ζωὴν ἔχειν is used to indicate the indwelling nature of the Father's gift to the Son. It is perfectly permissible to describe the life-giving power of Jesus here as christological.<sup>30</sup> It refers to the ability and authority of

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<sup>29</sup> Peder Borgen has traced the principles of agency through various *halakhic* texts which leads him to conclude that agency was a well known principle in 'normative and rabbinic Judaism.' However, he also finds the motif entering Philo through an affinity with Merkabah mysticism and he traces this theme on into finds from Nag Hammadi. He is able to conclude that the parallels he has found in Nag Hammadi texts give "clear evidence for the fact that Jewish Merkabah traditions have influenced the gnostic movement. It is therefore quite probable that the ideas of heavenly agents in gnostic/Mandean literature similarly have been influenced by Jewish principles of agency and Jewish ideas of heavenly figures. In that case the gnostic agents do not explain the background of God's agent in the Fourth Gospel, as Bultmann thinks. The Fourth Gospel rather gives a clue to the Jewish background of the gnostic/Mandean mythology." See Borgen 1968, *passim* and p. 92. Commenting on Borgen's article, John Ashton seems certain that now "there is no need, when investigating the theology of Jesus' role as the agent or special representative of God, to turn to Mandaeism or other gnostic systems for the source of the evangelist's idea – it is to be found ready to hand in the Jewish tradition." See Ashton 1997, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Relatively few authors deal with Jesus' life-giving powers as a christological issue, preferring instead to discuss the role of Jesus either under the heading of *eternal life* or in relation to an exegesis of the raising of Lazarus. However, amongst those who have a christological understanding of 5:21 must be numbered E.C. Hoskyns, C.H. Dodd, J.-A. Bühner and Ernst Haenchen. See Hoskyns and Davey 1947, pp. 268-269; Dodd 1953, pp. 318-325; Bühner 1977, p.209; Haenchen 1984 (1), p. 95. Rudolf Schnackenburg is an example of those scholars who propose a christology of Christ the life-giver as a basis for the Fourth Gospel's doctrine of eternal life – Schnackenburg 1980, p. 355. Joseph Blank finds 5:21 to be central to the christology of the Fourth Gospel – "Die Rede beginnt damit, daß an der Seite Gottes der Sohn als der eschatologische Lebensspender und Totenerwecker eingeführt wird. Das ist im

Christ to carry out a particular function (to give life) in terms of a specific license (life) granted by the Father to the Son and which dwells within him and it is this understanding of Jesus as *life-giver* in a biological sense which links the discourse of John 5 to the healing story which precedes it. Thus the Son has a share in or has been granted the creative power of God the Father to *give life* or to *make-alive*. The Johannine Jesus shares or possesses the divine creative power to sustain biological life which was previously believed to have been the prerogative of God alone.<sup>31</sup> Yet we are also justified in thinking that there is an eschatological element to the concept of *life* in John 5.<sup>32</sup> *Life* in this context is unlikely to be only the concept of biological life, it is probably also *eternal life*, the life with God which believers hope to be the prize of salvation. John introduces the idea of *life* in 5:21 and links it to the life-giving prerogative of God now gifted to Christ, but the theme of the following verses up to 5:30 is *eternal life* – life in its eschatological dimension. However, given that eternal life as a salvific concept is more correctly eschatological than christological, we shall delay further discussion of this topic until part B of this chapter.

Christologically, though, the motif of Christ as a *life-giver* is perhaps central to an understanding of other christological claims made in the Fourth Gospel. When the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel has Jesus say ἐγώ εἰμι the bread of life (6:35, 48), the light of the world (8:12), the door (10:9), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth and the life (14:6), the true vine (15:1, 5) it is immediately clearer what such a claim means as a metaphor when the metaphor is interpreted in the christologically

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Vergleich mit den Auffassungen des Alten Testaments und des Spätjudentums in der Tat eine unerhörte Neuerung, ein θαυμαστόν allerersten Ranges. Denn nach der alttestamentlich-jüdischen Auffassung ist das Leben-Spender eine Prerogative, die einzig und allein Gott zukommt.” – Blank 1964, pp. 120-121.

<sup>31</sup> A number of commentators see 5:21 in terms of Jesus as a biological life-giver, e.g. Barrett 1978, p. 260.

<sup>32</sup> So Haenchen 1984 (1), p. 95, 251.



*functional* terms of Christ the *life-giver*, as opposed to the more *titular* emphasis of *Son* or *Son of Man*.<sup>33</sup> By understanding that the Johannine Christ is the bread of life, the light of the world etc. because he has the power to give the *life* to which these things lead, it becomes apparent that the motif of Christ as the *life-giver* is central to Johannine christology.

- Jesus the judge

Three times in John 5 Jesus claims to have the power to judge. Despite at 3:17 explaining that it was not for the purpose of judging that Jesus came into the world, the reality of Jesus' role in judgement is clearly presented in 5:22, 27, 30. We learn in 5:22 that the function of judgement no longer resides in God the Father but has now been delegated to the Son. In 5:27 we learn that this is because Jesus is the eschatological Son of Man and in 5:30 it becomes apparent that Jesus' judgements are *just* ones because they are carried out in accordance with the will of the Father. This theme is repeated at 8:16, and at 9:39 the confusion sown by 3:17 is finally dispelled when we are told that it *is* for judgement that Jesus came into the world.

This idea is not entirely new as it is presented in the Fourth Gospel. The concept of Jesus as the eschatological judge can be found in the Synoptic Gospels, in Acts and in the Pauline correspondence. The Marcan Jesus claims the association with the

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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Casey notes the use of the 'I am' motif as a means of emphasising Jesus' status in John as the only means of salvation for both Gentiles and Jews. He also takes the absence of the motif from the Synoptic Gospels to be an indicator of John's distance from them and, therefore, to be confirmation of his belief in the late production of John. See Casey 1996, pp. 41-42. D.M. Ball's study of the use of the 'I am' motif in the Fourth Gospel suggests a stress on the emphasis of function and role, particularly where 'I am' is linked with an image. Ball's study focuses on the origins of ἐγώ εἰμι in the Old Testament and in the use of the motif from a literary perspective, and he suggests that 'I am' is used as a form of irony in an attempt to place the informed reader of the Gospel on the 'firm ground' of the evangelist's position. See Ball 1996, pp. 255-261. C.H. Williams has noted the use of the ἐγώ εἰμι motif as part of John's strategy for expressing God's revelation through the Johannine Jesus and also its use in the context of the offer of salvation which may or may not be accepted – "Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι encapsulates the power and authority in his possession to offer eternal life." See Williams 2000, pp. 302-303.

eschatological Son of Man at the tribunal before the High Priest (Mark 14:62). In Matthew's Gospel Jesus alludes to his role as the eschatological judge at 16:27 – again as the Son of Man – and he goes on to reiterate this in the parable of the great assize in 25:31ff. In the Book of Acts in the speech of Peter at 10:42 Jesus is described as the judge of the living and of the dead and to have been designated so by God. Paul refers to a tribunal in which judgement takes place before Christ's judgement-seat (2 Corinthians 5:10). Thus we see that the tradition of Christ as an eschatological judgement figure was part of the Christian inheritance before the time of the Johannine writings. The difference between the theme of Jesus as a judge in the tradition and in the Fourth Gospel is that in the latter, the theme is no longer entirely eschatological in that the judgements of the Johannine Christ are beginning to take place in the present. In other words, Jesus is already a judge in the Fourth Gospel – Jesus is already judging his opponents – or at least his presence is provoking a judgement of some kind.

In our previous discussions of the christological significance of the themes of Son of Man, agency and life-giver, we have found that the christology has been leading in an eschatological direction and that to have pursued our discussion further would have been to stray into the eschatological territory that we wish to reserve for the part B of this chapter. Clearly this also applies to our discussion of Jesus as judge and beyond summing-up below how the christological themes we have been discussing are combined in the Fourth Gospel, we shall not expand further on the role of Jesus in judgement here.



In our examination of the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, we have focused on five christological themes which have a direct bearing on the Gospel's eschatology. For the purposes of identification it has been necessary to discuss these themes more or less in isolation with only minimal comment on how they interact as part of the evangelist's overall presentation of the Johannine Jesus. Our interest in discovering how the evangelist integrates them together is governed by our need to uncover the christological basis for the Fourth Gospel's eschatology in accordance with Blank's dictum that Johannine eschatology is a function of Johannine christology. Given that an integrated christology is ultimately a *theology*, it may help us to begin with *theos* – with God – and attempt to follow John's christological path from God to judgement. We can begin, therefore, by asking, where is God in John's thinking or what does John believe God has done? We find that we already have the answer to this in the *agency* christology – God sent his agent into the world. Given that in the Johannine christology God has sent his agent into the world, we find that the Fourth Gospel goes on to identify God's agent as God's son. Thus we are able to infer a *Son of God* christology in which God sent his Son from the heavenly realm into the material world as his agent.

Having thus postulated that the Johannine Christ is not only God's son but is also acting as God's agent on some kind of mission on which he has been sent, it is then necessary to suggest a plausible purpose for the mission. Why, in Johannine theology, has God sent his son into the world as his agent? The answer in Johannine theology is that God sent his Son as his agent into the world to offer humanity a choice between salvation and judgement. In order to sustain this line of argument it is then necessary to explain how the Johannine Christ, as God's son and agent, could do this and the most likely explanation is that the Johannine Christ could offer a choice between salvation and

judgement because as both God's son and agent, he was authorized and empowered by God to give life and to execute judgement.

It now becomes necessary to define what we mean by the life and the judgement between which humanity will have to choose. On the one hand there is the choice of eternal life – a life beyond death with God in the heavenly realm. However it is necessary to point out that Johannine eternal life begins during one's earthly life with a conscious acceptance of the Johannine Christ's claims and in community with other believers. On the other hand there is the choice of judgement as a result of rejecting Christ. The Fourth Gospel makes it clear that this judgement is eschatological, that it will happen at an indefinite date in the future and that the Johannine Jesus, as the Son of Man, will be the judge. Thus we see that the Johannine Christ is acting as God's agent, that as God's son he is authorized to give life and that as the Son of Man he is authorized to act as the eschatological judge.

This, in the simplest possible terms, is the christological basis of the Fourth Gospel's eschatology. What we mean by this is that these are the christological beliefs that the evangelist started with in order to have formulated the Fourth Gospel's eschatology – in other words, the Gospel's eschatology presupposes these particular christological beliefs. Therefore, in a real sense, John's eschatology is a function of the christology we have described here.



## B. Eschatology in the Fourth Gospel

Having established the christological themes which underpin the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel, it is now possible to look at the eschatological themes presented in the Gospel. It is possible to identify three different eschatological themes in John and the student of the Gospel is immediately faced with the problem of deciding how these three areas of belief stand in relation to one another. This is a problem which has taxed the practitioners of Johannine scholarship to varying degrees since the emergence of the modern commentary. Every commentator on the Fourth Gospel since Westcott<sup>34</sup> has had to wrestle with the problems which the Gospel's eschatology poses and has had to propose some kind of solution in order to explain either what the evangelist was trying to convey in his rather puzzling terms or, alternatively, what had been done to the Gospel's eschatological passages by a later editor once the text had left the original writer's hands.<sup>35</sup> In this chapter it will be necessary for us to engage with some of these proposed solutions as we examine the eschatological themes of the Fourth Gospel, but it is our intention to postpone a closer examination of the major commentaries until chapter 2.

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<sup>34</sup> My copy of Westcott's commentary has a publishing date of 1894. However, in a prefatory note dated 1881, Westcott alludes to an even earlier edition (*The Speaker's Commentary*) of which his commentary was a reprint.

<sup>35</sup> As John Ashton has noted, "The contrast between these two ways of resolving the seemingly contradictory views found side by side within the Fourth Gospel – elimination on the one hand, reconciliation on the other – is one very important example of a wider opposition between those whose immediate response to theological or textual inconsistencies is to reach for their scissors and those who prefer to paper over the cracks." Ashton 1997, p. 18.

## Future Eschatology

The Fourth Gospel contains some passages that clearly refer to events of a salvific nature that lie in the future. These passages include references to a judgement on the last day (12:48) accompanied by a general resurrection of the dead (5:28-29; 6:39-40, 54). The farewell discourses contain references to the future coming of Jesus Christ (14:18-20, 28) in a prolonged discourse which goes on to forecast the tribulations which will come to those who follow Christ (15:18-19; 16:2-4, 20-23). Robinson has identified four elements in this eschatology: the day of the Lord; the last judgement; the ingathering of the elect; and the end of the world.<sup>36</sup> Taken together these events can be termed the *eschaton*. However, in early Christianity the *eschaton* became associated with a belief in the second coming (*parousia*) of Christ which would usher in the commencement of a new age with the final defeat of Satan and an end to all evil. Thus in terms of early Christianity in general, and particularly in relation to the Fourth Gospel, it is appropriate to use the term *parousia-eschaton* in reference to future eschatological events. A central part of the belief in the *parousia-eschaton* is the notion of a general resurrection of the dead and a judgement tribunal where those deemed worthy would be granted eternal life. Thus it is appropriate to speak of this historically dualistic future eschatology as a *horizontal* eschatology due to its perception of being at a significant break in a linear progression of the ages of history.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For an account of the development of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ within the framework of existing eschatological beliefs see Robinson 1957 and in particular pp. 16-35 and 140-141. The emergence of a doctrine of post-mortem judgement within in Judaism is charted in Brandon 1967, pp. 64-75. See also Rowland 1982, pp. 156-189 and Jeremias 1971, pp. 122-127.

<sup>37</sup> See Brown 1966 (1), pp. CXV-CXVI.



## Realized eschatology

The second kind of eschatology to be found in the Fourth Gospel can be termed *realized* insofar as it assigns to believers now in the present those benefits which elsewhere are deemed to be the fruits of a future and final salvation. These current or realized benefits are to be enjoyed in relationship with Jesus Christ and through acceptance of his message. Thus believers are saved according to their acceptance of Jesus (3:18). Resurrection is achieved as a result of this acceptance (11:23-26) and the new resurrected life in Christ is available now (5:24) and will continue eternally, even beyond physical death<sup>38</sup>. As we shall see below, this theology of new life in Christ was not an entirely new idea in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>39</sup> However, what makes the Johannine realized eschatology new is its scope and its radicality – those events which previously were assigned to the last day, the day of judgement, are now to be found in the everyday experience of the believer's life. In essence the parousia has been brought forward from a future end-time to become a living reality in the present and the coming of the Johannine Jesus is being portrayed as *the* eschatological event.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to offering salvation in the present for believers, the new Johannine eschatology also promises the corollary – judgement or condemnation for those who reject Christ (3:18). However, inasmuch as the Fourth Gospel implies a negative judgement (condemnation) in the present for non-Christians, this is not in any sense formalised in terms of a current judicial process and is presented in terms of an

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<sup>38</sup> See below under 'Heavenly eschatology.'

<sup>39</sup> In chapter 6 below the possible relationship between John's realized eschatology and certain aspects of Paul's theology is assessed.

<sup>40</sup> This was for Rudolf Bultmann the pristine eschatology of the Fourth Gospel as he believed the evangelist had originally presented it in its "demythologised" and unredacted form. Bultmann's analysis was tendentiously related to his source-redaction theory and lacked the christological penetration of Blank's interpretation. Bultmann 1955, pp. 33-69.

anticipation of the actual judgement which still awaits non-Christians at the parousia-eschaton. But it is in terms of judgement for those who accept Christ that the Fourth Gospel puts forward an entirely new and radical theology: those who accept Jesus Christ and believe in him will not face judgement (3:18; 5:24). In Johannine eschatology the Christian believer is exempt from judgement – both in this world and the next. Effectively, John by-passes the parousia-eschaton for followers of Christ and the terrifying prospect of the day of judgement is no longer an anxiety for Christian believers. Thus in the Fourth Gospel the Christian no longer needs to wait for the parousia-eschaton to enjoy the eternal benefits of salvation and it is in the eternal aspect of salvation through Christ that John plays his next trump card – believers will go directly to heaven when they die to enjoy eternal life with God.

### **Heavenly eschatology**

It is clear from the latter parts of the Fourth Gospel that John is proposing a theology in which believers in Christ will have a continuing existence beyond physical death in a heavenly realm to which they will be taken after death (14:2-3). In the heavenly realm believers will attain a perfect oneness with God through Christ (17:23). There is no indication from the Gospel text that this new heavenly eschatology for Christian believers is associated with the futuristic eschatology, nor that the enjoyment of its benefits will be postponed until after the parousia-eschaton. Rather, in this belief the heavenly realm exists in parallel with the physical world and those believers who die will gain immediate entry where they will enjoy eternal life. This seems to be yet another radical new departure in eschatological theology, leaving behind the historical dualism of the futuristic eschatology and replacing it (for believers) with a cosmic



dualism – rather than two contrasting ages in history there are now two contrasting, but co-existing, realms in the cosmos.<sup>41</sup> Thus it is possible to speak of the Fourth Gospel's *vertical* eschatology because of the perceived spatial relationship between earth below and heaven above.<sup>42</sup>

### **The concept of eternal life**

In the Fourth Gospel the phrase ζωή αἰώνιος – eternal life – is used by the evangelist in the speech of Jesus to indicate the prize of salvation – that which is obtained by the believer through faith in Jesus and his message. It is the qualitative indicator that salvation has been offered by God through Christ and accepted by the individual in faith. As a soteriological concept it has links to the idea of *the Kingdom* in the Synoptic Gospels in that it is the object at which the seeker of salvation grasps, but it contains far more of the notion of being an honour or a gift conferred upon the individual who lives in a relationship with God rather than being part of a new community as part of a changed world.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, despite the introduction of a specific existential dimension, the conceptual links with the Jewish and early Christian idea of life in the Kingdom for the elect following the parousia-eschaton are clear and the origins of Johannine eternal life may lie in the modification of more traditional beliefs in response

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<sup>41</sup> See chapter 6 below where the Johannine worldview is discussed.

<sup>42</sup> Once again see Brown 1966 (1), pp. CXV-CXVI.

<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that all communal aspects of salvation are entirely missing in the Fourth Gospel, as the passage about the vine at 15:1-6 hints. However, if the individual branch of the vine is a metaphor for the individual believer, the communal aspect of salvation is both diminished but still present in that the relevant relationship is less one of community and more of the individual being fruitful in Christ. Given the Old Testament associations of the vine with the collectivity of Israel (Psalm 80:8-16), it is hard to dismiss the communal aspects of the vine metaphor altogether. Barrett prefers a communal interpretation in which the vine is a metaphor for the Church but it is hard to see how the text can sustain this view. See Barrett 1978, pp. 470-473.

to a fading belief in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton.<sup>44</sup> What sets the Fourth Gospel apart from its Synoptic counterparts in the use of the phrase eternal life as a salvational gift to the believer is the way that it is deemed to be available to the believer directly and immediately as a part of earthly existence. The evangelist has brought the eschatological moment of salvation forward into the present of the believer so that there is no waiting for the parousia-eschaton and the new age to follow. It is important to stress, however, that the parousia-eschaton, particularly in its aspect of a day of judgement with Jesus as the judge, is not denied in the Fourth Gospel – these things are still there and they are still of fundamental significance to those who are not Christians. But for Christian believers the Fourth Gospel has minimized the importance of the future eschatology to the point where it hardly matters to the faithful if the parousia-eschaton ever comes to pass for it will not affect them – their eschatological moment is now in the encounter with Christ and, as believers in him, they are already saved because they are exempt from judgement and have entered into eternal life.

But what exactly does the evangelist mean by eternal life, what is the nature of the gift bestowed upon those who accept Jesus? Given the evangelist's fairly plain assertion that it is something that transcends physical death (11:25-26) and involves those who are still alive as well as those who have indeed died, it is hard to escape the conclusion that eternal life means some form of new conscious existence which begins in earthly life in a living relationship with God through Christ and continues after physical death in a conscious heavenly after-life. In a sense, therefore, the Fourth Gospel seems to offer the key to the age-old quest for both spiritual enlightenment and a life that never

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<sup>44</sup> In chapter 6 below we shall assess the possible consequences of the fading of belief in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton on the development of the Fourth Gospel's theology.



ends insofar as these things are offered in union with God through Christ. However, for some commentators this may be going too far. U.E. Simon believes that the Fourth Gospel is too rooted in the Semitic idiom to allow for such a revolutionary development of thought and he rejects all notion of eternal life meaning any kind of continued conscious existence after death.<sup>45</sup> Rather he sees eternal life as meaning a new relationship with God through Christ in which the earthly glory of Christ is reflected in the earthly life of the believer.<sup>46</sup> John Ashton takes this further by highlighting the difficulties in Fourth Gospel interpretation when secular Greek terms are used to denote previously Semitic (i.e. Hebrew and early Christian) eschatological concepts.<sup>47</sup> He notes that *life* in John largely replaces the Synoptic proclamation of the kingdom and that, thereby, *eternal life* has become principal among the “fruits of the gospel message.”<sup>48</sup> For Ashton, however, this is a richly metaphorical use of language on the part of the evangelist in which, while *life* and *kingdom* retain a degree of equivalence, *eternal life* is nuanced as much towards a spatial concept of being with God as towards the temporality of the idea of the age to come. Thus Ashton sees the freshness of John’s approach lying in the use of *eternal life* as a metaphorical construct which, while not excluding a life which may transcend human death,<sup>49</sup> is certainly representative of an earthly life which is qualitatively different in ways suggested by the idea of “the life of the new age.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Simon 1957, pp. 102-105.

<sup>46</sup> Simon is quick to concede that such a view represents an idea that is seldom realized, mentioning the “wholly unsatisfactory averageness of most Christians, who are indeed baptized and sustained by the Bread of Life and yet seem to lack the transcendental quality of Eternal Life.” Simon 1957, p. 106.

<sup>47</sup> Ashton 1991, pp. 214-220.

<sup>48</sup> Ashton 1991, p. 215.

<sup>49</sup> See Ashton 1991, p. 216, where he argues that although the Hebrew tradition emphasises *eternal life* as “a present possession” with “a special quality of life peculiar to the new age,” such *eternal life* also “undoubtedly includes the notion of endlessness.”

<sup>50</sup> Ashton 1991, p. 216.

Amongst those scholars who believe that the evangelist refers to a heavenly after-life when he writes about *eternal life* are C.H. Dodd and Rudolf Schnackenburg. Dodd clearly disagrees with the position taken by Simon and he believes the evangelist is contrasting the *life* of eternal life with death and that the Fourth Gospel's teaching on eternal life is new and revolutionary.<sup>51</sup> "In the dialogue preceding the Raising of Lazarus the evangelist appears to be explicitly contrasting the popular eschatology of Judaism and primitive Christianity with the doctrine he wishes to propound."<sup>52</sup> The evangelist's doctrine is simply that those who live in faith have already commenced a life that is eternal in that they already enjoy the benefits of Christ's resurrection. There is no denial of physical death and decay, but there is a belief in the continuing consciousness of existence with God after bodily death. "The implication is that the believer is already 'living' in a pregnant sense which excludes the possibility of ceasing to live."<sup>53</sup> Thus Dodd sees the evangelist proposing a new doctrine without contradicting the old teaching. This apparent contradiction between the immediacy of passing from death to life (5:24) and the future resurrection and assize (5:28-29) is resolved by Dodd's belief that the "evangelist agrees with popular Christianity that the believer will enter into eternal life at the general resurrection, but for him this is a truth of lesser importance than the fact that the believer already enjoys eternal life."<sup>54</sup> Here Dodd has elected to prioritize the two doctrines on behalf of the evangelist into greater and lesser truths. However, the result of this approach works contrary to Dodd's intention in that it serves to emphasize rather than resolve the puzzle. It simply does not make sense to say that two almost contradictory doctrines represent greater and lesser

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<sup>51</sup> Dodd 1953, p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Dodd 1953, p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> Dodd 1953, p. 148.

<sup>54</sup> Dodd 1953, p. 148.



truths, nor does it solve the problem to say that one will enter at a later date into something one already possesses – eternal life.<sup>55</sup>

Schnackenburg too sees in the concept of eternal life a doctrine of conscious awareness beyond the life of the body. “The life given to men in faith reaches beyond earthly death.”<sup>56</sup> Any other interpretation he rightly sees as rendering much of the Fourth Gospel meaningless and he believes it is necessary to take at face-value those passages that speak of not dying and living forever.<sup>57</sup> “It is an unavoidable fact that John is exercised by the problem of physical death, its meaning, the possibility of mastering it and inwardly overcoming it. Anyone who closes his eyes to this question is forced to provide his own answer to the question about the meaning of life; and anyone who refuses to give an answer sets up an arbitrary taboo.”<sup>58</sup>

Therefore it seems reasonable to suppose that those passages in the Fourth Gospel which speak about eternal life have a literal enough meaning and that the evangelist was attempting to break new ground with a doctrine of heavenly existence after death. Schnackenburg is essentially correct in saying that to assign a metaphorical meaning to the phrase *eternal life* is to deprive the Fourth Gospel of one of its principal thrusts. To unite his ideas of salvation and resurrected life, his soteriology and his eschatology, in a

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<sup>55</sup> A similar proposal had been put forward in 1946 by G.R. Beasley-Murray who asked of the Fourth Gospel, “whether it is fundamentally of a piece with the Christian-Hebraic tradition, whose traits are to be seen with tolerable clarity in the rest of the New Testament, or whether the characteristic elements of this tradition have been transmuted into a wholly new product.” Although opposed to Dodd’s recognition of Neo-Platonic influences on the Fourth Gospel, Beasley-Murray proposed essentially the same solution as Dodd – varying emphasis on greater and lesser truths.

<sup>56</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 361.

<sup>57</sup> John 6:50-51, 58; 8:51; 10:28; 11:25-26.

<sup>58</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 361.

new doctrine of heavenly life after death – eternal life – was probably one of the evangelist's main aims in writing his Gospel.<sup>59</sup> No attempt to draw the teeth of such an aim, such as those of Simon and Ashton, really does justice to the entire text of the Gospel.

### **What is the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel?**

It is clear that the eschatology presented in the Fourth Gospel differs markedly from that presented elsewhere in the New Testament in that it introduces at least three new ideas: firstly, the idea that salvation is obtainable now through the gift of eternal life and the promise of exemption from judgement; secondly, the idea that those who refuse to accept Christ bring judgement upon themselves now in a sense that anticipates the outcome of the coming judgement at the parousia-eschaton; and thirdly, the idea that there is a heavenly realm where the benefits of eternal life will be enjoyed in the presence of God after the death of the body.

The emergence of these new ideas in the Fourth Gospel and the tensions which then arise between realized and future eschatology raises a number of questions about the theology of the evangelist as distinct from the theology of the Gospel as a whole, in that it becomes necessary to try to decide whether or not the evangelist is responsible for everything presented in the Gospel as it has come down to us. Has the evangelist made a radical departure from the eschatology of the early Church or has he merely changed the emphasis somewhat? Do the Gospel's new eschatological ideas stem from a fresh christological outlook or are they merely a refocusing of ideas within the familiar framework of salvation history? If the evangelist has tried to present a radical new

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<sup>59</sup> Why the evangelist may have had such an aim is discussed below in chapter 6.



eschatology, has his theology been modified by the hand of a redactor whose concern was to make the Gospel more acceptable to the Church as a whole? If the evangelist has merely changed the emphasis of eschatological thinking, is it possible to trace why and how this came about?

In terms of the Fourth Gospel's eschatology, the use of the concept of *judgement* is of particular interest because it is a term intimately bound to Jewish and early Christian notions of the last day – the day of judgement.<sup>60</sup> Certain passages in the Gospel have Jesus say that he has not come to exercise judgement (3:17; 8:15; 12:47) and that his intended purpose is rather to offer salvation. These passages highlight part of the puzzle of judgement in the Fourth Gospel because although Jesus has come not to judge but to save, the certainty of judgement remains for those who reject him and the idea of judgement at the parousia-eschaton is retained with Jesus as the judge. Thus it is possible for the evangelist to say quite plainly, yet almost paradoxically, that Jesus has indeed come to judge (5:30; 8:16), is a valid judge (8:16), has been given all authority for judgement (5:22, 27) and that he came into the world for judgement (9:39). Therefore, can it be said that the passages in which Jesus has not come for judgement represent a polemic against judgement at the parousia-eschaton? Insofar as these passages attempt to emphasize the salvation that Jesus offers at the expense of diminishing the penalty for rejecting him, the answer is that there is no polemic against judgement at the parousia-eschaton. Future judgement remains a part of the Gospel's eschatology for those who are not Christians. For those who have actively rejected the offer of salvation which he brings the outcome of their future judgement may be preordained, but the day of judgement is still there waiting for them in the Fourth

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<sup>60</sup> See pp. 24-41 above in our introductory chapter.

Gospel. Part of the gift of salvation for those who do accept Christ is an exemption from judgement and, therefore, the judgement of the parousia-eschaton is of little interest to Christians, but this does not amount to a polemic against a judgement they know still awaits the rest of humanity.

Of parallel importance in the Fourth Gospel's eschatology is the idea of *resurrection*, a concept that is also of great importance in the theology of Judaism and early Christianity where there was a belief that salvation was linked to the resurrection of the body at the last day.<sup>61</sup> That the evangelist was no stranger to this belief is shown by his use of the motif in the dialogue with Martha (11:23-26). Here the evangelist has Jesus bring out the stark contrast between the Jewish hope of a final resurrection of the body at the last day and the Christian belief that salvation incorporating resurrection is obtainable through faith in Jesus now. Jesus leads Martha to her confession (11:27) that he is the Messiah, that he is able to offer a resurrection that will transcend death in the present, in earthly life. The dialogue leading up to this confession of faith is perhaps illustrating the path which the evangelist would like all Jews to take (and which many had indeed taken) and may also be part of an apologetic demonstration of the superiority of the Christian hope to that of Judaism. However, it is probably going too far to say that this passage represents a polemic against future eschatology. It is arguable that the passage stands as a corrective to tendencies within the early Church to be too concerned with the events of the parousia-eschaton,<sup>62</sup> but it is not a polemic against belief in the general resurrection of humanity on the last day.

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<sup>61</sup> See pp. 30-31 above in our introductory chapter.

<sup>62</sup> See Brandon 1967, p. 110.



While it is not possible to demonstrate by looking at *judgement* and *resurrection* that the Fourth Gospel contains direct polemic against futurist eschatology, it remains the case that the Gospel's thinking is markedly different from the rest of the New Testament on these matters. But to what degree? The lack of polemic suggests that scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann may have gone too far in assigning all references to future eschatology to the hand of a redactor in the assumption that the evangelist had no interest at all in such theology.<sup>63</sup> But the change in emphasis remains and still raises the question: is this merely a change of emphasis within the parameters of the older eschatology or can we detect a more fundamental theological reorganisation? To help answer this question it may help to look at the issue from the other side and to ask what the evangelist has done with the future eschatology he has incorporated into his Gospel. To help us do this we shall examine two issues raised by Rudolf Schnackenburg in support of his view that the evangelist retained a genuine doctrine of future eschatology.<sup>64</sup>

The first question Schnackenburg asks is: does the Fourth Gospel's view of humanity rule out the idea of the immortality of the soul following death? His answer, following a review of the topic of eternal life, is very much in the negative.<sup>65</sup> However, there is within the Gospel a definite tension between a belief in the continuation of the believer's eternal life following bodily death and an adherence to the Hebrew (and indeed general Semitic) view that ultimate salvation is obtained through the resurrection of the body. It is the absence of polemic against the latter that inclines Schnackenburg

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<sup>63</sup> We shall be examining Bultmann's hypothesis in chapter 2 below before engaging with his proposals more fully in chapter 4.

<sup>64</sup> See Schnackenburg 1980, p. 433.

<sup>65</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 352-361.

to the view that the evangelist is at least open to these ideas. However, it must be noted that Schnackenburg too emphasizes rather than resolves the tension, although in this case it may not be contrary to his intention. He states firstly that the evangelist wrote plainly about eternal life obtained during earthly life but continuing immediately after death in the heavenly realm and secondly that he wrote in terms that show he was 'open' to more traditional eschatological beliefs concerning resurrection at the last day. This is not to suggest, as in the solution of C.H. Dodd discussed above, that Schnackenburg believes this solves the problem. However, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, rather less explicitly than Dodd, he wishes to categorize the evangelist's thinking into greater and lesser truths.

The second issue Schnackenburg is concerned with is to establish the context of the evangelist's thinking not only within his own Church but in the wider context of early Christianity. For Schnackenburg the evidence suggests that the evangelist was not merely a solitary thinker or a lone voice whistling into the prevailing theological wind – the Gospel text itself provides evidence of that (21:23-24). But Schnackenburg is concerned with the consequences of his own decision to assign those passages dealing directly with futurist eschatology to the hands of redactors. While he is certain that such redacted passages "have considerable weight as statements from the circle of John's friends or disciples," he still rightly asks if it is conceivable that such friends or disciples would have felt able to contradict their master by re-introducing material concerned with traditional eschatology into the Gospel.<sup>66</sup> In other words, if the evangelist had had the primary concern of eliminating all futurist eschatology from his Gospel, would it not also have been a primary concern of his disciples to maintain this

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<sup>66</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 434.



position? This is a very fine point and, having opted to regard certain passages as redactional insertions, perhaps Schnackenburg shares the view of Raymond Brown that it is impossible to discover the motives of inferred redactors.<sup>67</sup> However, on the assumption that the letter 1 John bears a relationship of some kind with the Fourth Gospel, would Schnackenburg propose that it too had been subject to redaction in its reference to the parousia (1 John 2:28)? Or is it not more likely that the authors of both Gospel and letter, whatever their relationship, were both genuinely interested in maintaining a doctrine of future eschatology?

The points made above in dialogue with Schnackenburg tend to indicate that there is no real rejection of futurist eschatology in the evangelist's position, but rather a lack of emphasis with regard to the fate of Christian believers. From the viewpoint of Christian faith, this lack of emphasis is indicative of a new intellectual perspective – what Schnackenburg calls “an intellectual reorientation,”<sup>68</sup> in which the benefits of salvation are available in the believer's present without having to wait for the parousia-eschaton. However, the reorientation is also to the vertical from the horizontal – vertically up towards heaven rather than horizontally forwards towards the parousia – at least for those in the community of faith. But the lack of emphasis is no more than that – it is neither an absence nor an elimination and for those outside the community of faith the Fourth Gospel's futurist eschatology remains waiting to be encountered – perhaps not as

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<sup>67</sup> Raymond Brown is very concerned about redactional approaches that claim to have discovered the purpose of the redactors, particularly those that suppose the redactors to have been some kind of Church censor concerned with making the Gospel more ‘orthodox.’ Brown believes it is impossible to know the purposes of the redactors of the Gospel and that it is necessary to consider the possibility that redactional insertions of material containing futurist eschatology may have been made with the sole purpose of preserving traditional material. Brown 1966 (1), p. CXXI.

<sup>68</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 434.

imminently as the first Christians once believed, but still inevitably the Fourth Gospel's parousia-eschaton will not go away.

That the parousia-eschaton (incorporating a day of judgement) remains as an integral part of the evangelist's eschatology along with a belief in the gift of salvation in the present (incorporating a freedom from judgement) is the great puzzle of the Fourth Gospel's eschatology. It is a puzzle that has prompted comment from a number of scholars investigating the Gospel's theology without any particular proposed solution achieving a consensus of wide agreement. This is a theme we shall take further in the next chapter where we examine the commentaries on the Fourth Gospel. But we shall end this chapter with a look in broad terms at the kinds of solution that have been proposed to John's eschatological puzzle.

### **Towards a solution**

Our investigation of the Fourth Gospel's eschatology has found that there is a tension in the Gospel's theology between a realized and heavenly eschatology on the one hand and future eschatology on the other. The evangelist writes about salvation through acceptance of Jesus and his message in earthly life and of a continued heavenly life with God following death. These two doctrines are plainly quite compatible as the latter may simply follow as a consequence of the former. However, the evangelist also writes about the resurrection and judgement at the parousia-eschaton. It is the apparent incompatibility of this more familiar eschatology (life, death, resurrection to judgement)



with John's ideas of eternal life (obtainable in the present and continuing in heaven after death) which forms the puzzle of the Fourth Gospel's eschatological theology. The presence of this puzzle immediately leads to the question: how are we to make sense of a theological tract which contains ideas which conflict to the point of incompatibility?<sup>69</sup> For it makes little sense to suggest that the evangelist believed both that the Christian believer obtains an eternal life that is continued with God in heaven after death and also that the same believer is subject to a resurrection to judgement at the parousia-eschaton. The tension between these ideas leaves a cloud of confusion floating over and around the Fourth Gospel's eschatology, a cloud through which scholarship has found it hard to find a resolution without doing serious discredit to some of the things the Gospel has to say.

In order to arrive at a possible solution to this puzzle it is necessary to make a judgement as to whether or not the evangelist believed everything that can be read in the Gospel. For if we assume that the evangelist himself is responsible for the realized and heavenly eschatology, can we then safely assume that the same evangelist believed the more traditional future eschatology that appears in his Gospel? In other words, did the evangelist hold a literal belief in the parousia-eschaton of earlier tradition? If he did believe in both realized and future eschatologies, is it possible to explain how he held and wrote about two such seemingly contradictory beliefs? But if he did not believe in the future eschatology, why does it appear in the Gospel at all? Let us consider first the

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<sup>69</sup> The supposition that all religious expression must be devoid of confusion or obfuscation of any sort is clearly a tendentious line to take, as would be any claim that the Biblical writings are free from the deliberate use of paradox both in what they claim to record and in how they choose to record it. Paul Anderson's discussion of the stages of faith development in relation to dialectical thinking (and writing in John 6) provides a useful insight into how psychological theory has been used to construct models of how the certainties of religious faith may undergo different modes of understanding and expression as the individual believer progresses through perhaps a lifetime of contemplating his or her system of beliefs – Anderson 1996, pp. 142-148.

possibility that the evangelist did not believe in the traditional future eschatology. There are then two ways in which this future eschatology entered the Gospel: either it was written by the evangelist himself; or it was inserted by a redactor.

If we allow that he did not believe what he was writing and that it was the evangelist who composed those passages referring to future eschatology, it is still necessary to propose why he would do this. The most likely answer to this is that the evangelist felt obligated to preserve traditional material within his Gospel because such material was closely associated with the Jesus-traditions which the evangelist inherited.<sup>70</sup> The suggestion here is that there was a tradition that Jesus had himself spoken of the coming eschaton and that the evangelist felt unable to depart from this traditional facet of Jesus' teaching even though he no longer believed it. However, it has to be asked if this reasoning is altogether sound in view of the evangelist's handling of other traditional material. After all, the evangelist seems to have had little difficulty in dropping other areas of the Jesus-tradition which did not quite fit into his theological agenda. If we are asked to believe that the evangelist held certain areas of the Jesus-tradition to be too sacred to ignore or too interwoven into the fabric of the tradition to be extracted, how are we to explain the absence from the Fourth Gospel of Jesus' baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, the transfiguration, the institution of the last supper and, not least, any reference to exorcisms? Surely the absence of these key elements of the Jesus-tradition from the Fourth Gospel shows that the evangelist was no respecter of material he wished to omit from his Gospel.<sup>71</sup> On balance, therefore, it seems improbable that the evangelist felt obligated to include in his Gospel traditional eschatological material with

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<sup>70</sup> This solution has been proposed by Robert Kysar – Kysar 1993, pp. 104-106.

<sup>71</sup> See Piper 2000.



which he disagreed. Nevertheless, it may be that while constructing his narrative around only those elements of the Jesus-tradition of which he approved, memories and echoes of earlier themes have survived, despite the evangelist's efforts to suppress them. This might be what has happened in John 6, where the passage 6:35-59 shows a somewhat confusing allegiance to both heavenly and futurist eschatology. While this passage makes no reference to judgement, its repeated contention that the believer both has eternal life and will be raised up at the last day seems to present something of a puzzle. As C.K. Barrett has asked, how can the believer be raised up if "he never dies and already possesses eternal life?"<sup>72</sup> We suspect that John 6:35-59 may well reflect a tension between the evangelist's belief in eternal life and heavenly eschatology and certain elements within the Jesus-tradition which pertain to being raised at the last day. Similarly, not every apparent reference in John to future events need necessarily be understood in terms of the parousia-eschaton. An example is John 14:3, 18-20, 28 where Jesus' promise to the disciples that he will come again has often been understood

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<sup>72</sup> That John characteristically presents his theology dialectically, from different sides of a problem, is well illustrated in Barrett's 1972 essay, The Dialectical Theology of St John, which concentrates on the problems posed by John 6. In John 6 judgement does not form part of the eschatological statements presented. Here, by way of illustration and without offering a solution to the problems posed, Barrett outlines the heart of John's eschatological puzzle. See Barrett 1972, p. 52, where he writes with reference to John 6:

The chapter contains some of the clearest statements of "realized" or "present" eschatology to be found anywhere in the New Testament.

He who believes has (ἔχει) eternal life (6.47).

This is the bread that comes down out of heaven, that one should eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever (6.50f).

He who eats this bread shall live forever (6.58).

These passages seem clear. Eternal life is offered and possessed here and now; and the possessor, the man who is related to God in Christ, will not die but will live forever. Over against these verses, however, there stands a sequence in which, in slightly varying words, it is promised that the believer will be raised up at the last day (6.39, 40, 44, 54). But how can he be raised up if he never dies and already possesses eternal life?

to refer to the parousia, but is more likely to be a reference to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in which the evangelist believed and about which John 14 is ultimately explicit.<sup>73</sup>

Again if we allow that the evangelist disagreed with the traditional eschatological material that appears in his Gospel, it is possible to propose that he omitted this material from his Gospel and that it was subsequently inserted into the text by a redactor or redactors. Leaving aside all matters of textual and linguistic criticism for the time being,<sup>74</sup> there are two principal arguments against this suggestion. Firstly, as we discussed above, it seems unlikely that colleagues or disciples of the evangelist would turn against his teaching, perhaps after his death, to the degree that they would wish to alter the eschatological thrust of his Gospel by inserting material to which they knew he was opposed. It seems more likely that such colleagues would have been in broad agreement with his teaching and would have had no inclination to alter his Gospel in a direction which they knew was against his original intention.

The possibility then remains that the Gospel was edited by a redactor who was not sympathetic to the beliefs of the evangelist but was some kind of censor working on behalf of the wider early Church and whose remit was to bring the radical new Gospel into line with more 'orthodox' thinking. Again we find that there are improbabilities stacking up against this solution. First, it is making quite an assumption to propose that

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<sup>73</sup> Clear examples of differing interpretations of John 14 are illustrated by the commentaries of Bernard and Schnackenburg, the former opting for a simple reference to the parousia, the latter preferring a more spiritual explanation. Barrett suspects a fusion of the two, or that the language of the parousia is being used to describe the post-mortem expectation of the disciples. See Bernard 1928(2), p. 535 (but also 546-548 and 554-555), Schnackenburg 1982, pp. 62-63, 76-79, 85-86 and Barrett 1978, p. 457, 463-465, 468.

<sup>74</sup> We shall engage with those commentators who have proposed theories of a redacted Fourth Gospel below in chapter 2 and we shall engage in some specific textual and linguistic analysis in chapter 4.



at the time the Fourth Gospel appeared in its final form the Christian Church had either the resources or the inclination to police the publication of a document such as the Fourth Gospel. Secondly, if some early un-redacted form of the Gospel<sup>75</sup> had come to the attention of such a body with responsibilities for prescribing orthodoxy, would it not be more likely that John's text would have been rejected wholesale if it had been found to be too radical and in need of toning down? It seems more probable that the reaction of a Church censor would have been to suppress or ban such a document rather than to alter it.

In light of the points made above we are able to say that it is less than probable that the traditional future eschatological material appears in the Fourth Gospel in spite of the evangelist's disagreement with such doctrines – either from his own hand or from an editor's. Therefore we must now consider that the evangelist incorporated material into his Gospel which refers to the parousia-eschaton because he believed in these doctrines and that they had an ultimate theological relevance. We have discussed above the proposals put forward by Dodd and Schnackenburg that the evangelist believed in both realized and future eschatologies and that it is possible to categorize these beliefs in terms of how important the evangelist held them to be. We noted the difficulty this kind of proposal runs into – how are those who have obtained eternal life and have been exempted from judgement to rise again to face judgement at the parousia-eschaton? Surely the evangelist would have been as aware as any of his readers of the difficulty

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<sup>75</sup> In his postscript to the later editions of Bultmann's commentary, Hartwig Thyen makes clear that the only textual evidence for the work of a redactor in John 5 concerns the "legendary gloss" of 5:4. The thrust of Thyen's comment is to emphasize that there is no extant textual evidence to support Bultmann's contention that eschatological passages such as 5:28-29 must be additions made to an earlier version of the text by an editor and that "the form in which we know the Gospel was the form in which it was always known *publicly* in the Church." The inclusion of the italicized "*publicly*" suggests that perhaps Thyen was not prepared to go so far as to argue that the Gospel text had not been redacted to some degree *prior* to its becoming widely known. See Bultmann 1971, p. 742. See also Fee 1982.

here – the theology simply does not work. How, then, is this puzzle to be resolved? Is it possible to reconcile two conflicting theologies concerning the granting of salvation and the fate of the soul of the individual in eternity which lie side by side in the Fourth Gospel?

In the introductory chapter of this study we proposed a hypothesis which it is hoped will resolve the puzzle. The text of the Fourth Gospel suggests that the evangelist believed in a unified bicameral eschatology – applicable both to those who accept Jesus and to those who reject him. Thus the Gospel presents two strands of eschatology – one for Christians and another for non-believers. That the evangelist did indeed believe that those who accept Christ as their saviour will receive eternal life, be exempted from judgement and enjoy a heavenly existence after death is indicated by the text of the Gospel. However, what did the evangelist believe about those who reject Christ and those who never get the chance to make the choice for or against him? Again, the answer is found in the text of the Gospel. In the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel both these groups will be resurrected to a judgement at the parousia-eschaton, but for the former group – those who have actively rejected Christ – the outcome of their judgement is foreordained by the judgement that is implicit in not coming to the light. Could it be, therefore, that the overall eschatological position of the Fourth Gospel is one where a traditional eschatology of the parousia-eschaton applies to all of humanity except for Christian believers who are now subject to a new eschatology of eternal life and exemption from judgement? If the answer to this question tends towards the affirmative, then the puzzle of the Fourth Gospel's eschatology is moving towards a solution – the Gospel's unified bicameral eschatology contains different eschatological strands because they apply to different groups of subjects.

Before being able to say that the answer to the above question is in the affirmative, it is necessary to point out the principal difficulty with such a solution: the evangelist is by no means explicit that this is his belief. If the evangelist believed in separate eschatological fates for two different groups of humanity then why did he not plainly say so? Again we are left with a residual puzzle and its resolution will only be reached by the balancing of probabilities. It will be in attempting to balance those probabilities that the remainder of this study will be involved. We have found that the text of the Fourth Gospel can be interpreted in a way which supports our hypothesis. We must now build a case which not only supports our proposal but also answers the questions raised by scholars who have already wrestled with John's eschatological puzzle.

## **Findings**

In this chapter we have sought to map-out the christological basis of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement. In addition we have sought to examine what the Fourth Gospel has to say about judgement at the parousia-eschaton, exemption from judgement for Christian believers and eternal life both before and after death.

In relation to christology we have found that the Johannine Jesus is presented as God's dependent, obedient and authorized Son and agent, that he has come into the world on a mission from the heavenly realm to which he will return in glory, and that he comes not only as God's Son and agent, but also as the heavenly Son of Man. The Johannine Jesus has been authorized by God with the divine powers of both life-giver and judge.



Humanity will find him to be one or the other depending on their response to him – he will give life now and eternally in heaven to those who accept him. Those who reject him will find him to be their eschatological judge. Thus the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel has presented an integrated Johannine christology in which Christ is authorized and empowered as God's Son and agent to perform the functions of his mission – to present humanity with the choice between life and judgement.

In relation to eschatology the Fourth Gospel clearly refers to events in the future which will combine a day of judgement with the second coming of Christ – these events we have termed the parousia-eschaton. In addition there are clear statements of an exemption from judgement for those who accept the Johannine Christ. This exemption from judgement is accompanied by an entry into eternal life which begins during physical earthly life and continues as conscious existence with God in heaven following physical death. We have examined various possible explanations as to why these almost incompatible doctrines are found side-by-side in the Fourth Gospel including redactional insertions by editors or the attempt by the evangelist himself to preserve traditional material. All such explanations suffer from serious weaknesses and often complicate rather than resolve the puzzle they seek to address. In contrast we found that the hypothesis proposed in our introductory chapter seemed to fit well with the evidence from the Gospel text. This hypothesis proposes that the Fourth Gospel has a unified bicameral eschatology applicable to two different groups of people – eternal life with exemption from judgement applies to Christian believers while judgement at the parousia-eschaton applies to those who reject Christ and those who have not had the chance to accept him.

While we are not proposing that this chapter has proved that our hypothesis must be the only possible explanation to the puzzle of Johannine judgement theology, we do claim that the hypothesis fits the evidence and is at least a possible solution.

## Chapter 2

### The Commentaries

The eschatological tensions revealed in the use of the judgement motif in John have been of interest to students of the Fourth Gospel to varying degrees, but few scholars have addressed the problem directly or in depth and no study has been made which attempts to analyse the problem by integrating the insights of theological, literary and historical-sociological approaches to the Gospel. This chapter will assess how recent major commentators on the Fourth Gospel have approached the problem of judgement in John and to what extent, if any, they integrated these three approaches in their analysis.<sup>1</sup> In examining each of the commentaries we shall be looking for a clear indication that the author is aware of the problems inherent in John's judgement motif and an indication of how the commentator believes these problems have arisen in terms of a theory of composition – particularly with regard to John 5 (literary), an understanding of exactly what John means in his eschatology (theological) and an understanding of how the evangelist's situation may have contributed to his thinking and writing (historical-sociological). While an integration of two or more of these three approaches does not guarantee a solution to the puzzle of judgement in John, it seems less likely that resolution will be reached by concentrating on one area alone.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be impossible in the space allowed to assess in detail every significant commentary produced on the Fourth Gospel. In addition to the ones surveyed in this chapter, excellent commentaries on John have been produced by Barclay, Beasley-Murray, Bernard, Brodie, Haenchen, Hoskyns and Davey, Lightfoot, Lindars, Malina and Rohrbaugh, MacGregor, Marsh, Morris, Sanders and Mastin, Strachan, Talbert, Tasker, Westcott – all of which are represented in the bibliography to this study and are referred to in the text where appropriate. Although not strictly commentaries, it would be remiss not to list with these works two other indispensable publications: *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* by C.H. Dodd; and *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* by John Ashton. This is not to say that all these commentators engage meaningfully with the puzzle of judgement in John; some do not! Nor does every commentator analyse the Fourth Gospel with a seeming awareness of more than one of the three approaches noted above; some do not! However, all the commentators listed have at least indicated an awareness of the puzzle of judgement in John regardless of their contribution (or otherwise) to its resolution.



Nevertheless, as we shall see, the particular stance taken in any one of these areas is likely to affect any commentator's ability to propose a solution that is able to answer all the questions raised by judgement in John.

#### A. Rudolf Bultmann

Bultmann's commentary on John's Gospel first appeared in Germany in 1941 and it was 1971 before an English translation was published.<sup>2</sup> Six years prior to the appearance of the English edition, D. Moody Smith published *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel*,<sup>3</sup> an indispensable aid to understanding the literary composition theory which Bultmann's commentary proposes. Bultmann fails to explain his composition theory as an individual or isolated hypothesis in his commentary, preferring to allow his theory to grow by gradual exposition and inference as he comments on various passages of the Gospel. We shall be engaging in some depth – and with considerable indebtedness to D. Moody Smith – with Bultmann's composition and redaction theory in chapter 4 of this study. In the meantime it will be sufficient to note that Bultmann believes the puzzle of judgement in John is simply resolved by designating all references to future eschatological judgement in the Fourth Gospel as insertions by a redactor. Thus for Bultmann the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel holds no belief in future judgement or, indeed, in the parousia-eschaton and the pristine theology of the Gospel, as the evangelist intended it to be, is entirely realized.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bultmann 1941 and Bultmann 1971 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Smith 1965.

<sup>4</sup> In his 1953 essay, "The New Testament and Mythology," Bultmann develops a thesis in which the Fourth Gospel – or at least an original unredacted text of the Fourth Gospel – was a step along a path on which early Christianity sought to 'demythologize' itself. Bultmann believed that one area of mythology which the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was trying to leave behind was eschatology – "The mythical

Commenting on John 3:18, Bultmann notes that 'John can speak with a peculiar sort of ambiguity about judgement.'<sup>5</sup> But for Bultmann himself such ambiguity is easily resolved as he sees the eschatological event to lie in the actual mission of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel – 'in this event the judgement of the world takes place.' However, the very fact that there is a judgement is 'contrary to the intention of God's love, for he wishes not to judge but to save the world.' Thus it is faith in Jesus as he is encountered in his mission that John represents as being the source of life. But the obverse of this is that it is lack of faith, or unbelief, which leads to exclusion from life. Judgement is the exclusion from life and is the result of the rejection of God's love as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel the mission of Jesus has made the judgement a present reality as opposed to a future event.<sup>6</sup> Thus Bultmann sees 3:17-18 as doing away with the older naïve eschatology of Judaism and early Christianity. In John's Gospel judgement is not a 'specially contrived sequel to the coming and departure of the Son' and there is to be no 'dramatic cosmic event that is yet to come.' Rather, the mission of

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*eschatology* is untenable for the simple reason that the parousia of Christ never took place as the New Testament expected. History did not come to an end, and ... it will continue to run its course." Leaving aside for the present to what extent the Fourth Gospel has been demythologized, clearly Bultmann's belief that it has been de-eschatologized is heavily dependent on his redaction theory (Bultmann 1953, p.5). This is a theme which Bultmann develops further in his collection of 1955 Gifford Lectures, *History and Eschatology*, in which he sees the eschatological event as brought forward into the present life of believers through participation in the sacraments. While believing that the present remains a 'time-between,' this is not the same as the primitive Christian concept of the time between the ascension and the parousia, but rather a thoroughly Johannine concept of time between the crucifixion and the death of the believer and immediate entry into heavenly existence (Bultmann 1957, pp. 38-55). In his 1951 Shaffer lectures Bultmann had indicated that the seeds of Johannine demythologizing had been planted a generation before by Paul (Bultmann 1958, pp. 32-34). See also Bultmann 1962 where he addresses his critics on these issues. However, see also Henderson 1952 and Farrer 1953 for some insights into how the demythologization issue was perceived at the time in Britain.

<sup>5</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 154. This is a theme that Bultmann develops considerably in the second volume of his *Theology of the New Testament*, where the world is judged by the one and only coming of Jesus. Thus the incarnation is presented as a revelation of divine love presenting humanity with a choice between salvation and judgement, a revelation which continues beyond Jesus' earthly ministry as a revelation through the Word. The divine love is still to be encountered and the choice between salvation and judgement is still there for humanity in its encounter with the revelation in Christ's word, but the eschatological moment is always 'now' – there is no parousia-eschaton waiting in Bultmann's Johannine future where either believers or unbelievers will face judgement. Bultmann 1955, pp 33-69.

Jesus is a completed sequence of events which is in itself the judgement. This judgement is a consequence of God's love which now divides the world into 'believers and unbelievers ... saved and lost, those who have life and those who are in death.' God's love has become 'judgement in the face of unbelief' in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Bultmann understands 5:22 to mean a relinquishing of the office of judgement by the Father to the Son. However, this is immediately qualified as simply being a facet of the equality of the Father and the Son, with the Father now operating as judge through the Son. The Son is therefore due the same honour as the Father who remains due the same honour as before.<sup>8</sup>

For Bultmann, 5:28-29 is an addition to the original Gospel text by a redactor who was attempting to reconcile the new judgement theology of the Fourth Gospel with the earlier eschatology of Judaism and primitive Christianity. 5:27 might also have been inserted during this redaction process.<sup>9</sup> Thus for Bultmann the genuine theology of judgement in the Fourth Gospel is to be found at 3:17-18. Any subsequent allusions to future judgement and other eschatological events are the work of a redactor whose concern was to try to harmonize the revolutionary new theology of the Gospel with the more traditional understanding of judgement at the parousia-eschaton.

Bultmann's commentary on the Fourth Gospel is principally an explication of the various theologies which he is able to discriminate in John as a result of his comprehensive source, redaction and re-arrangement theory for the Gospel's

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<sup>7</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> Bultmann 1971, pp. 260-262.



production. While his approach is not entirely devoid of socio-historical insight,<sup>10</sup> such comment is rare for Bultmann and it is significant that such socio-historical insight as there is does not intrude beyond the introductory notes to selected passages into the verse-by-verse comments. Thus Bultmann's approach can be described as both literary and theological while showing only a little interest in socio-historical analysis.

## B. C.K. Barrett

Barrett's commentary on John was first published in 1955 with a revised second edition appearing in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Bultmann, Barrett prefers to treat John's text as unredacted and to base his assessment of the Gospel's theology (and by implication the evangelist's theology) on the text as it stands and, therefore, again unlike Bultmann, he seeks to find some way in which John's puzzling theology of judgement can be reconciled. Barrett sees salvation as being both explicit and implicit in the Fourth Gospel: "That salvation was in fact effected by Jesus Christ ... is a point John scarcely troubles to demonstrate"<sup>12</sup> and he goes on to outline different salvific ideas that would have been familiar in the decades from the times of Jesus to the writing of the Gospel. He notes more than one trend within Judaism and writes of "a general tendency ... to regard salvation as the fruit of a future act of God, for which men may hope, but upon which they cannot at present set their eyes."<sup>13</sup> Outside Judaism he notes the dominant trend to be one where salvation is "a present experience given to men through sacraments or through knowledge, γνῶσις. The present experience is the sacrament or knowledge

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Bultmann 1971, p. 239, where he discusses the possibility that John 5 and 9 reflect the difficulties faced by the Johannine Christians.

<sup>11</sup> Barrett 1955 and Barrett 1978 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 79.

left behind by a descending redeemer figure who returns (ascends) to heaven. Salvation is found by following the redeemer in his ascent.<sup>14</sup>

While noting that John was acquainted with these thought forms, Barrett is convinced that John's ideas of salvation are firmly grounded in Judaism – “salvation is of the Jews (4:22)” and he believes the evangelist “takes a decidedly Jewish viewpoint, and takes his stand upon the Old Testament.”<sup>15</sup> However, other influences are recognised as being present in the Fourth Gospel and for Barrett this is neither an accident nor simply the result of fortuitous eclecticism. This is a necessary and deliberate feature of the Gospel since “the old eschatological notion of salvation was not adequate for Christian use because the promised salvation was now partially fulfilled, and could no longer be described as purely future.”<sup>16</sup> Thus Barrett sees in the partial fulfilment of Jewish hopes a need to expand and progress forms of “thought and vocabulary” which had left the parent religion behind. Also Barrett believes this is why John's salvation is richer than the Synoptic presentation – it refuses to restrict itself to Jewish terminology and so brings out that which was “implicit in the primitive faith” by employing language and concepts from other traditions.<sup>17</sup>

In discussing the relationship of sin to salvation, Barrett points out that although Jesus is explicitly described as ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,’ there is running through the Gospel the theme of Jesus as the means by which sins are exposed. Jesus is the light to which those who do no sin are attracted and from which the sinful hide. Similarly, freedom from bondage to sin is to be found in Christ's truth and not by

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<sup>14</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 80.

other supposed means of grace such as descent from Abraham. For Barrett, as for Bultmann, the Fourth Gospel gives the impression of dividing the world into two camps – those who come to the light and those shunning the light. Here Barrett sees a difficulty of interpretation because “this language is crossed” by Jesus having taken on the world’s sin and by the existence of a choice between good and evil, between righteousness and sinfulness. Thus Jesus is portrayed as both redeemer and as judge. “Judgement is the obverse of salvation; it is the form salvation takes for men who will have none of it.”<sup>18</sup>

Commenting on John 3:17, Barrett immediately acknowledges the contrasts between this verse and later statements in the Gospel such as 5:27 and 9:39. This is a puzzle for which, however, Barrett has a solution – “the apparent contradiction in fact illuminates the meaning of judgement in this gospel.”<sup>19</sup> He solves the puzzle by translating κρίνειν as ‘to condemn’ rather than as ‘to judge.’ This has the affect of rendering (in English) 3:18 and 5:24 as meaning that believers are not condemned either now or at the parousia-eschaton. Thus for Barrett it is a mistake to think that these verses mean an exemption from judgement; the judgement tribunal is still there but for believers a positive outcome is guaranteed – no condemnation. Naturally, of course, in this understanding it follows from 3:18 that unbelievers are guaranteed a negative judgement – condemnation.

In noting that the Fourth Gospel refers to a final day of judgement at 5:27-29 and 12:48, Barrett believes that in John’s eschatology this represents an eschatological event at which the verdicts have been long decided in accordance with the κρίνειν described

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<sup>18</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 216.



above in relation to 3:18. While this view may help to explain the eschatological fate of those groups who have either accepted Christ or have made a conscious decision against him, it fails to explain the fate of those who have not had the chance to make this choice.

While Barrett notes in the second edition of his commentary the appearance in Johannine scholarship of the trend towards socio-historical analysis, his use of such techniques in own analysis remains minimal.<sup>20</sup> His commentary is, for the most part, a theological evaluation of the Greek text of the Gospel based upon a justification for taking the literary-critical stance of assuming the first twenty chapters of the Gospel to be a unitary composition.<sup>21</sup>

### C. Raymond Brown

Raymond Brown's two-volume commentary on John's Gospel was first published in 1966 as part of the Anchor Bible series of commentaries.<sup>22</sup> Brown devotes a section of his introduction to the problems of the Gospel's eschatology<sup>23</sup> and brings together his thoughts on Jesus as a judge under his comments on John 8:15-16.<sup>24</sup> He begins his examination of John's eschatology by outlining the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' views of salvific activity and notes that the Fourth Gospel manages to combine both in a fusion of ideas taken from a tradition of salvation history and other ideas related to divine intervention by a visitor from the heavenly world. Brown notes that these latter ideas

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<sup>20</sup> See Barrett 1978, pp. 137-138, 250.

<sup>21</sup> Barrett 1978, pp. 133-134.

<sup>22</sup> Brown 1966.

<sup>23</sup> Brown 1966 (1), pp. CXV-CXXI.

<sup>24</sup> Brown 1966 (1), p. 345.

are not new in John, citing the deuterocanonical book of Wisdom and C.H. Dodd's review of rabbinic literature.<sup>25</sup> With regard to the way these ideas of salvation are presented in the Fourth Gospel's eschatology, Brown feels that the relationship is governed by the Gospel's composition history, which in Brown's proposed scenario is a lengthy but plausible process.<sup>26</sup> He believes that in essence the central eschatology of John is realized, insofar as it is a present reality for the readers of the Gospel living in the post-resurrectional age to which the Johannine narrative points in terms of Jesus being raised in glory on the cross. Thus Brown believes that much of the material that is often discussed in terms of future eschatology in John is explicable as future in the narrative but realized in the time of the readers of the Gospel.<sup>27</sup> Rightly, though, Brown notes that this can not be said of those passages in John which are properly apocalyptic – of which he cites 5:28-29 as an example – and he proposes that such material has found its way into the Fourth Gospel simply because of its prominence in early Christian tradition. In view of his proposed composition theory, Brown thinks that these passages may be late redactions into the Gospel text but he is wary of attributing a specific purpose to a redactor, preferring not to follow Bultmann in designating such editing as 'ecclesiastical.'<sup>28</sup>

Brown brings together his thoughts on the subject of Jesus as a judge in his comments upon John 8:15-16.<sup>29</sup> Here he acknowledges that there are some passages which state that Jesus is not a judge (3:17; 12:47) while other passages clearly state that Jesus is a

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<sup>25</sup> Brown's reference is to Dodd 1953, pp. 144-146 – Brown 1966 (1), p. CXVI. However, see also Dodd 1953, pp. 74-96. On Wisdom see also McGlynn 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Brown's hypothesis for the composition of the Fourth Gospel is set out in detail at Brown 1966 (1), pp. XXXIV-XL. Brown proposes five stages in the compositional history of the Gospel: 1. The existence of a body of traditional material; 2. Development of the material into Johannine patterns; 3. Organization of material into a Gospel; 4. Evangelist's second edition of the Gospel; 5. Final redaction by an editor other than the evangelist.

<sup>27</sup> Brown 1966 (1), p. CXVIII.

<sup>28</sup> Brown 1966 (1), pp. CXVIII-CXXI.

<sup>29</sup> Brown 1966(1), p. 345.

judge (9:39; 5:22). For Brown the meaning of the first set of passages is clear enough in that John's Jesus is not acting in the narrative as a judge in the apocalyptic sense. Furthermore, the purpose of Jesus' ministry in John is primarily salvific, not judgemental. However, judgement inevitably takes place when individuals reject the salvation Jesus offers. Brown believes that the second group of passages represent a fusion of the idea of judgement being the consequence of a rejection of Jesus with the idea of Jesus as the apocalyptic judge of the parousia-eschaton. Thus he sees 9:39 as an example of a tendency towards the former, 5:22 as an example of a tendency towards the latter and 8:15-16 as a tendency to bring the two ideas together.

As with Bultmann and Barrett, Brown addresses the theology of the Fourth Gospel in a way which allows his commentary to be described as a truly theological one. Like Bultmann, Brown also has a well developed hypothesis for the writing of the Gospel which allows him to posit stages of composition rather than specific putative source documents.<sup>30</sup> However, where he goes beyond both his predecessors is in combining his theological and literary approach with a fuller awareness of a possible socio-historical background to the writing of the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> However, while Brown frequently refers to his composition theory in the body of his commentary, his references to the implications of his socio-historical analysis in his introduction are rare. Therefore, with reference to the notes and comment in the body of his commentary, it can be said that Brown's approaches to the Fourth Gospel are principally literary and theological.

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<sup>30</sup> Brown 1966(1), pp. XXXIV-XL.

<sup>31</sup> See section V of Brown's introduction, "The Destination and Purpose of the Fourth Gospel" – Brown 1966 (1), pp. LXVII-LXXIX.



#### **D. Rudolf Schnackenburg**

The three volumes of Rudolf Schnackenburg's commentary on John's Gospel were published in Germany between 1965 and 1975 with the English translations appearing from 1968 to 1982.<sup>32</sup> Of the various commentaries examined, Schnackenburg's is easily the most extensive with an introduction of well over 200 pages and 18 excurses<sup>33</sup> on the principal themes of the Gospel in addition to his verse-by-verse commentary on the Greek text.

Schnackenburg begins his comments on the subject of judgement in John with an awareness of a probable socio-historical background to the Gospel's production, noting that John 3:17 is more likely to be a polemical statement than a theological one in that it represents "a defensive attitude in the face of unbelieving Judaism with which Jesus is constantly coming into conflict in John." He proposes a scenario in which 3:17 in the Gospel is responding to Jewish opponents of the evangelist who were critical of a Jesus who "reacted with harshness and threats of judgment when faced with the representatives of unbelief among his people."<sup>34</sup> However, in his comments on 3:18 Schnackenburg leaves all notions of polemic behind and writes now of the Gospel's theology, particularly in terms of realized eschatology. He sees judgement in John as taking place in the present – here and now – determined by belief or otherwise in Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God. However this judgement takes place only as the consequence of a rejection of the offer of salvation. The divine will is to save rather than to judge and judgement is the consequence for those who refuse salvation.

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<sup>32</sup> See Schnackenburg 1968, 1980 and 1982 in the bibliography.

<sup>33</sup> Of particular interest are Excurses 12 and 14 on the topics of "The idea of life in the Fourth Gospel" and "Eschatology in the Fourth Gospel" respectively – Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 352-361 and 426-437.

<sup>34</sup> Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 400-401.

Schnackenburg sees this immediate judgement through rejection of Christ as the distinctive and innovative contribution of the Fourth Gospel to the theology of judgement. Looking forward to John 5, he sees this present judgement as being “formally ratified” at the day of judgement. Thus the unbeliever goes through a two-stage judgement process – the verdict is already known and will be confirmed at the last day.<sup>35</sup> But for believers the situation is entirely different. Schnackenburg believes that 3:18 must be taken literally along with 5:24 in its assertion that there is no judgement for those who accept the salvation Jesus brings. Christian believers are exempt from judgement according to the Fourth Gospel.<sup>36</sup>

Schnackenburg sees the meaning of 5:22 as being plain enough: No one is judged directly by the Father as all verdicts will come through the Son to whom he has given all judgement. Thus in John the Son has claimed for himself “one of God’s supreme acts of sovereignty,” that which takes place on the great day of judgement. That which in Judaism belonged to God alone is now entrusted to the Son, demonstrating that “the Son’s sovereign power is equal to that of God himself.”<sup>37</sup> Schnackenburg sees this theme continued in verses 27a and 30 where the present judgement passed on those who reject Jesus is justified in terms of the unity of the Father and the Son.<sup>38</sup> Here, puzzlingly in view of his previous comments on 3:18, he proposes that the intervening passage (verses 27b -29) is a redactional insertion intended to balance the evangelist’s concern with realized eschatology with a more traditional eschatological scenario.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 401-403.

<sup>36</sup> Schnackenburg 1968, p. 402.

<sup>37</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, p. 112.

<sup>39</sup> Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 114-117.

Schnackenburg's enormous commentary on the Fourth Gospel is naturally theological in its approach while being cautious in its use of literary-critical issues relevant to a theory of composition. He develops his theory of composition and authorship over sixty pages of his introduction,<sup>40</sup> most of which is a very cautious appraisal of the work of other scholars. However, it is possible eventually to pin-down Schnackenburg's belief in both a history of composition overlaid with a history of redaction<sup>41</sup> and, as we have seen, he is not afraid to introduce redactional explanations when he is certain that a particular passage is foreign to the Gospel. Socio-historical analysis has, however, played little or no part in Schnackenburg's approach to the Fourth Gospel. In his introduction he mentions in passing the likelihood of the Gospel narrative being informed by tensions between Christians and Jews at the time at which the Gospel was written,<sup>42</sup> but this is neither expanded upon nor does it intrude into the body of the commentary.

### E. Critique

Our examination of four major commentaries on the Fourth Gospel has found that each of the commentators approaches John with at least some awareness that the Gospel reflects a particular socio-historical background, although, as we have seen the degree of interest in this area varies significantly. However, all four commentators are broadly agreed on a probable background of a deteriorating relationship between the Johannine Christians and a Synagogue community from which they have been expelled. We have also found that each commentator approaches the Fourth Gospel from a literary

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<sup>40</sup> Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 44-104.

<sup>41</sup> Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 72-24, 100-104.

<sup>42</sup> Schnackenburg, 1968, pp. 127-128.



perspective which wishes to propose a theory of composition for the text and is willing to designate which portions of the text are in some sense original and, therefore, representative of a genuine Johannine theology, and which portions are redactional insertions by editors and, therefore, unrepresentative of Johannine thought.

We have also seen that from a theological point of view each of the four commentators ultimately attempts to solve the puzzle of John's eschatology by downplaying at least one of three of the Gospel's main eschatological thrusts. Bultmann does this by denying that true Johannine theology contains any reference to future eschatology and that, therefore, apocalyptic passages such as 5:28-29 which refer to the parousia-eschaton must be redactional insertions. Barrett plays down the assertions of 3:18 and 5:24 that believers are exempted from judgement while regarding the promises of eternal life to be provisional until confirmed at the parousia-eschaton. Brown underplays the presence of passages which refer to the parousia-eschaton, believing that they may be redactional insertions reflecting little more than the preservation of traditional material and that they are, therefore, unrepresentative of Johannine thought. Ultimately, in the second volume of his commentary, Schnackenburg adopts a similar position to Brown, although his first volume had proposed the only solution we have encountered so far which has proposed that believers are exempted from judgement and obtain immediate eternal life while unbelievers face eschatological judgement at the parousia-eschaton. Thus we can say that the solutions of Bultmann, Brown and Schnackenburg are reached via a particular understanding of the Gospel's literary history, all of which propose that certain elements of John's eschatology are not genuinely Johannine. Barrett, on the other hand, has blocked this route of explanation by proposing the unity of the Gospel and by interpreting John's entire theology of

judgement in terms of the parousia-eschaton. We shall deal briefly with each of these two types of solution.

Bultmann, Brown and Schnackenburg have all proposed that the Fourth Gospel's eschatological puzzle can be solved by accepting 3:18 and 5:24 more or less at face value as the evangelist's genuine theology. Thus the Johannine Jesus can be said to be bringing instant eternal life with an exemption from judgement for believers and instant judgement to unbelievers. This is realized eschatology insofar as it brings the eschatological judgement process forward into the present. All three commentators have further proposed that references to the parousia-eschaton in John, such as 5:28-29, are redactional insertions into the Gospel of traditional ideas which do not reflect the theological outlook of the evangelist. The proposed motives behind such redaction vary between Bultmann's ecclesiastical censor and Brown's preserver of traditional material.

In chapter 1 above we have already argued against these proposals on the grounds that:

- an ecclesiastical censor is a rather dubious concept;
- the Fourth Gospel is devoid of several other traditional Christian motifs;
- redactors belonging to the evangelist's circle would be unlikely to wish to edit his Gospel in a way that would change its major emphases;
- redactors from beyond the evangelist's circle would be unlikely to wish to edit the Gospel at all – it seems more probable that they would wish to discard it if they were not in agreement with its major emphases.

Thus we find the solutions of Bultmann, Brown and Schnackenburg unsatisfactory in that we believe it is unlikely that the Fourth Gospel has been edited in such a way that it came to contain material that is not genuinely Johannine and was an attempt to change

the emphasis of the Gospel. However we agree with these three scholars that John is proposing a realized eschatology at 3:18 and 5:24 which offers believers eternal life and exemption from judgement.

Barrett's resolution of the puzzle is completely different. In his solution the emphasis is entirely on the future eschatology of the parousia-eschaton. Thus Barrett is keen to play down the realized aspects of salvation and he believes the award of eternal life is not really present at all, but rather a provisional status which will be ratified on the day of judgement. In view of this belief, it is not entirely surprising that Barrett has almost nothing to say about the exemption from judgement offered to believers in 3:18 and 5:24. In terms of unbelief, or of rejection of salvation, Barrett believes these verses are not talking about judgement but about condemnation. Thus those who reject Christ are not being judged, they are being condemned – again a status that will be ratified on the day of judgement. There is little doubt that Barrett's solution works in English when it is possible to substitute one word with a clear set of meanings with another word with another set of meanings. It is clear that in its juridical sense the idea of judgement carries the idea of a weighing of the evidence leading to a decision which could go one way or the other. It also incorporates the notion of a process in which these things happen. Condemnation, on the other hand, carries with it the implication that the process is over, the judgement has been handed down and the verdict is unfavourable. Thus to replace judgement with condemnation does indeed change the meaning of these passages significantly. Rather than being exempted from judgement, believers simply need have no fear of condemnation when they come to judgement. Unbelievers, on the other hand, can place no hope in judgement as their condemnation only awaits confirmation. It does seem odd, though, that a two-stage judgement is necessary in



Barrett's scenario – the verdicts of both believers and unbelievers are already known – why, then, is it necessary to posit an eschatological judgement court at all?

If, however, we take the Gospel text back into the Greek language in which it was written, it is legitimate to ask if Barrett's solution still works. It is not, after all, possible to change the wording of the Greek, yet *κρίνειν* carries with it both the idea of juridical judgement as well as condemnation and for the original Greek speaking reader of the Gospel it would have been necessary to take in the entire concept which the word carries with it and decide in which sense the evangelist may have intended it to be understood.<sup>43</sup> Were John to be setting a deliberate puzzle by the use of a word with two meanings, it would not be a unique instance in the Fourth Gospel where John seems to enjoy playing with words that have double meanings.<sup>44</sup> However, the concept of eschatological judgement was well established in early Christianity as well as in Judaism and, indeed, the motif of judgement in the afterlife was a well-established concept throughout the Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures.<sup>45</sup> It may be something of a misrepresentation of the usual understanding of this motif to say that judgement automatically implies condemnation. Judgement meant exactly that – a weighing of the evidence for and against the accused with the possibility of either a favourable or an unfavourable outcome – condemnation was only one of the possible

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<sup>43</sup> The reader may have taken in the whole concept and kept hold of it in its entirety, in which case both the negative outcome – condemnation – is implicitly understood, but so also is the process by which the verdict is reached – judgement. See Baur *et al* 1979, pp. 451-452, where it is made clear that the concept of judgement, while often contextually inseparable from condemnation, also implies a consideration of the administration of justice in which the innocent will be vindicated. See also Schneider and McComiskey 1975.

<sup>44</sup> John 1:5 – *κατέλαβεν* – has the darkness failed to overcome the light or has it misunderstood the light? John 3:3 – *ἄνωθεν* – is it necessary to be born from above or born again?

<sup>45</sup> S.G.F. Brandon has traced the concept of post-mortem judgement through the cultures of Ancient Egypt, Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Israel and the Graeco-Roman culture into Christianity. His presentation is of an almost universal process of judgement at a tribunal with the possibility of more than one outcome rather than a pre-ordained condemnation. It was in some sense Judaism that was the exception to the general rule in that judgement was seen as eschatological rather than post-mortem and national rather than simply individualistic. See Brandon 1967, pp. 6-111.

outcomes. Barrett's argument is that the outcome was already decided, that judgement here means condemnation, but it is by no means certain that this is how the Gospel would have been understood by its first readers. For this reason we find Barrett's solution to the puzzle of judgement in John's Gospel to be unsatisfactory.

## **Findings**

We have examined four major commentaries on the Fourth Gospel to find out how their authors have dealt with the problems inherent in the Gospel's theology of judgement. For reasons explained above we have found that all four of the commentaries propose a solution which is unsatisfactory. Three of the commentaries propose solutions in which certain theological propositions in John's theology of judgement are regarded as foreign to the Gospel and do not represent the thinking of the evangelist. The remaining commentary proposes a solution in which it is necessary to think about the Gospel's theology of judgement in ways that would have been foreign to the Gospel's first readers. In the introductory chapter of this study we proposed a hypothesis in which all the elements of the theology of judgement in John 5 are to be considered as fundamental to the evangelist's thinking – entry into eternal life and exemption from judgement for believers, judgement by Christ at the parousia-eschaton for unbelievers. All four of the solutions proposed in the commentaries are incompatible with this hypothesis, and had we found any of these proposed solutions to have been satisfactory, it would have been necessary to amend the hypothesis. However, since we have found all four of the solutions to be unsatisfactory, we may conclude that none of them pose a threat to our

hypothesis and that we may proceed with further investigations in an attempt to establish whether our hypothesis stands or falls.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Some recent approaches to John 5**

Given our findings so far that the interpretation of the theology of judgement presented in John 5 is governed by an understanding of both the unity of the text and the evangelist's use of language, a further study of the work of scholars who have paid particular attention to John 5 may help to clarify these issues further. In particular we have noted a limited use of socio-historical approaches to John 5 in the commentaries and in this chapter we shall be looking for a more developed awareness of firstly, the possible implications of the evangelist's social and historical setting in the Gospel's composition; and secondly, the use of an awareness of a possible particular social and historical background as an interpretative tool with which to probe the Gospel's text. We have discussed our awareness of the dangers of a circularity of approach in this method in our introduction.

If, in our examination of the work of four Johannine scholars in this chapter, we encounter particular theses which are incompatible with our hypothesis, we shall assess the arguments put forward and consider amending the hypothesis. Should, on the other hand, we discover that scholars are proposing theses that are compatible with our hypothesis, then we shall consider what implications, if any, the work of these scholars may have for the advancement of our hypothesis. In general terms we wish to discover what these scholars make of John 5 in terms of unity of composition, use of language, development of christological and eschatological ideas, compatibility of realized and future eschatology and the possible implications of the evangelist's socio-historical

setting. Thus we remain on the lookout for elements of a three-stranded approach to the study of the Gospel – theological, literary and socio-historical, as we remain convinced that only by an assessment of the text using all three techniques can we hope to unravel the puzzle of John's theology of judgement.

#### A. J.L. Martyn

Few proposals for advancing the understanding of the Fourth Gospel and the community which produced it have received such wide acceptance as that of J.L. Martyn.<sup>1</sup> His thesis is that the Gospel is the product of a community that was engaged in a prolonged and unpleasant dialogue with the synagogue which may ultimately have descended into violence. Martyn believes that the Gospel is presented as a 'two level drama.' The first and most obvious level, which he calls the *einmalig*, is the drama of Jesus and the encounters and relationships of his historical ministry, events which took place decades before the Gospel was written. The second level of the drama, which is to be found disguised in the events portrayed in the first level, is the tension and dialogue between the evangelist's Church and the synagogue community at the time the Gospel was written. The Gospel narrative is then, according to Martyn, a fascinating synthesis of two separate historical periods and two separate historical situations. The Fourth Gospel's Jesus is at the same time both the historical Jesus of Church tradition and a Christian missionary contemporary with the evangelist. Jesus' antagonists in the Gospel are at once the Jewish authorities he faced in Palestine at the time of his ministry and the synagogue leaders opposed to the evangelist's Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Although originally published in 1968, we refer here to the revised and enlarged edition of *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* – Martyn 1979.

While acknowledging that some parts of the Gospel contain traditional material, Martyn believes that other parts are particularly indicative of the *Sitz im Leben* of the evangelist and his Church. In particular he demonstrates that from chapters 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 we learn more about the problems of the evangelist's Church community than we do about the ministry of Jesus. Martyn believes these chapters show that in all likelihood the Johannine Christians were in open conflict and prolonged dialogue with the synagogue. Furthermore, he finds evidence that synagogue members were required to recite a 'Benediction Against Heretics' (the *Birkat-ha-minim*) which may have undergone some revision in order to implicate Jewish Christians as heretics.<sup>2</sup> In addition Martyn cites the use of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος (9:22, 12:42, 16:2) as evidence that unrepentant Jewish Christians were being expelled from the synagogues as heretics. Martyn presents us with a Jewish community in which the synagogues were involved in defensive manoeuvres and were attempting to preserve their unique identity in the face of growing Christian activity within and around them. In addition to open apostates amongst them, they also found 'secret Christians' in their number who confessed Christ only in private while openly participating in the life of the synagogue.

The fullest and most illuminating treatment of a Johannine passage by Martyn is his exegesis of John 9, the healing of the blind man, the subsequent investigation by the authorities and the expulsion of the man from the synagogue.<sup>3</sup> This particular example of his work is so well known in Johannine studies as to require no further expansion from us here, as we are primarily interested in Martyn's treatment of John 5. However,

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<sup>2</sup> This idea was put forward in almost the form in which Martyn adopts it by W.D. Davies in a study of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism as part of the world which shaped the tradition of the Synoptic Gospels. Although Martyn may take credit for introducing the idea into Johannine studies, his acknowledgement to Davies seems rather minimal. See Davies 1963, pp. 275-277 and Martyn 1979, p.56, note 74.

<sup>3</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 24-62, comprising the first two chapters of his study, is devoted to John 9 and develops the central tenets of his thesis.



Martyn bases his examination of John 5 on the results of his exegesis of John 9 and it will be necessary for us at least to list his conclusions here.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in the order in which Martyn presents them at the start of his third chapter, the bases upon which he begins his examination of John 5 are:

a. Christian missionaries had come to the city in which the Gospel was later to be written and had preached their messianic message in the synagogue. A narrative document for use in evangelism was produced listing a number of the miracles of Jesus. As a result a messianic group was formed within the synagogue but not distinct from it in social or liturgical terms, except that separate meetings may have been held for the celebration of the Eucharist and for teaching purposes. The activities of these Jewish Christian groups were a matter of some concern to the synagogue authorities and the Jewish Christians themselves may have been aware of this concern. Nevertheless, they continued with their missionary work and with their 'dual allegiance' because they were Jews themselves and did not believe they were drawing Jews away from their traditional religion.

b. In time the concern of the synagogue leaders deepened to a belief that the confession of Jesus as the Messiah was apostasy, perhaps due to the issue of the newly reworded 'Benediction Against Heretics' from Jamnia. Synagogue members were confessing belief in Jesus in numbers that were more than uncomfortable for the Jewish leaders and the 'Benediction' may have been intended as a means of stemming the tide of converts and of identifying those who had converted. However, as the penalty for persistently avoiding the utterance of the 'Benediction' was ultimately

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<sup>4</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 64-68. Above and in the following pages we give a summary of Martyn's presentation of his exegesis of John 5 without substantial comment. We shall discuss his proposals after describing them.

excommunication, Martyn infers that by now the Christian group was no longer a part of the synagogue and that the Church now existed as a separate institution. Clearly the synagogue leaders no longer wished to tolerate Christian belief in any form in their midst.

c. Excommunication slowed down the rate at which converts to Christianity were being made in the synagogue but failed to halt the flow entirely. Therefore the elders of the synagogue sought to devise new sanctions they could impose both against those within their midst who might be tempted to confess Christ, even in secret, and against those previously expelled but still evangelizing in the Jewish community.

d. The result was the imposition of the death penalty on at least some of the former synagogue members who were now not only confessing Christ but also seeking converts from Judaism by preaching the Christian message amongst Jews. It is in the light of this inference – that the synagogue authorities are able to exercise jurisdiction to the extent of capital punishment over some (or any) of their former members – that Martyn begins his examination of John 5. He is particularly drawn to this chapter because it is in John 5:18, for the first time in the Gospel, that it is revealed that Jesus' opponents are seeking to kill him.

Martyn believes the healing story in John 5:2-9b to be a piece of tradition which the evangelist has taken and made the subject of a 'dramatic expansion.'<sup>5</sup> He notes that the form-critical characteristics of miracle-stories are all in place and in the correct order<sup>6</sup> –

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<sup>5</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 68

<sup>6</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 68-69. Martyn succinctly states the three elements of this healing story as: "1. The sickness is serious (v. 5). 2. Jesus heals the man (v. 8). 3. By carrying his pallet the man demonstrates the reality of his cure (v. 9a-b)." That these are typical traits of a New Testament healing story may be traced back through the work of Vincent Taylor, who notes: "Often the account of a miracle has three well-marked stages. First, the sufferer is introduced, with some description of his malady and perhaps a

the seriousness of the illness (verse 5), the healing by Jesus (verse 8) and the confirmation that a healing has taken place (verse 9a and b). The evangelist's 'dramatic expansion' is to give the third of these elements – the confirmation of the healing – a new emphasis which is pregnant with potential. John 5:9c adds the observation that these events all took place on the Sabbath and we are provided with not only proof that a healing has occurred, but also an intimation that conflict lies ahead.

Martyn notes that the drama as it is presented is divided into a sequence of scenes:

1. At the pool – Jesus and the crippled man (verses 2-9b);
2. In the neighbourhood of the pool – the man and the Jews (verses 9c-13);
3. In the temple precincts – Jesus and the man (verse 14);
4. Near the temple precincts – the man and the Jews (verse 15), although Martyn notes that this scene is presented by way of editorial comment rather than by discourse;
5. Unspecified location – Jesus and the Jews (verses 16-47).<sup>7</sup>

In reply to his own question as to whether John has presented a drama on two levels in these scenes, Martyn answers that the *einmalig* level is to be found in the evangelist's comment in 5:16, where we are informed that Jesus is now under persecution by the Jews for Sabbath infringement. He points out that while the persecution implied by the word ἐδίωκον probably exceeds the requirements of Jewish religious discipline, Jesus, as a Jew, is subject to the rigours of Jewish law and, as a Sabbath breaker, must expect

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reference to attempts which have failed to cure him. Then, the cure is described, with greater or less detail as the case may be, and occasionally with some account of the means employed. Finally, though this stage is not always present, the results confirming the cure are depicted." Bultmann, too, had noted the same three simple elements in his exhaustive account of synoptic healing stories. Taylor 1935, pp. 24-25, 121-126; and Bultmann 1968, 209-215.

<sup>7</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 69-70.



to be disciplined. Therefore, Martyn finds nothing in 5:16 which takes the drama of John 5 beyond the *einmalig* level.<sup>8</sup> The drama begins to move onto its second level in 5:17, with the “quasi-divine claim” of Jesus that he is working because his Father has not ceased to work, but the second level is not ‘clearly and distinctly indicated’ until 5:18. For Martyn the second level of the drama is fully revealed by verse 18 with its revelation that the Jews sought now not mere persecution of Jesus but actually his death because not only had he broken the Sabbath but also because he made himself equal to God by calling God his Father. As Martyn succinctly puts it, “There are reasons for seeking to kill Jesus during his earthly lifetime, and there are reasons for seeking to kill him now, in John’s own day!”<sup>9</sup>

Martyn expands on what he sees as the second-level drama by equating the Jesus of the *einmalig* level with a Jewish Christian contemporary of the evangelist who has been involved in an attempt of some kind to reveal the healing power of Jesus to a fellow Jew.<sup>10</sup> Then the Jewish authorities become involved and interrogate the healed Jew. There is a subsequent exchange between the Jewish Christian healer and the Jew who has been healed. This, however, does not lead on to a confession of Christ on the part of the healed Jew. Rather he is cautioned to commit no more sin now that he is well lest worse things befall him. Martyn believes this to be “good *Jewish* teaching,” and believes it represents the Jewish Christian’s response to his perception of the instability of the healed man who might well betray him. Thus the lame man of John 5 represents a member of the Jewish faith who, while grateful for Christian healing, remains loyal to the synagogue. Naturally, therefore, when questioned by the synagogue authorities as to the identity of his healer he obliges with the information once he has obtained it and

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<sup>8</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 70-73.

thus becomes involved, perhaps only passively, in the proceedings against his healer. At this point the lame man drops out of the drama – he has no further part to play – and interest switches to the attempts of the synagogue authorities to apprehend the Jewish Christian healer. Martyn goes on to point out that the reason the synagogue authorities wish to apprehend the Christian healer is the one that has already been deduced – the hoped-for deterrence of excommunication has failed to stop the conversion of Jews to Christianity and action must now be taken directly against the converts. The synagogue authorities could never be as explicit as this, however, and if pressed, Martyn believes they would have given the theological justification that, “We persecute Jewish Christians because they worship Jesus as a second God.”<sup>11</sup>

Martyn’s exegesis of John 5 ends at that point. He does no exegesis of the dialogue of verses 19–47, but moves on to those passages in John 7 which are thematically linked to the controversy of 5:9c–18. He then turns his scholarly attention to a masterful exploration of how the synagogues could have claimed to have the authority to execute Christian preachers.<sup>12</sup> Martyn takes his first clue from Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* – in particular *Dialogue* 69.<sup>13</sup> While cautiously aware that Justin could just possibly have had the Fourth Gospel before him as he wrote, Martyn notes that Justin recalls that Jesus was known to be (amongst the Jews) both *λαοπλάνος* and *μάγος*, a *deceiver of the people* and a *magician*. The term *λαοπλάνος* may have its origins in the *πλάνος* of Matthew 27:63 with which Justin is familiar in *Dialogue* 108, but Martyn feels the origin of *μάγος* must lie in Jewish traditions about Jesus. Since both terms

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<sup>11</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 77–81

<sup>13</sup> For a modern edition of the Greek text of Justin’s *Dialogue*, see Marcovitch 1997. For an English translation see Roberts *et al.* 1885.

are found together in Justin and elsewhere (*Sanhedrin* 107b<sup>14</sup>) in reference to Jewish attitudes to Jesus, it seems reasonable to Martyn to infer that both λαοπλάνοϛ and μάγοϛ are terms the Jews used to describe Jesus. On the basis that these terms have been traditionally used by the Jews against Jesus, Martyn now proceeds to search for evidence that not only did the Jews use these terms but that they also used them as the basis of a legal charge. Furthermore, he is sure that if a legal charge is found that is concerned with the worship of some other god along with *the* God, then his case for a two level drama in John 5 becomes much stronger.<sup>15</sup>

Martyn's attention now turns to the Babylonian Talmud's *Sanhedrin* 43a, a passage which discusses the execution of Jesus because he 'led Israel astray' and 'practiced magic.' There is some confusion in this passage about the method of execution – stoning or hanging (crucifixion) – and Martyn is convinced that the hanging references represent an *einmalig* level of traditional memory and the references to stoning represent a back-projection of later trials of Christians. These Christians were charged with leading the people astray and with practicing magic, capital charges for which they faced death by stoning. Thus Martyn claims, "we should view *Sanhedrin* 43a as a composite reference to (a) the trial and stoning of Christians charged with "leading astray," and (b) the trial and crucifixion of Jesus." Support for this claim is sought in what Martyn sees as another 'composite' reference. The Jerusalem Talmud's *Sanhedrin* 25c, d<sup>16</sup> tells of the execution by stoning in Lydda of one Ben Stada, a rabbi accused of being a *Mesith* (= πλάνοϛ). The Babylonian Talmud's *Sanhedrin* 67a, however, adds the detail that Ben Stada was hanged on the eve of the Passover. This passage, like

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<sup>14</sup> For an English translation of *Sanhedrin* from *The Babylonian Talmud*, see Epstein 1935.

<sup>15</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> See Neusner 1982-94.



*Sanhedrin* 43a, contains the same confusion between stoning and hanging as well as having a reference to “leading astray.” Martyn believes that by a similar process the trial and execution of Ben Stada – perhaps for Christian teaching – has become fused with traditions about the execution of Jesus. This interpretation of these passages lends support to Martyn’s thesis that the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel is not solely reliant on Jesus traditions but is also depicting events in the life of his own community. He concludes that the intimation in 5:18 that Jesus was now sought on capital charges is a reflection of what was happening to Christians who sought to convert Jews in the evangelist’s city and that notwithstanding their recent excommunication, “they are, therefore, *in the technical and legal sense*, persons who lead the people astray. The law itself warns about them (Deut. 13:6 ff.) and provides the punishment due to them. They are to be legally arrested, tried, and if found guilty, executed.”<sup>17</sup>

As Martyn notes in the preface to the revised edition of *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, since its original publication in 1968 it had “won a rather wide following.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless his thesis is not without its critics – even amongst his admirers.<sup>19</sup> Particular criticism has been heaped upon Martyn’s insistence that the ‘Benediction Against Heretics,’ the *Birkat-ha-minim*, lies behind the hostility of the

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<sup>17</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Martyn 1979, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Amongst his admirers must be listed John Ashton, who, although thinking it “possible and permissible to cavil at a few small points,” rates Martyn’s book as second only to Bultmann’s commentary in the ‘league table’ of important books about the Fourth Gospel. Slightly less enthusiastic is Rudolf Schnackenburg in the second volume of his commentary. He notes that “The transparency with which the narrative reveals the underlying situation of the evangelist and his community is particularly great in John 9.” He then goes on to outline Martyn’s thesis, sums up it up with “This view may go too far,” and ends with a rather grudging attempt to compliment Martyn on his work. W.G. Kümmel is even less kind in his dismissal of Martyn’s work on the basis that it “remains wholly unproved.” As neither Martyn’s nor anyone else’s inferences from the Gospel text about the Johannine community can be ‘proved,’ we feel than Kümmel may have missed the point somewhat. Ashton 1991, pp. 107-109; Schnackenburg 1980, p. 239-239; Kümmel 1975, p. 231.

synagogue towards the Johannine Church. This ironically termed 'Benediction' was an addition to the twelfth of eighteen 'benedictions' forming part of the synagogue liturgy:

For the apostates let there be no hope, and let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our day. Let the *Nazarenes* and the *minim* be destroyed in a moment, and let them be blotted out of the book of life and not be ascribed together with the righteous.

We learn from the tractate *Berakoth* 28b in the *Babylonian Talmud*<sup>20</sup> that this was composed in Jamnia by one Samuel the Small at the request of Gamaliel II. Possibly the term *minim* (heretics) originally stood alone and referred to Christians by obvious implication with the addition of 'Nazarenes' (Christians) only at a later date when a more explicit reference was felt necessary. Scholarly consensus for long put this later date at around 85 C.E.<sup>21</sup> Meeks, however, has cast doubt that the traditions of *Berakoth* can be relied on and has followed other scholars in proposing that the *Birkat ha-minim* was produced considerably later *as a result* of the tensions identified by Martyn in John 5 and 9.<sup>22</sup> Further doubt is cast upon the part played by the 'Benediction' by references elsewhere in the New Testament to the violent and even fatal persecution of Christians

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<sup>20</sup> See Epstein 1948.

<sup>21</sup> Beasley-Murray 1987, p. lxxvii.

<sup>22</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 201, note 40. See also the personal correspondence from Meeks to Martyn reproduced in Martyn 1979, pp. 54-55, note 69, and the opinions expressed in Dodd 1963, p. 410; Sanders and Mastin 1968, p. 242; and Kysar 1975, p. 171. R. Kimelman argues that while the eventual use of the *Birkat ha-minim* in *Berakoth* does indicate hostility towards Christian Jews in the Synagogue, its origins lie in a more general cursing of unidentified Jewish sectarians. He goes on to argue that in the period in which the Fourth Gospel is likely to have been written, there is ample evidence that Christians were welcome in Synagogues and there was no cursing of Christians in Synagogue prayers. Thus Kimelman does not see the *Birkat ha-minim* as a "watershed" which had precipitated a Church-Synagogue split by the end of the first century. See Kimelman 1981. While arguing that the emergence of the *Birkat ha-minim* was a symptom rather than a cause of the Christian-Jewish antipathy to which the Fourth Gospel witnesses, Maurice Casey states that "Kimelman's presentation is faulty because it fails to take seriously the severity of Jewish opposition to Christianity in the earliest phases of Christian existence." See Casey 1996, pp. 105-109. P. W. van der Horst argues that the original purpose of the *Birkat ha-minim* had nothing to do with the specific emergence of Christians within the Synagogue but was a response to the need for calls inspiring national unity following the disasters of the Jewish Wars. Like Kimelman, van der Horst thinks the *Birkat ha-minim* came to be used against Christians, but only by the Fourth Century when Christianity came to be the adopted faith of the Roman Empire and persecutions against Jews began to intensify. See van der Horst 1993-94.

by the synagogue authorities.<sup>23</sup> Aware of these criticisms by the time the revised edition of *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* was published, Martyn elected to persevere with his original proposal about the role of the *Birkat ha-minim* in his thesis – mainly on the basis of the evidence gathered in his exegesis of John 5, not simply his work on John 9 as he had done in the first edition of his book.<sup>24</sup> This is puzzling only insofar as Martyn’s proposals do not stand or fall depending on the role of the ‘Benediction,’ which offers only peripheral support to his thesis. The Gospel itself is explicit in the use of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος, a process (if not a term) known elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>25</sup> From this we may infer that even if expulsion from the synagogue is unlikely on the *einmalig* level, it was perhaps a common fate for Jewish converts to Christianity in the early decades of the Church.

As we noted above, Martyn did no exegesis of John 5:19-47 to look for evidence in support of his thesis. This is understandable insofar as his primary concern was to look for clues in the text which might indicate measures taken by the synagogue authorities against the Johannine Christians. However, we believe that Martyn’s method, if applied to the whole of John 5 including the discourse, would have produced a number of useful indicators of Christian responses to the persecution they were undergoing. We shall reserve the main points we wish to make about the discourse of John 5 until chapter 5 of our study and our own exegesis which will follow in chapters 7-12. At this stage it is worth noting, however, that Martyn believes the “dramatic expansion” of the healing

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<sup>23</sup> Luke 6:22 may be a similar *einmalig* representation of circumstances with which the Gospel writer was familiar. Acts 6:7 – 8:1 and 13:50 as well as the Pauline recollection of 1 Thessalonians 2:14ff. are perhaps more to be relied on as historical indicators of prevailing conditions.

<sup>24</sup> Martyn 1979, pp. 54-57, notes 69 and 75.

<sup>25</sup> See note 23 above on this page. However, see also Casey 1996, pp. 98-101, where it is argued that it is a mistake to think of ἀποσυνάγωγος simply in terms of exclusion from particular buildings and more appropriate the think in terms of the inability to be included in any form of assembly or meeting with Jewish people.



story by the evangelist into a Sabbath dispute is little more than a means of getting Jesus to claim equality with God (verse 17) with the result that he is now liable to a capital charge (verse 18). We hope to show later that the discourse of John 5 has a number of discernable sections. These sections are:

- Christological claims 5:17-23
- Eschatological consequences of the christological claims 5:24-30
- Testimony in support of the christological claims 5:31-40
- Why “the Jews” can not accept the christological claims 5:41-44
- The testimony of Moses 5:45-47

We hope to go on to show that these passages may be used to demonstrate an acrimonious dialogue between the Johannine Church and the synagogue. Martyn has focused on one verse from John 5, verse 18, to show that the synagogue authorities were active in pursuing Jewish Christian preachers on capital charges. Examined by Martyn’s method, the above headings alone show that the Johannine Church was more than active in defending itself – verbally, at least. The discourse of John 5 shows that the Church was making christological claims that were anathema to their Jewish opponents. These claims were being developed into an eschatology that must have seemed very attractive to potential converts. The christological claims were being defended by reference to scripture proofs in a ‘rabbinic’ manner. Moses, the central pillar of Jewish piety, was being used by Christians to defame the synagogues and to justify the Christian stance on Sabbath observance. Furthermore, the very language of the John 5 discourse helps to reinforce the idea that an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ are involved in heated debate. One example will suffice here. The frequent use of the terms ὑμῖν and

ὕμεις<sup>26</sup> – *you people* – in the John 5 dialogue are placed by the evangelist in the utterances of Jesus when he is addressing “the Jews.” Jesus, of course, is himself a Jew and it is odd, to say the least, that he should address his Jewish opponents in a way that so sharply differentiates them from him. On Martyn’s *einmalig* level it is almost unthinkable that he would have addressed them in these terms and it is likely that the use of ὑμῖν, ὑμεῖς, and even ὑμῶν (verse 45 twice) are further evidence that the events of John 5 – including the discourse of 5:19-47 – are depicting the debates and conflicts between the Johannine Church and the synagogue authorities after they had separated and had adopted their entrenched opposing positions. We believe that Martyn’s method may be adapted and used to examine John 5:19-47 fully. A fuller exegesis of the discourse of John 5, may help us to reconstruct the other side of the argument Martyn was describing, although we accept that his primary concern was to demonstrate the attitudes of the synagogue authorities towards Christians rather than *vice versa*.

If one wished to be critical of Martyn’s method, it could be pointed out that perhaps he attempts too much in his interpretation of at least some parts of John’s narrative as what in the end must be termed *allegorical* representations of actual episodes in the life of the evangelist’s community – or, more succinctly, Martyn is trying to be too specific. If we are prepared to accept, as Martyn has proposed, that certain passages in the Fourth Gospel are representative (allegorical) then we must also ask what the value of such a representation (allegory) would be to its first readers and hearers if the events and characters being represented (allegorized) are entirely specific. If the initial audience of the Fourth Gospel was envisaged as extending beyond an inner circle of *cognoscenti*,

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<sup>26</sup> ὑμῖν occurs four times in the John 5 dialogue, in verses 19, 24, 25 and 38. ὑμεῖς has eight occurrences in verses 20, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 44, 45.

then the chances of specific events and characters being recognised in the way Martyn suggests diminishes sharply. Rather, the value of an allegorical text intended for wide readership lies in the applicability of the allegory to a variety of characters in multiple situations perhaps over a considerable length of time. This is not to suggest that Martyn is entirely mistaken in detecting what he calls a “two-level drama.” But it does seem fair to suggest that Martyn is perhaps trying to be too specific in his identification of events and characters being allegorized in John’s presentation of the events surrounding the career of Jesus.

However, the weakest point in Martyn’s exegesis of John 5 is that it is only convincing in the light of his exegesis of John 9. He wisely begins his book and develops his thesis with his explication of John 9 because that chapter is the most well developed *drama* in the Gospel apart from the passion narrative. It is John 9 that gives Martyn the best base from which to develop the thesis that the evangelist is composing a *drama* composed of *scenes* which can be understood on two levels rather than on one historical level – his *einmalig*. And it is only because his argument for John 9 is so convincing that he is prepared to propose (and we are prepared to accept) a similar explication of further parts of the Gospel, including John 5. Some critics of Martyn have proposed that his conclusions go too far. Others point out that some of the evidence he produces in support of his claims is weak or invalid, while at least one major New Testament commentator has belittled Martyn’s work on the basis that his thesis can not be proved.<sup>27</sup> The first two criticisms are valid, but only up to a point – Martyn has pursued his thesis with zeal beyond the point where criticism of part of his work can puncture

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<sup>27</sup> See notes 19 and 22 above on pp. 113 and 114 respectively. Tobias Hägerland is representative of a school of thought which wishes to abandon Martyn’s insights entirely on the grounds of criticism of Martyn’s exaggeratedly specific assertions. But as we have tried to show, a cautious approach to these assertions does not negate Martyn’s initial insights or the usefulness of his approach. See Hägerland 2003, pp. 309-322.



the whole. The third criticism seems to us to miss the point entirely. The value of Martyn's proposals is to be found in their usefulness as analytical tools for probing the text of the Fourth Gospel in the search for fresh understanding and not in the absoluteness of their 'truth' as a historical picture of what the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was up to when he sat down to write. Martyn's thesis is no more or less likely to be 'proved' than any other scholarly exposition of John's Gospel and it suffers nothing in comparison because of that. Therefore, despite the criticisms of some scholars and despite our reservations about his particular approach to John 5 compared to his work on John 9, we wish to follow the consensus opinion and agree that Martyn has produced a valuable method of examining the text. Viewed through Martyn's lens, the text of John 5 does reveal tensions – perhaps fatal tensions – between Church and synagogue, as the synagogue elders seek to arrest and execute those Jewish Christians who are missionaries amongst the Jews. But going beyond Martyn, his method may reveal there are also tensions between Jewish Christians and Jews for other reasons, between those who no longer venerated the Jewish Sabbath and Jews who still did so zealously – for only the non-observance of apostate Jews could have angered the synagogues so much. Then there are tensions that have arisen because of the christological and eschatological claims of the Johannine Church – claims that the synagogue wished to suppress and which the Church wished to proclaim all the louder.

## B. Jerome Neyrey

In his 1988 monograph, *An Ideology of Revolt*,<sup>28</sup> Jerome Neyrey attempts to show that the high christology of the Fourth Gospel, in relation to what he sees as lower and, therefore, earlier christology, is a reflection of changing social conditions and relationships in the community that produced the Gospel. His book is an interesting fusion of traditional form and redaction methods of textual criticism with an application of social-science modelling to his inferences about the Johannine community. Neyrey begins his analysis with an examination of John 5 in which he detects a number of layers of composition. Firstly, he suggests that a traditional healing story, represented by verses 1-9, has been expanded into a Sabbath controversy by the evangelist in verses 10-16 and that the reply to the 'charge' of Sabbath-breaking is found in verses 30-47. In the intervening section of verses 17-29 Neyrey believes he has found a later redactional insertion in which a newer 'higher' christology of Jesus as 'equal to God' is presented for the first time in the Gospel. The new christology emerges in the charge of blasphemy levelled at Jesus in verse 18 as a result of his statement in verse 17 and subsequent defence in verses 19-29. Neyrey leans heavily on the thesis of Anthony Harvey that much of the Fourth Gospel can be explained in terms of legal terminology and forensic processes<sup>29</sup> and he is right to have picked out John 5 for special attention in this respect, for regardless of one's views on its process of composition and the presence or otherwise of redacted passages, John 5 resonates with the language of the legal hearing. There are charges and a defence including counter-charges which ultimately place Jesus' accusers in 'the dock' as defendants. There are witnesses called to give testimony. There is a theme of judgement, where Jesus – initially the accused –

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<sup>28</sup> Neyrey 1988

<sup>29</sup> Harvey 1976

becomes the judge. Lastly there is Moses, astonishingly cast in the role of prosecuting counsel against “the Jews” at the great assize where Jesus is the judge. This is not a contentious part of Neyrey’s proposal, even though he several times refers to the evangelist’s use of legal terminology as Jesus’ participation in a “formal forensic process.” As the Gospel presents it, the process is distinctly ‘informal’ in John 5 and only after Jesus is arrested does the Gospel present a dramatic representation of a ‘formal’ legal process. The forensic character of John 5 is entirely literary, which, as we shall see, will have a direct bearing on our discussion of Neyrey’s conclusions.

After establishing that John 5:1-9 is a healing miracle story of a type familiar from the Synoptic Gospels, Neyrey detects the evangelist’s hand in the subsequent redaction into a Sabbath-controversy in verses 10-15.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, completion of a preliminary enquiry leads directly to a formal forensic process against Jesus. Now that the agent of the unlawful act has been properly identified, formal charges can be leveled against him personally. .... In a book on the forensic character of John’s Gospel, A.E. Harvey described the legal process reflected in John 5, calling attention to the charges lodged, the defense offered, and the role of witnesses in the defense. In general, the judges were probably the leading men of the city or the synagogue, the ones who administered justice “in the gate” (Amos 5:15; Deut. 19:12). As Harvey points out, their function was not primarily the investigation of facts but a decision on the admissibility and competence of the witnesses who spoke on behalf of or against the accused. In short, the essence of the forensic process lay in the battery of impressive witnesses who could be summoned to testify. As Harvey noted, the person with the more impressive array of witnesses normally won. Clearly, John 5 knows of a charge (5:16), a defence (5:30-47), and a marshaling of competent and admissible witnesses on Jesus’ behalf (5:31-39). No verdict is recorded.<sup>31</sup>

As we indicated above, we feel the need to cavil at the description of the controversy as a ‘formal forensic process,’ – after all, ‘no verdict is recorded.’ But this is not our only concern, for Neyrey then goes on to relate the testimony of the witnesses called in 5:31-

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<sup>30</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 10ff. – in the section headed “THE EARLY STRATUM: SIGN, CONTROVERSY, DEFENSE.”

<sup>31</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 10.



40 entirely to the Sabbath controversy,<sup>32</sup> denying that these verses are in any way related to 5:19-29, the passage which he believes is a later redaction. In fact, in his description of the four ‘witnesses’ called in Jesus’ defence in 5:31-40, Neyrey claims that John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, God the Father and the Scriptures in each case are offering a defence of Sabbath-breaking by Jesus. Yet strangely, Neyrey does little to demonstrate this – he merely asserts that it is so. Nor does he demonstrate that the testimony of the witnesses can not be related to the christological and eschatological claims of 5:19-29, again he merely asserts that this is the case.

Neyrey ends his discussion of the link between John 5:1-16 and 30-47 by positing their *Sitz im Leben* in terms of the history of the Johannine community. He suggests that the forensic nature of this passage is indicative of “a situation later than the missionary propaganda of the first disciples,” revealing a period when the young community was itself subjected to litigious, as well as other, forms of harassment:

This portrays the Johannine Christians in a rather defensive stance; the optimistic propaganda of its missionary posture yields to apologetic responses in forensic proceedings. The Christology here is most definitely not high, for it deals with Jesus as reforming prophet, an authorized agent from God. It suggests an early stage of the Gospel’s development.<sup>33</sup>

Neyrey next turns his attention to John 5:17-29,<sup>34</sup> which he believes is a later redactional insertion into the chapter in which Jesus’ rather odd comment in verse 17 leads to accusations of blasphemy and a threat of capital punishment in verse 18. Notwithstanding that verses 19-29 are more of a justification than a defence, Neyrey identifies this passage as totally unrelated to verses 30-37, believing they form “two

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<sup>32</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 15ff. – in the section headed “A SECOND REDACTION.”

different defenses in response to the two different charges.”<sup>35</sup> At no stage does Neyrey discuss the possibility that the second charge (verse 18) could have grown out of Jesus’ response (verse 17) to the first charge (verse 16), as he believes there has been a blunt redactional insertion and that the two blocks of material are fundamentally unrelated. Thus he argues *again* that the witnesses of 5:30ff. are testifying in defence of Jesus’ Sabbath-breaking and not in defence of his christological claims in 5:19-29, *again* without demonstrating why this is so.<sup>36</sup> He then goes on to argue that the two defences are unrelated on the grounds of content – 5:21-29 being eschatological while 5:30-47 contains no eschatology.<sup>37</sup> This, of course, is simply *not* the case. John 5:45 contains a clear reference to the eschaton and the roles of Christ and Moses in relation to “the Jews” and to a tribunal of some kind. Neyrey then follows this with a *third* assertion that the witnesses of 5:31-39 appear to testify in relation to Sabbath-breaking despite the fact that their testimony makes no mention of Sabbath-breaking.<sup>38</sup> He ends what he calls his “preliminary investigation” by noting that John 5 relates two “totally different forensic processes against Jesus” and summarizes his position with four points:

1. Different charges are brought in 5:16 and 5:18;
2. ‘The apologies in 5:19-29 and 30-47 argue totally different defences;
3. Topics common to both passages are handled differently;
4. Different christologies are revealed in the two passages.

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<sup>35</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 16-17.

<sup>37</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 17, where he says, ‘eschatological material is totally missing in 5:30-47.’ Puzzlingly, this is followed in the subsequent paragraph by, ‘The judgement materials, moreover, function differently in 5:21-29 and 41-47.’

<sup>38</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 17.

His conclusion is that “it can no longer be maintained that 5:16-47 is a seamless, homogenous text.”<sup>39</sup> We believe Neyrey has not been entirely successful in demonstrating that he is justified in reaching these conclusions by means of the arguments he has put forward.

Neyrey then follows up with a more detailed look at John 5:17-29,<sup>40</sup> in which he identifies the theological themes of the passage and seeks to relate them to the charge against Jesus in 5:18. He correctly points out that the charge contains two elements – not only is Jesus ‘equal to God,’ but he ‘makes himself’ equal to God. He is able to show that the “makes himself” element is dismissed as untrue by the assertions in verses 22, 26 and 27 that the powers Jesus possesses are given to him by the Father. Thus:

One part of the charge is false: Jesus never makes himself anything nor steals anything from God. All that he is and has, God has *given* to him.<sup>41</sup>

Neyrey then correctly points out that in answering the charge that Jesus is ‘equal to God,’ the passage seeks not to deny or dismiss the charge, but to affirm the truth of it. Jesus is ‘equal to God’ because God has granted him both creative and eschatological powers,<sup>42</sup> creative power in 5:19-20 and eschatological power in verses 22-29. Neyrey then goes on to show that verses 21-29 indicate four aspects of the eschatological power given to Jesus that reflect his equality with God:

Resurrection – based on verses 21, 25 and 28;

Judgement – based on verses 22 and 27-29;

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<sup>39</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 18ff. – in the section headed “A NEW CHARGE, A NEW DEFENSE.”

<sup>41</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 22-23.



Honour – based on verses 22-23;

Imperishability – based on verse 26.<sup>43</sup>

Neyrey does ask why the creative powers granted to Jesus in verses 19-20 are only hinted at as part of “all” the things the Father shows the son, while the eschatological powers of verses 21-29 are explained in such great detail – perhaps because it is a difficult question and almost impossible to answer – but he is certain that both powers are given to Jesus as the son by the Father and that the charge of verse 18, that Jesus is ‘equal to God,’ has been affirmed insofar as it is God’s will that it should be so.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the most puzzling feature of Neyrey’s exegesis is that he then goes on to relate at least part of the theology of John 5:19-29 to the sign of 5:1-9,<sup>45</sup> despite his earlier assertion that they must be unrelated because verses 19-29 are part of a redactional insertion. He demonstrates that in Jewish tradition the power of the divinity was considered to consist of two constituent elements – *dynamis poiētikē* and *dynamis basilikē*. Using examples from Philo,<sup>46</sup> he shows how these two divine attributes were respectively linked to the particular titles *theos* and *kyrios* and that the occurrences of these two titles throughout the Fourth Gospel are linked to an understanding that *theos* implies *dynamis poiētikē* and *kyrios* implies *dynamis basilikē*.<sup>47</sup> In relation to John 5 it is hard to see the relevance of the titles *theos* and *kyrios* as the former is not found in the

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<sup>43</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 23-24.

<sup>44</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 25ff. – in the section headed ‘GOD’S TWO POWERS.’ Apparently Neyrey believes the theological link between narrative and the discourse is to be inferred from the work of the putative redactor. If he is correct in this belief, how does he believe the discourse related to the narrative before the text was redacted? Neyrey does not answer this question.

<sup>46</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 25-26 gives a full list of the references from Philo as they are used in the text. They can also be found in his note 37 on p. 231. For a critical text and translation of the works of Philo, see Colson *et al.* 1929-53. An English translation only is given in Yonge 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Neyrey does allow for exceptions where *kyrios* is ‘open to the minimalist interpretation of “sir” or “master,”’ but he follows Bultmann’s suggestion that in certain instances it is used as a ‘cultic title.’ Neyrey 1988, p. 28 and Bultmann 1971, p. 695, note 2.

chapter and the sole occurrence of the latter in verse 7 is likely to have no more meaning than “sir.” Neyrey, himself, admits the tenuousness of the link and that *theos* is only implicit in 5:17-20.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, he is probably right to find a demonstration of the creative power God has given to Jesus – the *dynamis poiētikē* through which creation is maintained – in the healing miracle of 5:1-9. Although Neyrey does not attempt to find a link between the title *kyrios* and the healing miracle, nor does he seek to explain any of Jesus’ actions or statements in 5:1-9 in terms of *dynamis basilikē*, he has established that there is a link between the sign and the discourse which he explains in terms of *dynamis poiētikē*. Furthermore, he has established that the link is between the sign of verses 1-9 and verses 17-20 of the discourse – that is, between the sign and that part of the discourse which Neyrey has already stated to have been redacted in after the sign was already linked to verses 30-47 of the discourse by the Sabbath-controversy of verse 10-16. Although it is not impossible in the scenario that Neyrey has proposed that the *dynamis poiētikē* link between sign (verses 1-9) and the later redaction into the discourse (verses 17-20) could be the artful creation of the redactor responsible for the insertion, Neyrey does not address this issue. Indeed he seems to be unaware that ultimately it tells against his redaction hypothesis that this link exists. Were a link to be found between the sign and the part of the discourse which Neyrey believes was first attached to it, while no link were to be found between the sign and the part of the discourse he proposes is a later redaction, then his redaction theory would appear to stand on firmer ground. But the link Neyrey has found gives no help to his redaction hypothesis at all.

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<sup>48</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 28.

Prior to listing the conclusions of his study of John 5, Neyrey briefly discusses the *Sitz im Leben* of the final redaction of verses 17-29 into the chapter as he has proposed.<sup>49</sup>

After reviewing much of what he said already, he addresses the composition process under the heading of ‘*Collection*.’<sup>50</sup> Here he proposes that although 5:21-29 was a late redactional insertion into John 5, not all the material these verses contain was brand new. For example he claims that:

- 5:24 – represents established Johannine eschatology as already found in 3:17-18.
- 5:21 – represents ‘echoes’ of the ‘earlier’ bringing of life mentioned in 10:10 and 20:31.
- 5:25 – ‘might be said to reflect an older tradition in the Fourth Gospel, related to an earlier version of the raising of Lazarus.’<sup>51</sup>

Thus he feels that 5:21, 24 and 25 represent what were, by the time of the redaction he proposes, “characteristic Johannine eschatological materials that had been part of the Fourth Gospel for quite some time.”<sup>52</sup> He then points out, quite correctly, the tension that exists between these verses and 5:22 and 27-29, where the current possession of *eternal life* is hard to reconcile with the future resurrection to *life* or to *judgement*. Noting that there are two eschatological traditions lying side-by-side in these verses, Neyrey asks, “Who put them side by side, and why?”<sup>53</sup> In answer to this he states that his own hypothesis of christological growth from *low* to *high* excludes Bultmann’s proposal of an ecclesiastical redactor inserting only verses 27-29 in order to make the Fourth Gospel more acceptable to the wider Church. Neyrey’s proposal *requires* that

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<sup>49</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 29ff. – in the section headed ‘THE COMPOSITION AND *SITZ IM LEBEN* OF 5:17-29.’

<sup>50</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 31-33.

<sup>51</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 31-32.

<sup>52</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 32.



the full eschatological power, that which is explicitly possessed of Jesus in 5:27-29 and which is fundamentally part of his equality with God, be an original component of verses 17-29 because it is expressive of the newer, higher christology which the passage contains.

Under the heading of "Occasion" Neyrey then seeks to place his proposed redaction of John 5:17-29 into a recognisable framework of the story of the Johannine community.<sup>54</sup> On the basis of an "equal to God christology," he suggests that the redaction belongs "to the same period of Johannine history in which the Prologue (1:1-18) and the confession of Thomas (20:28) were added to the Fourth Gospel,"<sup>55</sup> a time of schism from the synagogue followed by persecution and death threats. While not speculating as to why the christological confessions of John 5 that led to the split with the synagogue should have risen to such "special heights," he does propose their social usefulness once the Johannine Christians had gone their own way. The christological and eschatological claims of John 5 offer a guarantee of eternal righteousness for those who confess and follow Jesus as well as defining sanctions to be taken against those who oppose him and his followers. Neyrey correctly suggests that these beliefs would act as a force for social cohesion in an oppressed and persecuted Johannine community.

We have followed Neyrey's argument from its beginnings in a proposal of a late redaction of verses 17-29 into the already existing text of John 5 through to his concluding remarks which propose that the higher christological ideas present in the redacted material were necessary for the maintenance of a persecuted Johannine community. Along the way we have looked at his exegesis of the proposed redactional

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<sup>54</sup> Neyrey 1988, pp. 33-35.

<sup>55</sup> Neyrey 1988, p. 35.

material and we have examined his theories about where some of the *newer* material came from. Had Neyrey been proposing a theory about the growth of the Johannine tradition we would have had little to disagree with him about, for we are largely in agreement with him that the christology of the Fourth Gospel does indicate signs of its development. We agree too that the eschatological statements of John 5 are in need of a reconciliation beyond that which Bultmann proposed. We also have no quarrel with his proposal that the christology and eschatology of John 5 were factors promoting social cohesion in a beleaguered community, although we would like such a theory to look at the genesis of the ideas as well as their subsequent utility. The quarrel we have with Neyrey is that he considers it necessary to posit a redaction of the actual *text* of John 5 in order to begin a discussion of these matters. We believe that all the inferences that Neyrey has drawn from his hypothesis of a *redacted text*, and with which we are in broad agreement, could just as validly have been drawn from a hypothesis of an *evolving tradition* which ultimately produced the text of John 5 as we now have it. As we pointed out earlier, Neyrey's argument from the text for a late redaction of verses 17-21 into John 5 was unconvincing at least and while we are happy to agree with some of his later inferences, we do not feel that his hypothesis has proved that John 5 is not a unitive text.

### C. James McGrath

In his 2001 monograph, *John's Apologetic Christology*,<sup>56</sup> James McGrath's principal interest is in tracing the growth of the christology of the Fourth Gospel in terms of the

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<sup>56</sup> McGrath 2001

role of theology in legitimising the stance of the Johannine Christians in their conflict with the synagogue. In essence his hypothesis is that in certain key passages in the Fourth Gospel where christological claims are made in the face of opposition from “the Jews,” the evangelist is engaged in ‘legitimation’ in its sociological sense, and that this has been the ‘catalyst’ which has accelerated a process which has taken traditional early Christian ideas and motifs, transforming them into the distinctive portrait of Jesus and the theological ideas which the Fourth Gospel presents. With an awareness that the origins of the Johannine christological picture can not be found in the christology itself, nor in Jewish criticisms of the Johannine presentation, McGrath is keen to emphasise the importance of searching for evidence of ‘pre-Johannine’ points of conflict from which the distinctive Johannine christology could have grown in a legitimating process. He also shows an awareness of the weakness of previous approaches that have maintained that the Johannine christology was purely the result of conflict with the synagogue and of approaches that attribute the conflict purely to the christology. McGrath, therefore, proposes a dynamic model of christological development in which the two factors interact continually so that the Johannine christology grows as the conflict with the synagogue deepens.<sup>57</sup> In terms of its christological content John 5 ‘provides a natural starting point’ for McGrath’s study, in which he clearly identifies ‘the points at issue in the christological controversy’ and seeks to detect a pattern of growth from broader – and presumably older – issues recognisable elsewhere in the New Testament.

McGrath’s examination of John 5 begins with a search for traditional material in the story of the healing miracle and Sabbath controversy forming the first part of the

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<sup>57</sup> McGrath’s assessment of previous approaches to the study of Johannine christology is given in the introductory chapter of his book – McGrath 2001, pp. 4-34. His own methodology is set out with a brief explanation of legitimation theory in pp. 34-47.



chapter and he immediately notes six traces of a relationship of some kind with Mark 2:1-12. No literary dependence on Mark's Gospel is suggested, but McGrath feels these six points indicate a dependence on 'a very similar tradition, and perhaps an independent version of the same basic story:'

1. Both the Marcan and the Johannine stories involve the healing of an invalid of some kind – someone who needs help in moving around.
2. Both stories involve a healing in which Jesus tells the invalid to 'get up, pick up his mat and walk.' As McGrath notes, the Greek in each case is "practically identical, the only difference between them being an additional *καὶ* in the Marcan version."
3. Despite the introduction of a Sabbath controversy into the Johannine story telling against similarity with the Marcan story, McGrath notes that from the presence of Sabbath healing controversies in other Synoptic locations (Mark 2:23-8; 3:1-4; Luke 13:10-16) he can infer that "healing on the Sabbath is also a traditional motif rather than a Johannine creation."
4. In both the Marcan and the Johannine stories "Jesus is accused of blasphemy and/or doing what only God can do."
5. In both stories Jesus talks about "sin and being made well."
6. Both stories initiate a discussion which includes mention of "the authority of the Son of Man" (Mark 2:10 and John 5:27).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 81-82.

McGrath then goes on to list a number of arguments posed by other commentators against there being any relationship between the Johannine and the Marcan stories, the first three objections by Raymond Brown, the remainder by Sanders and Mastin:

1. Mark sets his story in Capernaum while the Johannine story takes place in Jerusalem.
2. There are many differences of detail. In Mark the invalid is lowered through a roof by his friends, while the Johannine invalid lies alone by a pool.
3. There is a difference of emphasis – “a miracle illustrative of Jesus’ power to heal sin vs. a healing with only a passing reference to sin.”
4. “In Mark the man has four friends, in John nobody.”
5. “In Mark they take the initiative, in John Jesus does.”
6. “In Mark Jesus sees their faith, in John faith is not mentioned.”
7. “In Mark Jesus forgives the man before healing him, in John Jesus heals him and then warns him not to go on sinning.”
8. The Marcan Jesus “gives offence by telling the man he is forgiven,” the Johannine Jesus by Sabbath-breaking and “making himself equal to God.”<sup>59</sup>

In dealing with these objections, McGrath feels that the first two are easily explained by the needs of the evangelist who had to adapt his story to fit into a Jerusalem setting. He dismisses the third objection as “weak” in that it is as much a similarity as a difference. The remaining objections are dealt with in terms of the evangelist’s editing and possible conflation of two or more traditional stories and McGrath concludes that the objections

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<sup>59</sup> McGrath refers to Brown 1966(1), pp. 208-209 and Sanders and Mastin 1968, pp. 160-161.

raised, while probably precluding a literary dependence between John and Mark, “do not preclude an original common tradition lying behind both.”<sup>60</sup>

McGrath then questions the opinions of those commentators who regard the “issue which is addressed here in John, in connection with the Sabbath healing, as fundamentally different from that addressed in John’s source and in the Synoptics.”<sup>61</sup>

He takes the view that the Johannine and Marcan passages address the same issue in different ways – Mark by having Jesus accused of blasphemy on account of a claim to be able to forgive sins (a divine prerogative), John by having Jesus accused of the blasphemy of making himself equal to God in the course of a Sabbath controversy – both accounts following on from a healing miracle. Thus, “the basic claim being made is essentially identical, namely, that Jesus is capable of doing what only God can do.”<sup>62</sup>

McGrath is confident that he has shown that the “equal to God” blasphemy is a “pre-Johannine” motif and not, therefore, an invention of the evangelist or his community.

Where John departs from the other Gospels is in providing the lengthy reply by Jesus which forms the discourse of John 5, “whereas in the Synoptics the miracle itself is deemed sufficient to silence opposition and legitimate Jesus’ actions.”<sup>63</sup> This, McGrath feels, might be evidence that the christological claims of the Johannine Church, while not being entirely new, were becoming “more problematic as time went on, so that John needed to address the issue in a fuller way.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 85, where he draws on the support of Sanders – Sanders and Mastin 1968, p. 161.

<sup>61</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 85, note 18 lists a number of commentators who have taken such a view, including Bultmann 1971, p. 247; Smith 1984, p. 121; Painter 1991, pp. 221-222 – although this reference to Painter seems to be a misprint in McGrath as we found Painter’s discussion of the issue at Painter 1991, p. 181.

<sup>62</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 85-86 and p. 86, note 20, where he agrees with MacGregor 1928, pp. 173-174 and Lindars 1972, pp. 218-219 – which again is probably a misprint as we found Lindars’s discussion of this issue at pp. 219-220 of his commentary.

<sup>63</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 86.

<sup>64</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 86.



McGrath next turns his attention to the accusation made against Jesus in John 5:18. He proposes that whilst a translation of this verse along the lines of, “He was calling God his own Father, *thereby* making himself equal with God,” is justifiable on grammatical grounds, “from the perspective of cultural anthropology it is extremely difficult to maintain.”<sup>65</sup> McGrath argues that in the Mediterranean cultures contemporary with both Jesus and with the Johannine community the concept of sonship would have specifically excluded equality and would, in contrast, “immediately imply obedience and dependence.”<sup>66</sup> A claim of equality with one’s father would, therefore, be taken as a mark of rebellion or at best inappropriate behaviour. Thus McGrath argues that the correct sense of the accusation of “the Jews” in 5:18 is given by, ‘He claimed that God was his Father, although [he was] making himself equal with God.’<sup>67</sup> The claim of “the Jews” is based on their observation that Jesus’ claim to divine sonship is invalid because his behaviour as a son is inappropriate in that he is claiming to hold prerogatives that can belong only to his Father. Furthermore, “the Jews” might not object to a claim of divine sonship if it was accompanied by what they perceived as appropriate behaviour and it is the perception that Jesus ‘makes himself’ equal with God that they find so unacceptable. Divine sonship is not unimaginable. Equality with God is not inconceivable were God to will it so. But *making oneself* equal to God is beyond the pale and also incompatible with divine sonship. McGrath concludes this issue by saying:

The key issue here does not appear to have been equality with God *per se*, but whether Jesus is *making himself* equal with God. That is to say, ‘the Jews’ do not regard Jesus as someone appointed by God, who would thus bear God’s authority

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<sup>65</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 86-87. See also McGrath’s brief earlier look at this issue in McGrath 1998, pp. 470-473.

<sup>66</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 87.

<sup>67</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 88.

and speak and act on his behalf, but as one who seeks his own glory, a messianic pretender who blasphemously puts himself on a par with God.<sup>68</sup>

In his examination of the discourse of John 5, McGrath first looks at the evangelist's use of the motif of Jesus as God's obedient Son and agent.<sup>69</sup> As neither of these ideas are unique to the Fourth Gospel in the New Testament, McGrath feels that the Johannine contribution is the expansion of the implications of *agency* (where the one who is sent is like the one who has sent him) to the point where Jesus as God's agent has become a central tenet of the Fourth Gospel's christology in a way that is not seen in earlier New Testament writings *and* to have combined the agency motif with the idea of Jesus as the obedient son of the Father. The evangelist has drawn out the implications of the traditional beliefs of sonship and agency in combination to allow Jesus, as the obedient son and agent, to remain obedient as a son while assuming the divine prerogatives as an agent. Thus, in relation to agency and sonship, McGrath is able to say that 'John emphasizes these aspects of the Jesus tradition to make the point that Jesus resembles an agent appointed by God rather than a rebel against God, because he is constantly pointing attention away from himself to the Father who sent him.'<sup>70</sup> McGrath argues that both Christians and Jews would have been aware from the Hebrew scriptures of some rare instances of the delegation of divine powers,<sup>71</sup> but he sees the extension of the divine prerogatives through Jesus as God's agent to the question of Sabbath activity as a new development, yet one which may have been persuasive – even

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<sup>68</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 89-95. The christology of Jesus as God's agent – agency christology – is a theme which runs through McGrath's book, forming one of the central pillars of his thesis. The subject is formally introduced and explained in his second chapter, pp. 60-62.

<sup>70</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 90.

<sup>71</sup> McGrath has in mind here principally the stories of Elijah, and he refers to Lindars 1972, p. 222 and Neyrey 1988, p. 75 for support. See McGrath pp. 90-91 and p. 91, note 42.

to some non-Christian Jews.<sup>72</sup> The evangelist's combination of sonship language and agency language is not, however, entirely harmonious. As McGrath notes:

The resulting portrait sets up a tension between equality language and subordination language that would exert a great influence on the course of later christological development. It also lays much greater stress on Jesus as life-giver and judge than did earlier works.<sup>73</sup>

Following the lead of C.H. Barrett's argument that the whole of the Fourth Gospel should be interpreted through its prologue,<sup>74</sup> McGrath then looks for a link between the language of agency in John 5 and the evangelist's Logos christology. He notes examples of the presentation of a link of agency language with the Word of God as early as Isaiah 55,<sup>75</sup> with Wisdom in Proverbs and elsewhere,<sup>76</sup> and with the Logos in numerous locations in Philo.<sup>77</sup> While not suggesting a direct literary dependence of the Gospel upon Philo, nor even that the evangelist knew Philo's works, McGrath suggests that there is a similarity of thinking indicative of a shared milieu and a common heritage of ideas. Philo presents the Logos as "God himself in his interaction with the created order," at the same time as describing the Logos as "*fulfilling this divine prerogative in terms of a son obediently imitating his father.*"<sup>78</sup> Thus these concepts were not entirely new when used by the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel and if his readers could have been assumed to have been familiar with their previous usage, their use could have been

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<sup>72</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 92, which refers to Barrett's concluding remarks on John 1:1 in his commentary – "John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse." See Barrett 1978, p. 156.

<sup>75</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 92, which refers to Isaiah 55:11.

<sup>76</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 92-93 and p. 93, note 49, where reference is given to Proverbs 8:22-31 and to Wisdom of Solomon 7:22, 8:4-6 and 9:2.

<sup>77</sup> The references to Philo, given at McGrath 2001, p. 93 and in note 50 there, are *De Confusione Linguarum* 63, *De Cherubim* 77, *De Fuga et Inventione* 94-105, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 54. For translations of the works of Philo, see Colson *et al.* 1929-53 and Yonge 1997.

<sup>78</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 93. The italics are McGrath's.



thought of as not merely acceptable, but even as convincing arguments which would appeal not only to Christians but perhaps also to potential Jewish converts.<sup>79</sup>

The use of the term *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* in John 5:27 gives McGrath his next opportunity to search for the reshaping of earlier traditions in the Fourth Gospel. Noting that the title 'Son of Man' is used in John 5 in close proximity to statements that Jesus has been given authority to judge and that some will be resurrected to life and others to judgement,<sup>80</sup> McGrath argues that on one level the evangelist was simply using an inherited tradition, probably of Danielic origin, where "the apocalyptic Son of Man was widely accepted to carry out the role of judge, and if Jesus is the Son of Man, then he is rightly regarded as occupying the role of judge."<sup>81</sup> While this understanding would be widely accepted in Christian circles, it would at least be understood by their Jewish opponents even if found to be unacceptable. This, McGrath feels, is a minimalist interpretation of how the evangelist used what was by then established Christian tradition with its origins in Jewish apocalyptic and he wishes to show that perhaps the evangelist was working harder than this interpretation indicates.

In pointing to parallels between the Fourth Gospel and the *Testament of Abraham*, McGrath rightly dismisses as "far-fetched" any suggestion that the evangelist's use of *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* is a direct reference to the *Testament's* Abel ben Adam.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, he is attracted to the idea that the evangelist is drawing upon an established Jewish tradition that humanity will be judged by a human being and he

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<sup>79</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> In 5:27a and in 5:29 respectively.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 95.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, 13:1-5, translated by E.P. Sanders in Charlesworth 1983, pp. 889-890.

points to a New Testament motif displayed in Hebrews 2:17 and 4:15-16, where the humanity of the earthly Jesus has become essential to the risen Christ in his role as redeemer. Thus McGrath proposes that the use of *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* in 5:27 has “a double appeal” in that it combines two traditions that would be understood by both Jews and Christians. Furthermore, such an interpretation serves to emphasise the humanity of Jesus which is already being interpreted in the light of the prologue’s emphasis on Jesus’ pre-existence. Thus the evangelist can be said to be cleverly using “motifs traditionally associated with the state of the *exalted* Jesus to defend the authority attributed to the *earthly* Jesus, thereby making another alteration to the tradition which represents a subtle but nonetheless significant development.”<sup>83</sup>

McGrath’s examination of John 5:31-47 is very brief. He notes that witnesses are called to testify on behalf of Jesus:

- John the Baptist – respected in Jewish circles,
- God the Father – whose work Jesus is doing,
- the Scriptures – through which God the Father is revealed
- Moses – the writer of (some of) the Scriptures.<sup>84</sup>

McGrath sees the evangelist putting his opponents under pressure here by questioning their understanding of things they themselves hold to be sacred and for which they would believe themselves to be possessed of a unique right to interpret. From the Christian point of view, the witness testimonies serve to reinforce not only the truth of

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<sup>83</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 100-101.

their christological and eschatological claims about Jesus as God's son and agent, but also their belief that the claim of "the Jews" that he was a blasphemer are groundless.<sup>85</sup>

McGrath summarizes his findings in his examination of John 5 by noting that the issue behind the narrative of 5:1-18 is essentially the same as that behind related passages elsewhere in the New Testament – 'namely that of Jesus doing what it has traditionally been believed that only God can or should do.' He also notes that in the dialogue of 5:19-47, which is a response to accusations by "the Jews," he had found that the evangelist had taken the traditional motifs of agency, sonship, Son of Man and Logos and had developed them in original ways which accentuated Jesus as God's agent and also sought to strike a balance between Jesus' humanity and pre-existence. Noting that these developments are used to shape material through which Jesus speaks to accusing opponents, he concludes with:

Given that these distinctive developments occur in the context of a response to Jewish objections, it is logical to conclude that the developments are the result of the process of legitimation. The distinctive way John uses the traditions he inherited, the way he combines various traditional motifs and ideas, and the implications he draws from them, are the result of his use of them as part of an attempt to defend his community's beliefs about Jesus.<sup>86</sup>

James McGrath's examination of John 5 is notable for a number of factors. On the positive side there is a methodology which combines a search for traditional ideas and motifs undergirding the text with a search for signs of their development in the light of an accepted social-scientific theory about the growth of knowledge. This is combined with an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches and a

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<sup>85</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 101.

<sup>86</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 101-102. Note the tendency towards circularity here which McGrath himself discusses in his introduction.



refreshing conciseness of approach in following through his insights. This is illustrated by his treatment of John 5:1-18 where he considers nearly every aspect of the narrative from why Jesus is in Jerusalem to the nature of the charges of blasphemy levelled against Jesus, unearthing traditional undercurrents with remarkable frequency. Similarly, he follows the growth of agency christology and Son of Man christology in the dialogue of 5:1-47 with impressive thoroughness and freshness.

Given the purely christological nature of McGrath's study, it is perhaps unfair to sound a negative tone about his coverage of John 5, as it is possible to see areas of the text which might yield rich rewards if studied by his method but which are not strictly christological. Perhaps McGrath sensed this himself in his pitifully brief examination of the witness testimonies of 5:31-47 which he must have felt compelled to mention because of their obvious contribution as legitimating material. Nevertheless, one wonders what results might have emerged had he looked for older traditions behind 5:24 where it talks of eternal life and not coming to judgement. Would McGrath have found parallels between these ideas and those proposed in Matthew 13:43?<sup>87</sup> What of John 5:25, where to hear Jesus' voice is to live? Is there a similar tradition of having life to be found in Luke 10:28?<sup>88</sup> Would McGrath's method reveal traditions in the Synoptic Gospels which are reflected in the anti-Jewish polemic of John 5:41-44?<sup>89</sup> Matthew 23:1-8 is only one possibility. As these passages are not christological in the purest sense, we can not expect McGrath to answer these questions for us, for like all investigations, his was restricted to a specific area – in his case christology. We,

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<sup>87</sup> Matthew 13:43 is the conclusion of Jesus' explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds related at 13:24-30. No mention of judgement is made in this context, although there is a separation of evildoers from the righteous by angels. The reward of the righteous is, however, some form of continued existence with God in his kingdom.

<sup>88</sup> Here Jesus is asked by the lawyer about the inheritance of eternal life. The answer is that life can be obtained and this can be done by righteous observance of the law.

<sup>89</sup> In this particular example Jesus' target is specifically the Pharisees. But note also the reference to Moses, another motif that surfaces in John 5.

however, shall return to these questions in a later chapter as they have a direct bearing on the present study.

#### D. Andrew Lincoln

In his book *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*,<sup>90</sup> Andrew Lincoln's principal thesis is that the narrative of the Fourth Gospel is an extended lawsuit metaphor. The basis of this thesis is the presence in the Gospel text from the prologue to the epilogue of a great deal of legal language. John repeatedly talks of witnessing, testimony and judgement and Lincoln believes that these legal terms are deliberately placed so as to give the entire narrative the structure of an extended trial or lawsuit. He is not, however, suggesting that the Gospel seeks to record in documentary form an actual extended trial involving the historical Jesus. Rather he is arguing that the lawsuit motif has been used by the Gospel's author as an extended narrative metaphor and that, therefore, it is possible to use the lawsuit metaphor as an interpretative tool in the study of the text. Our task here is simply to look at Lincoln's identification of legal terminology in the Gospel text and to attempt to follow how he sees the structure of an extended trial in the use of this language.

Lincoln sees the lawsuit motif as forming a twofold *inclusio* around both the public ministry of Jesus and also the entire Gospel narrative. The first *inclusio* is formed by the testimony of John the Baptist concerning both himself (1:19-28) and Jesus (1:29-34) and the final pericope of the public ministry section (12:17-50), where Jesus speaks

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<sup>90</sup> Lincoln 2000. However, see also Lincoln's initial look at this subject in Lincoln 1994.

about judgement. The second *inclusio* is formed by the testimony of the Baptist and the testimony of the beloved disciple at 21:24. Within the Gospel narrative itself, Lincoln sees the lawsuit motif as explicit in the controversies of 5:19-47 and 8:12-59, while he spots it merely emerging at various other loci – e.g. 2:25; 3:11-23; 4:39-44; and 7:7. He argues that for the reader of the Gospel the motif should be “dominant enough to color the way in which the reader interprets the dispute and its aftermath in 7:14-52 (cf. v.51) and the interrogation of the blind man in John 9 (cf. 9:39).”<sup>91</sup>

In the farewell discourses Lincoln sees the motif occurring at 14:16, 26 with reference to the paraclete and at 15:26-27 and 16:7-11 with reference to the paraclete *and* the disciples. While he sees the lawsuit motif hard at work in the trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16a), he sees it surfacing again at the culmination of the passion narrative in the narrator’s testimony following the death of Jesus (19:35). Thus Lincoln believes that “both the pervasiveness and positioning of the motif encourage readers to view the narrative, as a whole, from the perspective of a trial.”<sup>92</sup> However, this is a trial of cosmic dimensions – as may be inferred from the Gospel’s prologue. The protagonists are God and Jesus versus the unbelieving world. “So ultimately the issues in the trial that follows are to be seen as not simply between Jesus and Israel but as between God and the world.”<sup>93</sup>

Certainly Lincoln is successful in showing that the Gospel is pervaded by language of a forensic nature. But the idea that the absence of a Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin in John is compensated for by the evangelist having Jesus ‘tried’ in public during his

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<sup>91</sup> Lincoln 2000, p. 22.

<sup>92</sup> Lincoln 2000, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Lincoln 2000, p. 22.



ministry is not a new one.<sup>94</sup> However, the originality of Lincoln's thesis lies in his seeing Jesus on trial before the Jewish people throughout the whole of the public ministry narrative. In this extended trial, Lincoln lists the seven witnesses called to give evidence: John the Baptist; Jesus himself; Jesus' works; God the Father; the scriptures; the Samaritan woman; and the crowd who testify to the raising of Lazarus. Each of these witnesses offers testimony on behalf of Jesus, confirming his identity and the truth of his message. However, in addition to the calling of witnesses who offer testimony, the lawsuit motif also manifests itself in judgement. Initially, judgement is seen to be exercised by the leaders of the Jewish people and by Pilate, the Roman procurator, who preside as judges over Jesus and those who testify on his behalf. However, "because of his unique relationship with God, Jesus can function not only as chief witness in the trial but also as judge."<sup>95</sup> Thus as the narrative progresses the tables are turned and the would-be judges become the accused while the accused becomes the judge, bringing judgement upon his opponents.

Lincoln's argument is that the legal language pervading the Fourth Gospel has been deliberately structured in such a way as to suggest that the narrative is laid out as a trial. The implication of this is that we are to infer that the trial or lawsuit motif was used by the Gospel's author as an extended metaphor in his composition. The weakness of Lincoln's thesis is that he is not entirely successful in his attempt to demonstrate that the structure of a trial or lawsuit can be traced sequentially through the pages of the Gospel narrative in a way which suggests the entire Gospel is a lawsuit metaphor. At no point in his book does he really map out a structure in the use of forensic language which corresponds with any recognised tribunal proceedings, ancient or modern. Simply to

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<sup>94</sup> See for example Saabe 1991, an essay which is neither referred to by Lincoln nor included in his bibliography.

<sup>95</sup> Lincoln 2000, p. 24.

point out that there is a good deal of legal terminology present, which there certainly is, is not tantamount to that terminology being arranged in the form of a trial or in the form of some other kind of legal hearing. Nevertheless, it is clear that certain passages within the Gospel narrative display in themselves elements of the lawsuit metaphor which Lincoln has described, John 5 being a case in point. Here the questioners of the healed man begin as both accusers and potential punishers of Jesus. By 5:47 they have themselves become the accused with Jesus as their judge and Moses as their prosecutor.<sup>96</sup> However, as a lawsuit metaphor the discourse of John 5 is a self-contained unit – the trial begins and ends in the passage. It is hard to see how John 5 fits in as part of a larger lawsuit running through the Fourth Gospel.

Part of Lincoln's thesis is that the author of the Fourth Gospel has appropriated the lawsuit motif from Isaiah 40-55 in the Septuagint.<sup>97</sup> Lincoln bases this claim on a number of linguistic similarities between the forensic language of John and the forensic Greek of the Septuagint's Deutero-Isaiah and also on the claims of some commentators that Isaiah 40-55 is structured as a form of cosmic lawsuit between God and the nations. However, the use of the motif in a structured way is hard to spot in a reading of Isaiah 40-55 and this is perhaps reflected in Lincoln's reluctance to map out how exactly the lawsuit motif works in these chapters. He is fortunate in having the commentaries on Isaiah to fall back on.<sup>98</sup> However, J.D.W. Watts has pointed out in his substantial commentary on Isaiah that the form-critical work of the mid-twentieth century which identified "polemic genres including trial speeches and disputations" in Deutero-Isaiah

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<sup>96</sup> Lincoln 2000, pp. 73-81.

<sup>97</sup> For the Greek text of the Septuagint, see Rahlfs 1935 and Brenton 1851. For assessments of the Fourth Gospel's reliance on Deutero-Isaiah, see Ball 1996, pp. 265-269 and Williams 2000, pp. 299-303.

<sup>98</sup> See Lincoln 2000, p. 38, note 6, where he refers to C. Westermann's *Isaiah 40-66* (London; SCM, 1966), A. Schoors' *I Am Your God and Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL-LV* (Leiden; Brill, 1973) and R.F. Melugin's *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* (Berlin; de Gruyter, 1976).

has been largely superseded by an approach closer to the *ante quo* where such units are studied as part of a larger whole rather than on their own.<sup>99</sup> Other than his reference to “trial speeches and disputations,” Watts makes no mention in his commentary of a lawsuit motif in Deutero-Isaiah, which is perhaps not too surprising given the relatively minor role played by forensic language in what is a substantial corpus of material. Nevertheless, given that some forensic terminology is present in Deutero-Isaiah, it should not be too surprising to find some overlap with the Fourth Gospel if, as seems to be the case, forensic terminology was the common-place parlance of “polemic genres ... and disputations.”<sup>100</sup>

Lincoln is somewhat more successful in his use of the lawsuit motif and legal language as a lens through which to examine the social background to the writing of the Fourth Gospel. With a rather minimal acknowledgement to the work of J.L. Martyn, Lincoln believes John’s use of legal language and the lawsuit motif reflects a background where the evangelist’s community was feeling itself to be undergoing a trial of some kind.<sup>101</sup> Lincoln’s proposal is that the forensic vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel reflects a situation in which Jewish Christians were being put on trial by their synagogue authorities and were subject to a judgement which resulted in their expulsion from the Synagogue. In parallel with this, Lincoln also sees the Johannine Christians ultimately standing in judgement over those in the Synagogue who would judge them and also over those who betrayed their community by first accepting then rejecting Christ. Lincoln may be pushing his argument a little too far here in seeing formal tribunals behind the narrative and one wonders whether the Gospel’s forensic vocabulary was not

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<sup>99</sup> Watts 1987, pp. 72-73.

<sup>100</sup> See, however, Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 11-23, where the format of the Old Testament *rib* or lawsuit pattern is clearly delineated.

<sup>101</sup> Lincoln 2000, pp. 265-285.



simply a reflection of the language used in polemic exchanges in the evangelist's community.

As a key to opening the door to an increased understanding of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement, Andrew Lincoln's proposal that John be understood as an extended lawsuit metaphor borrowed from Deutero-Isaiah is not entirely successful. Furthermore his attempt to portray the Gospel's soteriology and judgemental eschatology as the positive and negative outcomes of an ongoing cosmic trial seems stretched at times. However, his insights into the language of judgement, witness and testimony as a reflection of the bitter disputes between Church and Synagogue underlying the Gospel represent a useful application of socio-historical analysis and this section of his book is easily the most successful. The failure of his analysis as a whole undoubtedly lies in the tendentious character of his literary proposal and his carrying of this theme on into his theological discussion.

## **Findings**

When viewed in the context of his wider thesis and particularly alongside his exegesis of John 9, J.L. Martyn's study of John 5 has produced a valuable method for examining the text which reveals possible motivations and methods by which the synagogue authorities carried out their persecution of the Johannine Christians – or at least those former adherents of Judaism who persisted in their Christian mission amongst the synagogue community. We have suggested that perhaps Martyn's method could be extended to help throw light on other areas of Church-synagogue tension such as

Sabbath observance and the Johannine Church's strident christological and eschatological claims.

We are in agreement with Jerome Neyrey that the text of John 5 indicates the presence of a developing christology. We also agree with him that the eschatological statements of John 5 do not sit easily together and are in need of an explanation which will reconcile them. We agree too that John 5's christology and eschatology were socially cohesive factors for the Johannine Christians. We disagreed, however, with his theory of redaction for John 5, as we believe his other findings would be more elegantly explained by a theory of an evolving tradition without the need to resort to proposals for an evolving text. We found, therefore, that Neyrey's exegesis does not amount to a convincing case that John 5 is not a unitive text.

We found that James McGrath had produced an insightful model of the development of christological ideas in John 5 in which the evangelist took traditional Christian motifs and ideas and developed them in ways that legitimated his community in its stance against the synagogue. We think there is potential to use a similar model to study other developments in John 5 that may not be purely christological.

We found that Andrew Lincoln's theological analysis served only to confirm his literary proposal and resulted in little in the way of fresh understanding of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement. However, his relating of the Gospel's juridical language to a possible background of disputation between Church and Synagogue in the evangelist's community is a useful example of how the positing of a specific socio-historical

background to a text can promote a fuller understanding of what a text is saying, why it is saying what it says and, not least, to whom it is saying it.

Our examination of the work of these four scholars on the Fourth Gospel has revealed little to suggest that the hypothesis we have proposed may not be examined further to assess its applicability to John 5. Nothing presented by these authors has convinced us that the text of John 5 is anything other than unitive. Each of them has presented evidence of the possibility of a Johannine community involved in acrimonious debate with their Jewish neighbours, while two of them have highlighted the need for a resolution to the puzzling discrepancies in John 5's theology of judgement. Thus we feel justified in proceeding with our investigation into whether our hypothesis will ultimately help to resolve that puzzle.



## Chapter 4

### The Stylistic Characteristics of John 5

Nowhere in his studies of the Fourth Gospel does Rudolf Bultmann claim that stylistic characteristics alone are sufficient grounds for inferring that a particular portion of text can be differentiated sufficiently from its surrounding text to allow him to suggest that it has been lifted unaltered from a source document, or has been lifted from a source document and re-written by the evangelist or even is a redactional insertion by an editor. Bultmann claims that any such suggestions he might make are based also on contextual and theological grounds, so that only by all three factors applying in support of one another are there sufficient grounds for deciding upon the provenance of a given portion of text.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his commentary Bultmann uses the stylistic characteristics he has identified in support of nearly every source-critical decision he makes and his analysis of John 5 is typical of this approach.<sup>2</sup> Our aim here is look closely at Bultmann's stylistic analysis of John 5 in an attempt to establish the relative strengths and weaknesses of his approach.

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<sup>1</sup> See Smith 1965, pp. 7-12 and Anderson 1996, pp. 72-73.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Anderson has expressed doubts about a methodology in which Bultmann identifies strong stylistic criteria for differentiating material to various sources in John 1:1-18, 2:1-11 and 4:46-54 and then "proceeds on the assumption that if a sayings and a narrative source may be inferred in these places, they may be found elsewhere in the Gospel." Elsewhere Anderson notes that "While it may be argued that the evidence for distinguishing source material on the basis of stylistic criteria alone is not distributed evenly throughout the Gospel, Bultmann nevertheless continues to use stylistic evidence to bolster his judgements at every turn." See Anderson 1996, p. 74 and note 4.

Bultmann believes he has found four separate strands or layers of material in John 5.

These are:

- the work of the evangelist – consisting not only of his connecting words and phrases, but also much of the speech put into the mouth of Jesus in the discourse.
- a signs-source from which the evangelist has taken the story of the healing by the pool and the consequent Sabbath controversy. The source supplying this material is known as the *σημεῖα*-source<sup>3</sup>
- poetic material of a theological nature which the evangelist has taken from a non-Christian revelation-discourse source and which forms the basis of the theology in the speech of Jesus. The source behind this material is well-known by its German title – the *Offenbarungsreden*<sup>4</sup>
- theological material which has been inserted by a secondary editor into the speech of Jesus to make the finished Gospel acceptable to the wider Church. The editor who supplied this material is usually referred to in Johannine scholarship as the *ecclesiastical redactor* – a convention we shall continue here – although Bultmann refers to him simply as *the editor*<sup>5</sup> in his commentary on John 5.

The criteria by which Bultmann believes each of these four bodies of material can be distinguished from one another will be mentioned under the separate headings below, but in the main this chapter will try to assess whether or not he is justified in reaching

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<sup>3</sup> *σημεῖα*-source as used here and in the English edition of Bultmann's commentary is a literal translation of Bultmann's *σημεῖα*=*Quelle*. Compare Bultmann 1941, p. 177 and Bultmann 1971, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> See Bultmann 1941, p. 177. The English translation of Bultmann's commentary uses the quite literal rendering of *revelation-discourses*. Compare Bultmann, 1971, p. 238. Both the English and German titles are in widespread use in English-speaking Johannine scholarship.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Bultmann 1971, p. 238 and Bultmann 1941, p. 196, where he refers to *der Red.* for *der Redaktor*.

the conclusions he has on the stylistic evidence he presents. We shall assess the theology of John 5 in detail in chapters 5 and 6 below.

The results of Bultmann's analysis of the Greek text of John 5 are summarized below in table 1, where we give a verse-by-verse allocation to the sources Bultmann has proposed. The table is only broadly accurate because Bultmann often allocates words or phrases within a verse to a different source than the surrounding material. We deal with all these minor anomalies under the headings of each source below.

Table 1

<u>Verses in John 5</u>	<u>Origin suggested by Bultmann</u>
1	evangelist
2-15	σημεῖα-source
16	evangelist
17	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
18-19a	evangelist
19b-21	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
22-23	evangelist
24-26	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
27-29	ecclesiastical redactor
30-32	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
33-37a	evangelist
37b	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
38	evangelist
39-44	<i>Offenbarungsreden</i>
45-47	evangelist

Bultmann's source theory for John 5 is crucial for an understanding of the theology of judgement in the Fourth Gospel, for it posits that the true eschatological theology of the Gospel is represented by the beliefs of the evangelist – beliefs which may only be



clearly understood by removing the comments of a later editor from the text. Given this proposed pedigree, it is difficult to maintain that John 5, as it stands, presents a coherent theological argument because the christology and eschatology it proposes do not grow one from another, are not the theological insights of one gifted thinker or school of thinkers and, ultimately, are actually almost diametrically opposed. John 5 thus represents something of an obstacle to any proposal that the Fourth Gospel presents a unified coherent theology of judgement unless Bultmann's source theory can be successfully challenged. It is the overall simplicity and elegance of Bultmann's solution which makes it imperative that we engage with it, for he solves the puzzle in its entirety even if it is at the cost of doing violence to the text. Therefore the onus falls on us initially to demonstrate any weaknesses in Bultmann's argument if we wish to propose that we have an alternative solution. If we are to show ultimately that the Fourth Gospel has a coherent and comprehensible theology of judgement as it stands, demonstrating this will be almost impossible if Bultmann's source theory for John 5 is held to be correct – at least for the discourse passages. Thus we shall now undertake a close examination of Bultmann's treatment of John 5 to try to ascertain if there are any weaknesses in his arguments that might allow us to question his conclusions.

Beyond grappling with Bultmann's source theories for John 5, it is only fair to point out the debt owed to him for his persistent and brilliant analysis of the text and the theology of John's Gospel. For Bultmann, on a scale far surpassing any other commentator, has pointed out the difficulties the Fourth Gospel presents us with. We are at liberty to disagree with his solutions to those problems, to contest his conclusions and question his methods, but we remain deeply in his debt for the precision with which he has already identified the problems which trouble us still.

## A. Evidence of a signs-source

In his commentary on the Fourth Gospel Bultmann introduces the concept of a source document which he calls the *σημεῖα*-source in his analysis of John 2:1-12.<sup>6</sup> Bultmann concedes that the idea of the existence of this source document was not originally his,<sup>7</sup> but as D. Moody Smith points out, “It remains, however, for Bultmann to redefine the exact limits of this document and interpret it in the context of the gospel.”<sup>8</sup> Bultmann’s criteria for identifying those parts of the Fourth Gospel that have their origins in the *σημεῖα*-source are sprinkled liberally throughout the text and footnotes of his commentary and, prior to the publication of Smith’s monograph, were notoriously difficult to assimilate into an integrated whole. Thus it remained for Smith to gather together the various strands of Bultmann’s reasoning, produce listings of criteria for assigning certain parts of the Gospel to certain sources and to attempt a reconstruction of the sources.

Smith lists Bultmann’s criteria for assigning the origins of specific parts of the Gospel to the *σημεῖα*-source as:

- “General contextual evidence”<sup>9</sup> – which we may assume to be an identification of miracle and healing stories on basic form-critical grounds;
- “Characteristic traits of speech and style” – including the use of “Semitizing Greek ... many of its stylistic characteristics are Semitisms.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 113, note 2.

<sup>8</sup> Smith 1965, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Smith 1965, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Smith 1965, p. 35.

- “Distinctive motifs or details ... which cannot be attributed to the evangelist because they do not embody any of his interests.”<sup>11</sup>

Bultmann justifies his designation of the source as a *document* (as opposed to the source being a disparate collection of traditional stories) on the grounds that the Gospel contains the vestigial remains of a numbering system that may have been complete in the source (2:11 and 4:54).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he believes he has found embedded in the Gospel the introduction and the conclusion of the source document at 1:35-51 and 20:30-31.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of John 5, Bultmann firmly designates verses 2-15 as originating in the σημεῖα-source more or less as they stand, while verses 16 and 18 he believes to be expansions of a single sentence which he has reconstructed – the expansion being necessary to surround the evangelist’s insertion of Jesus’ reply in verse 17.<sup>14</sup> Thus it is possible for Bultmann to postulate that in the σημεῖα-source the healing story at the beginning of John 5 consisted of exactly the block of Greek text reproduced by Smith<sup>15</sup> and translated here:

*Now there is in Jerusalem itself, near to the sheep-gate, a pool – its Hebrew name is Bethzatha – surrounded by five porches. In these porches lay many sick people – the blind, the lame and the wasted. Now, there was a certain man there who had been ill for thirty eight years. Jesus, seeing the man lying there and knowing that he had been ill for a long time, said to him, ‘Do you wish to become well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘I have no one to put me in the pool when the water*

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<sup>11</sup> Smith 1965, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Udo Schnelle argues convincingly that the numbering of the two miracles is not a vestigial remainder left over from the source document, but is rather to emphasise that both events took place at Cana. See Schnelle 1992, pp. 91-93 and p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Bultmann 1971, pp. 113, 118. Smith 1965, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> Smith 1965, pp. 41-42.



*is disturbed. For whenever I try, someone else gets in before me.' Jesus said to him, 'Get up, take your mat and walk.' And at once the man became well, took his mat and started to walk. Now it was a Sabbath on that day. Therefore the Jews said to the man who was healed, 'It is a Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.' But he answered them, 'The one who made me well told me, "Take your mat and walk."'* They asked him, 'Who is this man, the one who told you to take and to walk?' But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had melted away into the crowd that was there.

*After this Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have become well. Sin no more lest something worse happens to you.' The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason, therefore, the Jews sought to kill Jesus because he did these things on the Sabbath.*

Smith's construction of the σημεῖα-source from 5:2-15 departs from the Gospel text in only one detail – the omission of ἐκεῖνός from verse 11 in accordance with Bultmann's opinion that this is a mark of the evangelist's style and must, therefore, be his insertion.<sup>16</sup> The final sentence is Bultmann's reconstruction from verses 16 and 18 of the Gospel text (see above).

Bultmann gives two reasons for believing that this healing story originated in the σημεῖα-source. His first reason is his observation that the general pattern of the story is reminiscent of the style of the Synoptic healing stories, although he does not believe the story comes from the Synoptic tradition:

The style corresponds to the Synoptic healing stories, inasmuch as there is no attempt to give psychological explanations of peoples' motives. The statement of the length of the illness, v.5, and the fact that the healed man carries away his bed, v.8f., are also true to the style. Yet this latter motif, the original sense of which

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<sup>16</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 243, note 2.

was to demonstrate that he had been healed, is used here to connect the healing story with the dispute about the Sabbath.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, Bultmann relies on the identification of certain stylistic peculiarities in 5:2-15 which he believes are characteristic of passages originating in the **σημεῖα**-source:

Stylistically the narrative shows strong similarities with the other sections which probably come from the **σημεῖα**-source. The Greek is not bad Greek, or translation Greek, but “Semitising” Greek. Typical of this is the placing of verbs at the beginning of sentences in v.7 (**ἀπεκρίθη**), v.8 (**λέγει**), v.12 (**ἠρώτησαν**), v.15 (**ἀπῆλθον**), and the corresponding lack of connecting particles. **Ἐν τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ αὐτοῦ**, v.5, is not Greek. Nor can **ἦν δὲ σαββ. ἐν ἐκ. τ. ἡμ.** really be said to be good Greek.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, Bultmann may have underplayed his hand on the question of sentences beginning with a verb. Of the fifteen sentences comprising John 5:2-15, eight begin with a verb – verses 2, 4, 7, 8, 9b, 10, 12, and 15 (53%). Of the thirty eight sentences forming the rest of the chapter, only seven begin with a verb – verses 18, 19, 28, 30, 39a, 45a and 45b (18%). This would seem to suggest that Bultmann is correct to have identified this particular characteristic as at least differentiating verses 2-15 from the remainder of John 5. However, in a similar analysis of John 6, Anderson found that the presence of a verb at the beginning of a sentence was not a characteristic that differentiated between the verses that Bultmann claimed to have originated in the **σημεῖα**-source and the remainder of that chapter – despite Bultmann’s claims to the contrary.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Bultmann claims a wider set of stylistic criteria in his identification of the **σημεῖα**-source material in John 6 than he does for John 5. In his commentary on John 6, Bultmann claims the **σημεῖα**-source

<sup>17</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 237, note 4.

<sup>18</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 238, note 1.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson found that verb-first sentence construction was found in just under 67% (12 out of 18) of those sentences Bultmann had designated as **σημεῖα**-source material in John 6, while the ratio for the remainder of the chapter was 63% (29 out of 46 sentences) and he rightly concluded that this particular sentence construction was ‘absolutely non-indicative’ for identifying **σημεῖα**-source material in John 6. See Anderson 1996, p. 75.

material is also identifiable by “the lack ... or very simple form of connection between the sentences (δέ and οὖν).”<sup>20</sup> Again, however, Anderson was able to show that these characteristics did not differentiate between σημεία-source material and the remainder of John 6.<sup>21</sup> In his commentary’s coverage of John 5 Bultmann fails to mention these additional criteria. This may have been because he realised that they would have told against him if he had sought to place any reliance upon them. For instance, in John 5 there are no sentences beginning with the primitive connections δέ and οὖν, and only six sentences beginning with the equally primitive καὶ – all but one of them (verses 17, 27, 37, 38, 39b and 49) in material other than that assigned to the σημεία-source by Bultmann, the exception being verse 9. Of the twenty-eight sentences in John 5 which have no verb at the beginning, no primitive connecting particle, and no other connecting particle or phrase,<sup>22</sup> five (verses 3, 6, 7b, 11 and 13) are found in the fifteen sentences assigned to the σημεία-source by Bultmann (33%) and twenty three (17, 19b, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 30b, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36a, 36b, 37b, 41, 42, 43a, 43b, 44, 46 and 47) are found in the remaining thirty eight sentences (60%). Had Bultmann used these additional criteria for identifying σημεία-source material in John 5, the results would have been worse than “non-indicative” – they would have shown that verses 2-15 are unlikely to have originated in his putative source document.

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<sup>20</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 211, note 1.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson’s analysis showed that δέ is found at the beginning of eleven sentences, six of them being in Bultmann’s σημεία-source material – a potentially significant find. However, οὖν is found at the start of sixteen sentences, with eleven of them being in material not assigned to the σημεία-source by Bultmann. Leaving out sentences beginning with a verb, only two out of fourteen sentences with no connection are found in Bultmann’s σημεία-source material. From a viewpoint of supporting Bultmann’s claims, Anderson described these results as ‘disappointing.’ Anderson 1996, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann fails to define what other connections he had in mind as being less primitive than δέ and οὖν, but in the context of John 5, there are only two other connections used. The sentences of verses 1 and 14 begin with μετὰ ταῦτα and the sentences of verses 24 and 24 begin with ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν. Verse 19 incorporates ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν into the longer sentence which introduces the discourse.



Bultmann has made it quite clear that he does not rely on stylistic criteria alone when designating the probable source of particular Gospel passages – he relies additionally on contextual and theological indicators. However, if Bultmann had wished to rely to any degree on stylistic evidence that any portion of the Gospel text could be differentiated from the material surrounding it because it displayed the stylistic markers of a putative source document, a sound scientific approach to establishing his hypothesis would have been to analyse *both* the suspected portion of text *and* the surrounding material for *all* the stylistic criteria claimed to be present in material originating in the source – in *every* case. Such an approach could be said to have the virtue of objectivity, in that every suspect passage is analysed according to the same criteria. Furthermore, it would then be possible to suggest a degree of probability that a particular passage originated in a particular putative source depending on the degree to which it displays stylistic characteristics associated with the source document in contrast (or otherwise) to its surrounding material.

By these criteria Bultmann's approach seems to be less than satisfactorily objective. A comparison of his approaches to John 5 and John 6 indicates that he is selective in those criteria he wishes to apply to any given passage. Furthermore he does not seem to apply the criteria to the surrounding or associated text (for instance, the discourse accompanying the 'sign') to test for differentiation. Finally, those criteria he does apply are not indicative in every case. Thus Bultmann's method for identifying σημεία-source material by stylistic criteria has a rather subjective feel to it at best. This should come as no great surprise, given Bultmann's subsequently published belief that the

Fourth Gospel is a stylistic unity<sup>23</sup> – a belief that surely excludes the possibility that the text has been crudely stitched together unedited from more than one source document but does not exclude the possibility that the Gospel’s author has rewritten the source material in his own style. Despite his claim not to have relied on any single identifying factor (contextual, stylistic or theological) in identifying passages originating in the *σημεῖα*-source, one is left with the impression that Bultmann has in fact done just that – he has identified those passages he believes to have originated in the source on form-critical grounds and has proceeded to look in a rather unsystematic manner for stylistic evidence to support his claim. The unscientific methodology and arbitrarily selective way in which Bultmann applies his stylistic criteria does much to detract from the credibility of the reliance he places on his stylistic analysis. Despite Bultmann’s claim that this reliance is a small factor on its own, he “continues to use stylistic evidence to bolster his judgements at every turn.”<sup>24</sup>

Besides Bultmann’s stylistic criteria, his form-critical identification of the material in John 5 he believes to have originated in the *σημεῖα*-source is not to be accepted without question. While few would argue that the usual criteria for identifying a miracle story of the healing type are to be found in the opening verses of John 5, the wealth of

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<sup>23</sup> Bultmann’s article *Johannesevangelium* in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3 (1959), pp. 840-850, is partially translated in Smith 1965, pp. 3-4, where Bultmann says, “The question about the sources [of John] is ... so difficult to answer because the speech of John seems to be so unified as to give no occasion for partitioning. The unity of speech, however, could have resulted from the evangelist’s thorough editing.” Clearly Bultmann felt he had to respond to the studies of Ruckstuhl and Noack which had done much to discredit his analysis – or his stylistic analysis at least. While Ruckstuhl’s conclusion (i.e. that his own stylistic analysis indicated that the Fourth Gospel had no sources at all) is unjustified, his work had helped to show that Bultmann’s stylistic analysis of the material assigned to sources lacked the same methodological rigour applied to the material assigned to the evangelist. Noack, in a more restrained monograph, is critical of Bultmann’s methodology and results and goes on to attribute much of the Gospel material to oral sources. Smith 1984, pp. 43-47 gives a summary of these debates from a standpoint fairly sympathetic to Bultmann, but the opposition to Bultmann keeps mounting. Turner in 1976 stated that he had found the Fourth Gospel to be a stylistic unity and in 1984 Poythress published two papers which reached the same conclusion – Turner 1976, pp. 2-3; Poythress 1984a and Poythress 1984b.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson 1996, p. 74.

additional detail and the seemingly appended controversy about the Sabbath indicate that the kernel of tradition has been thoroughly reworked.<sup>25</sup> Bultmann's contention is that the 'sign,' the healing itself, is not theologically linked to the discourse which forms the bulk of the chapter and that, therefore, the point of the story is to get Jesus into a dispute with "the Jews" in the temple precincts where he can make his speech.<sup>26</sup> Thus, for Bultmann, the observation in verse 9 that it was a Sabbath day and that a controversy followed from this are more important than the healing itself. Whether or not he is correct that there is no theological link between the healing and the discourse (an open question which we shall address later), from a literary point of view Bultmann is correct in his view – the Sabbath controversy is crucial to the progress of the narrative from sign to discourse. This, however, does not justify his allocation of the Sabbath controversy material to the σημεῖα-source. If, as other commentators have pointed out, the source material has probably supplied the story only as far as verse 9a,<sup>27</sup> then it is the evangelist who has introduced the critical literary link of the Sabbath controversy – not the σημεῖα-source.

The final point to be made about the healing story comprising the opening verses of John 5 is that the establishment of its exact origin either as an extract from a source document, a traditional story handed down by another tradition or even as a free composition of the evangelist, is not crucial to determining the unity of John 5. Bultmann contends that the discourse material of John 5 is a patchwork of material,

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<sup>25</sup> See note 6 of chapter 3 on pp. 108-109.

<sup>26</sup> "Thus we can see why the Evangelist has taken the healing story of 5.1-9a as the starting point for Jesus' discourse: as a story of the breaking of the Sabbath it becomes a symbolic portrayal of the constancy of the Revealer's work. The healing itself seems to have no symbolic importance for the discourse." Bultmann 1971, p. 246.

<sup>27</sup> We agree with both Fortna and Martyn that the 'traditional' element of the healing story consists of verses 2-9a and that the Sabbath controversy is the work of the evangelist. Martyn designates this as 5:2-9b as he treats the first sentence of verse 9 as separate clauses, a and b. Fortna 1988, pp. 113-117 and Martyn 1979, pp. 68-69. See also Witkamp's analysis in Witkamp 1985, pp. 19-36.



some of which is drawn from a sayings-source document, some of which is the composition of the evangelist and some of which is the inserted comment of an ecclesiastical editor. His reasoning for reaching this conclusion will be discussed in the following section. If, however, it can be shown that the discourse material forms a coherent linear argument from start to finish, then Bultmann's source theories begin to look not only unnecessary but actually a hindrance in trying to understand the theology of the discourse. But in the case of the σημεῖα-source this is not necessarily the case. For even if we establish that John 5 is a compositional unity, it remains quite conceivable that the evangelist could have taken his miraculous healing story from a source of some kind just as easily as he could have composed it himself. If one were to propose that John 5:2-15 is an original composition of the evangelist, it would naturally follow that its stylistic characteristics were those of the evangelist himself. Similarly, if the evangelist had rewritten in his own style a story he had received from another source – written or oral – then again we should find the evangelist's stylistic characteristics – not those of the source. On the other hand, only if the passage was simply lifted word-for-word from a putative source document would it be likely to display the stylistic characteristics of the source. Analysis of Bultmann's stylistic criteria for the σημεῖα-source in John 5:2-15 has shown that this last possibility is the least probable explanation. However, the unity of John 5 does not depend on this issue being resolved one way or the other, for the chapter can still be said to be a compositional unity even if the basic healing story has its origins elsewhere and has been taken by the evangelist and incorporated into his larger narrative.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Udo Schnelle has argued against the existence of a putative Semeia Source document on the following grounds: 1. The proposed vestigial enumeration of the miracles at John 2:11 and 4:54 is the work of the evangelist; 2. John 20:30-31, the proposed end of the source, is to be attributed to the evangelist; 3. The nature of some of the miracles is either foreign to early Christian tradition (e.g. turning water into wine) or bears heavily the marks of the evangelist's heightening of miraculous content (e.g. the raising of Lazarus); 4. Stylistic analysis fails to establish any segments of text in John that either consistently vary

## B. Evidence of a sayings-source

In the discourse of John 5 the twin strands of material that Bultmann assigns to a source document and to the evangelist are intertwined around one another like the two strands of a double-helix. Because of this close relationship it is tempting to consider examining them together as the style of each has to be looked for in the other. However, for the sake of clarity we have given each a section of its own. Bultmann's method seems to have been to identify those clauses in the discourse material which he feels he can scan into the kind of poetic strophes he claims to have identified in the Fourth Gospel's prologue.<sup>29</sup> Because Bultmann has reproduced these strophes in his commentary, we are easily able to tell which material he assigned to this source. Any material he is unable to scan or considers to be obviously prosaic he assigns to the hand of the evangelist rather than to the source (with the exception of verses 27 – 29, which he believes is the work of an editor). Furthermore, odd words and phrases within the lines which do scan are assigned to the evangelist on the basis of his identification of the evangelist's stylistic characteristics. With the final removal of the connecting phrases of verses 19, 24 and 25, Bultmann is left with his *Offenbarungsreden* – the revelation-discourse source.

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from the rest of the Gospel or have a similar enough style to one another to be assigned to a common source; 5. No form-critical evidence exists for the existence of any kind of document resembling a proposed signs source; 6. The seven miracles of John is significant in view of the mystical associations of the number seven in the ancient world; 7. The significance of 'signs' as a theological motif is unique to the work of the evangelist; 8. There is no detectably consistent theology running through the signs themselves, i.e. the putative source would have no theology of its own. See Schnelle 1992, pp. 150-164.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to Bultmann's contention that "the same general poetic structure found in the prologue can be seen in the rest of the gospel, where it indicates the evangelist's continued use of the same source," Smith lists a number of other features which have helped Bultmann to designate specific lines as coming from the *Offenbarungsreden*. These include: Semitisms; ἐγώ εἰμι sayings of Jesus; superfluous third line after a double verse marking the end of a discourse. Additionally, this material is usually presented as the speech of Jesus; *Offenbarungsreden* material becomes a 'text' for the evangelist's preaching; the evangelist "imitates the style of the source so that it is not always possible to distinguish between the two." Smith 1965, pp. 20-21.

Bultmann assigns the origin of most of verses 17, 19-21, 24-26, 30-32, 37b, and 39-44 to the source which he terms the *Offenbarungsreden*. Smith has reconstructed this source in Greek and it translates thus:

*[My Father is [still] working and I too am working.]*

*The Son can do nothing on his own*

*only what he sees the Father doing.*

*For whatever things the Father does*

*these things the Son does also.*

*For the Father loves the Son*

*and shows to him everything he is doing.*

*[And greater works than these he will show him, so that you people will be amazed]*

*For just as the Father raises the dead and makes alive*

*so also The Son makes alive whomsoever he wishes.*

*Whoever hears my word*

*and believes in the one who sent me*

*has eternal life*

*and does not come to judgement,*

*but passes*

*from death into life.*

*The hour is coming and now is*

*when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God*

*and having heard, they will have life.*

*For just as the Father has life in himself*

*so also he allows the Son to have life in himself.*

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*I am not able to do*

*anything on my own;*

*as I hear, I judge*

*and my judgement is just*

*because I do not seek my own will*

*but the will of the one who sent me.*

*If I testify about myself*



*my testimony is not valid  
 There is another who testifies about me  
 and [I know that] his testimony about me is true.  
 You have never heard his voice  
 nor have you seen his form.  
 You search the scriptures  
 because you people think in them you possess eternal life  
 yet you do not want to come to me  
 that you might have life.*

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*I do not accept glory from humanity  
 but I know you people  
 that you do not have the love of God within you.  
 I have come in the name of my Father  
 but you do not accept me.  
 But if another were to come in his own name  
 you will accept him.  
 How are you people able to believe  
 when you accept glory from one another  
 yet you do not seek glory from the only God?<sup>30</sup>*

Within these verses as they appear in the Gospel text, the introductory phrase ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν in verses 19, 24 and 25 does not appear in the reconstructed source, nor does the final clause of verse 39, these being attributed to the hand of the evangelist

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<sup>30</sup> Smith 1965, pp. 25-27. The passage is broken into three sections because Smith has reconstructed the source in an order which inserts John 11: 25-25 into the first break and 7: 16-18 into the second. Also, he has placed square brackets round those phrases which he felt Bultmann was uncertain about attributing to the source – the whole of verse 17, also ἕως ἄρτι within verse 17, the final sentence of verse 20 and οἶδα ὅτι in verse 32. Certainly Bultmann phrases his opinions on verses 17 and 32 in the form of questions rather than answers, leaving an element of doubt as to his own certainty, but on verse 20 he is quite definite that the final sentence “must be an addition of the evangelist’s.” We have elected to translate Smith’s Greek reconstruction of the source material as we have found it in order to give as full a picture of his reconstruction of the *Offenbarungsreden* as possible, but see Bultmann 1971, p. 245, note 4; p. 253, note 1; and p. 263, note 2.

by Bultmann.<sup>31</sup> Thus if we designate the discourse of John 5 to consist of verses 17, 19-47, we find that almost exactly half of this material is considered by Bultmann to have originated in his *Offenbarungsreden* – a proportion which is small enough to raise the question, how much can the revelation-discourse source document have dictated the final shape and meaning of the discourse itself? This, however, is a question that can only be answered by an examination of the theology of John 5, something we shall attempt in chapters 5 and 6 below. Here we are concerned with the question of whether Bultmann is justified in saying that the body of text he has assigned to his putative source in John 5 can be differentiated from the surrounding text on stylistic grounds. At this juncture it is worth reminding ourselves that our intention is not to disprove Bultmann's source theory, or even to cast doubt on the likelihood that the *Offenbarungsreden* existed in the form Bultmann has suggested. We simply wish to attempt to ascertain whether or not the *Offenbarungsreden* material in John 5 can be differentiated from the surrounding material using the stylistic criteria that he has proposed. In his examination of John 5 Bultmann is very sparing in the criteria he lists for assigning material to his source.<sup>32</sup> His two most obvious criteria are to separate out everything he believes to be the work of the evangelist (see below) and to attempt to scan the remaining material into poetic strophes. Thus if we wish to test this approach we must ask two questions: Does the material Bultmann has reproduced as Greek strophes have a genuine poetic quality? And is the surrounding material (assigned to the evangelist) devoid of similar poetic quality?

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<sup>31</sup> Smith notes that this is a characteristic of the evangelist's style. We may infer that Bultmann does not consider this phrase to have come from his source simply because he does not include it within the lines of poetic material he presents in his commentary. Smith 1965, p. 10 and Bultmann 1971, pp. 247-260.

<sup>32</sup> Beyond his statement that "the discourse is again based on a text from the "revelation-discourses," with which the comments of the Evangelist form a marked contrast" and his reproduction of the *Offenbarungsreden* as poetic material, in his treatment of John 5 Bultmann tends to isolate the source material by identifying what he believes to be the work of the evangelist. Bultmann 1971, pp. 238-273.

If one seeks to answer the first question by looking at the strophes as they are reproduced in Bultmann's commentary, one may well be convinced that there is something poetic about the individual verses as the Greek is reproduced there – for example, verse 19:

οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδέν,  
 ἂν μὴ τι βλέπη τὸν πατέρα ποιοῦντα.  
 ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ,  
 ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ.<sup>33</sup>

Less promising is a look at these Greek strophes when they are reproduced as a block of material in the pages of Smith's monograph.<sup>34</sup> Read through in this manner it is difficult to gain any appreciable sense that the *Offenbarungsreden* material from John 5 has any poetic quality beyond its antithetical approach – an approach just as effective in prose as most English translations of John's Gospel will testify. Much of this material consists of short clauses of fairly simple Greek which are easy to separate into the lines of the strophes. But where a sentence is more complex and not so easily dismantled the results can be confusing – the more so because there is little evidence of any consistency of approach from verse to verse. However, given that Bultmann believes the poetry was probably originally Aramaic and has been translated at some stage into "Semitizing" Greek, it is perhaps not fair to ask too much of the resulting poetic quality.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bultmann 1971, p. 248. But see also up to p. 271 for the remaining strophes Bultmann has identified in John 5.

<sup>34</sup> Smith 1965, pp. 25-27.

<sup>35</sup> D.M. Smith notes that the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel writes "in a partially Semitizing Greek, while the source [*Offenbarungsreden*] was originally composed in Aramaic. Whether that document was translated by the evangelist himself or came into his hands already translated is a question which, according to Bultmann, cannot be decided." While Bultmann was unable to point to any known document from antiquity as an exact parallel to his *Offenbarungsreden*, he based his belief in the Gnostic redeemer myth as "the key to understanding the Fourth Gospel" on some twenty-eight motifs shared by John and "Mandean, Manichaean and other Gnostic sources." In terms of strophic style, the closest parallel to which Bultmann could point was the Odes of Solomon, which may be approximately contemporaneous with the Fourth Gospel and which do contain certain similarities of dualistic thought. See Smith 1965, pp. 15-23 and note 55 on pp. 16-17. See also Charlesworth 1985, pp. 725-733.



This leads us on to attempt to answer our second question – is the material surrounding the *Offenbarungsreden* in John 5 devoid of similar poetic qualities? Since the poetic qualities we are looking for are confusing at best, this will be almost impossible to answer – but not entirely impossible. Bultmann has, of course, covered every eventuality by stating that one of the techniques of the evangelist has been to imitate the style of his source<sup>36</sup> – thus adding to the difficulty of differentiating between any material lifted from a source and surrounding material composed by the evangelist. But if this is so, should the evangelist not have at least attempted to imitate any poetic qualities the source has bequeathed to the discourse in his own contribution? As an example let us examine verses 22 and 23, the first sizeable block of material in the discourse which Bultmann assigns to the evangelist and which he, therefore, does not present as strophic material in his commentary. Bultmann does not comment on the poetic or prosaic qualities of these verses, but he believes they are comments made by the evangelist and, therefore, by definition are not part of the *Offenbarungsreden*.<sup>37</sup> Table 2 below shows why Bultmann believes these verses are comments of the evangelist – his reasons are stylistic. However, it is hard to see exactly how the following lines of Greek differ qualitatively from the strophes Bultmann has reproduced in his commentary:

οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ κρίνει οὐδένα  
    ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ  
ἵνα πάντες τιμῶσι τὸν υἱὸν  
    καθὼς τιμῶσι τὸν πατέρα  
ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱὸν  
    οὐ τιμᾷ τὸν πατέρα τὸν πέμψαντα αὐτόν

These six lines show how easily the short clauses of fairly simple Greek can be separated into the kind of strophes Bultmann has proposed for his *Offenbarungsreden*

<sup>36</sup> Smith 1965, p. 21, where it is listed amongst various factors which make the *Offenbarungsreden* material hard to isolate.

<sup>37</sup> Bultmann 1971, pp. 256 – 257.

material. But these lines are from material he has excluded from that source – and still they seem to have the same inbuilt possibilities for poetic expression as the material he has assigned to the source.<sup>38</sup>

This potential for strophic expression can also be found in other shorter phrases which Bultmann has excluded from the *Offenbarungsreden*. In the Gospel text, verse 19 begins:

Ἀπεκρίνατο οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς  
καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς  
ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν

These lines are excluded from Bultmann's source because he believes they are a connecting phrase of the evangelist's – an opinion with which we are in complete agreement. But the point we wish to make about them here is that they are loaded with potential for poetic expression as the three lines above show. Even the phrase ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν on its own has a solemn haunting quality that is suggestive of poetic expression. Its repetition in verses 24 and 25 can only serve to reinforce the impression that the whole discourse has been written in the kind of strophes that Bultmann suggests for the *Offenbarungsreden* or as a particularly solemn body of prose containing certain poetic traits such as antithesis and repetition.<sup>39</sup> In either case, we do not believe that

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<sup>38</sup> Ruckstuhl is critical of Bultmann's identification of *Offenbarungsreden* material on the grounds of its alleged poetic qualities because of both the lack of these qualities in material Bultmann assigns to the source and their presence in material assigned to the evangelist. Sadly, Ruckstuhl gives no examples from John 5 of material in which he detects the kind of poetic qualities which Bultmann uses to identify his source. Amongst eighty such instances in the Gospel he lists: 4:32, 4:38, 8:47, 9:41, 13:20 (p.48). However, Ruckstuhl does give three examples from John 5 in which he questions the rhythmic qualities of strophic material in the *Offenbarungsreden* – 5:21 (p.45), 5:39 (p.46) and 5:26 (p.51) – all from Ruckstuhl 1951. Ruckstuhl's questioning of Bultmann's methodology in assigning material to the source suggests that Bultmann perhaps relied rather more heavily on theological arguments than he cares to admit.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Brown notes that the discourses of the Fourth Gospel as they have come down to us are prose with 'uniquely solemn' qualities. He feels that Bultmann is on firmer ground with his assertion of the poetic qualities of the Johannine prologue, which Brown too believes to have been a hymn of some kind, but doubts that similar qualities are to be found in passages of any length in the discourses. Despite his

Bultmann has shown that his designated *Offenbarungsreden* material can be separated from the surrounding text on stylistic grounds alone.

### C. The work of the evangelist

Having precisely defined his *Offenbarungsreden*, Bultmann allows that in the discourse of John 5 the evangelist has freely composed only verses 20b, 22-23, 33-37a, 39c, 45-47 and has added in the three instances of ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν in verses 19, 24 and 25. Verses 16 and 18 are the evangelist's expansion of the final sentence of the σημεῖα-source material – a sentence which Bultmann has condensed down from the evangelist's allegedly expanded version. For the Fourth Gospel as a whole, Smith has made an exhaustive listing of the stylistic and theological characteristics Bultmann has identified as marking out the evangelist's hand.<sup>40</sup> These need not all be listed here, but we shall list those ones occurring in the discourse section of John 5 which Bultmann uses to develop his argument that the evangelist's own compositional material can be differentiated from material taken from the *Offenbarungsreden*:

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doubts as to the originally poetic nature of the Johannine discourse, Brown goes on to justify his own translation of the discourses into a poetic format in English by observing that "when one has worked with the material for a while, searching to find a format, one does get caught up into the pattern." However, having entered into the spirit of a poetic layout for the discourses in Greek, he is critical of Bultmann for being, "rather arbitrary in his excision of glosses which he attributes to the final redactor. We are not certain that the poetic format is so fixed or strict that awkward lines can be treated as additions." Brown 1966(1), pp. CXXXII-CXXXV.

<sup>40</sup> Smith 1965, pp. 9-11, *Stylistic Characteristics for the Work of the Evangelist* and pp. 11-12, *The Evidence of Theological Motifs and Terminology*. Smith lists thirty two stylistic characteristics which are only the ones "most frequently cited by Bultmann." A further four "characteristic literary techniques or expressions" are listed and finally a list of thirteen items of "theological ideas and terminology." These forty nine identifying markers make Bultmann's identification of the evangelist's material by far the most detailed of his source critical analyses.



Table 2

<u>Characteristic (from Smith 1965)</u>	<u>Verses assigned to evangelist</u>
prosaic style	20b,22-23,33-37a,38,39c,45-47
exegetical ἵνα-clause	23,34
οὐ ... ἀλλά construction	22
emphatic ἐκεῖνος	35,37a,39c,47
ἀμήν ἀμήν introducing Jesus' speech	24,25
οἶδα ὅτι	32
reference to earlier subject	20b,33-36a
theme of μαρτυρία	33-37a, 38,39c
theme of μένειν ἐν	38

Table 2 shows that by his own criteria, the material which Bultmann has assigned to the evangelist in John 5 seems to display a few of the characteristics he claims for this material in general. These, however, represent only a small proportion – nine out of forty nine (or 18%) – of the characteristics Bultmann has proposed for the evangelist's material throughout the Gospel. The question this raises is not whether or not this material was written by the evangelist, but rather do these characteristics distinguish it from the surrounding material in John 5 – the material Bultmann wishes to assign to the *Offenbarungsreden*? In section A above we established that a sound scientific approach would be to analyse the surrounding material for the same characteristics. In this case that would mean that if the characteristics Bultmann claims are significant markers of the evangelist's material are absent from the *Offenbarungsreden* material (or at least feature infrequently in it), then we could agree that the two sets of material are distinguishable by these criteria. If, on the other hand, the *Offenbarungsreden* material is found to contain a significant number of these markers, we might wish to conclude that Bultmann's case is at least weak. Taking the list of markers for the evangelist's

material as listed by Smith and searching for them in the *Offenbarungsreden* produces the following results:

Table 3

<u>Characteristic (from Smith 1965)</u>	<u>Offenbarungsreden</u>
epexegetical ἵνα-clause	40
antithesis with negative first	19, 30, 43
οὐ ... ἀλλά construction	24, 30
explanatory (and causal) ὅτι clause	30, 39, 42
theme of μαρτυρία	31, 32, 37, 39, 40

In terms of the number of markers and the frequency with which they are found in the *Offenbarungsreden*, the results listed in table 3 are at first sight inconclusive. However, given that Bultmann has gone to great lengths to excise any phrase or sentence from the *Offenbarungsreden* material which betrays the traits he believes are characteristic of the evangelist, it is almost surprising to find any of these characteristics in the *Offenbarungsreden* at all. The number of stylistic markers that Bultmann claims belong to the evangelist's material are fewer in the *Offenbarungsreden* material than they are in the material he has assigned to the evangelist – but they are there, all but one of them more than once. If Bultmann had been able to firmly identify the stylistic characteristics of the evangelist's material, and using these characteristics fence off every word and phrase in the discourse as being the work of the evangelist, then the remaining material (his *Offenbarungsreden*) should contain almost or absolutely none of these. But this is not the case. Table 3 shows that in John 5 both the stylistic characteristics and a dominant theological theme of the evangelist are found throughout the chapter's *Offenbarungsreden* material. This would tend to suggest that while Bultmann has identified many of the stylistic characteristics of the author of the discourse, he has been less successful in showing that these characteristic markers can

be used to differentiate that author's work from neighbouring material which he assigns to a source.

#### D. Evidence of the work of an editor

Bultmann's proposal that an editor has been at work in John 5 is based purely on theological grounds. There is no textual evidence to support his case<sup>41</sup> and he presents no stylistic evidence other than his observation that the 'clumsy and unnecessary repetition' of verse 27 can not be taken from the *Offenbarungsreden*. While Bultmann is sure that verses 28 and 29 are an editorial insertion, he is uncertain as to where the editor's work begins in verse 27. He allows for both the possibility that the editor inserted the whole of verse 27 along with verses 28 and 29, and the possibility that the editor added only *ἀνθρώπου* at the end of the evangelist's statement in verse 27 as a lead into the apocalyptic eschatology of his own editorial insertion of the following two verses.<sup>42</sup>

Bultmann's belief that these verses are an editorial insertion is based on his observation that the apocalyptic eschatology they contain is entirely at odds with the eschatology of the *Offenbarungsreden* (and by implication the evangelist) found in verses 24 and 25. Verses 28 and 29 have been inserted "by the editor, in an attempt to reconcile the dangerous statements of vv. 24f. with traditional eschatology." Rightly, Bultmann has identified in verses 24 and 25 an entirely new eschatology in which the eschatological moment is 'now' in the hearing of the message of Jesus. Those who hear and who

<sup>41</sup> See note 75 on p. 80 above and also Bultmann 1971, p. 742.

<sup>42</sup> Bultmann 1971, pp. 260-262.



believe will no longer face judgement – they have eternal life now. Even those who are spiritually dead, οἱ νεκροὶ of verse 25, will hear and believe and so will have life. Bultmann's belief is that this new eschatology is simply too radical for the Church at large and that the editor, who ultimately published the Gospel, inserted the apocalyptic eschatology of verses 28 and 29 as a corrective addition. However, even Bultmann points out that it is hard to understand exactly how, on this view, verses 24-25 can be reconciled with verses 28-29.

We shall go on to discuss the eschatology of John 5 in detail in chapter 6, but at this point we shall confine ourselves to pointing out two difficulties with Bultmann's proposal.<sup>43</sup> Firstly, the idea that the Gospel had an editor, an ecclesiastical redactor, whose concern was to make the Gospel more acceptable to the wider Church prior to publication, would make more sense if such an editor were to have excised offending material as well as adding in 'orthodox' theological ideas. The logical conclusion of such an editor's activities would be, of course, that his work would be almost undetectable because the theology of the Gospel would be his – but it would be coherent and not obvious as additions and insertions as with Bultmann's beliefs about verses 28 and 29. Trying to explain the Fourth Gospel's *aporias* and numerous difficulties by resorting to a theory of 'gaps' caused by the excision of unacceptable material is a fruitless task because we have no textual evidence to support such an idea and, therefore, no idea what the excised material might be, even if we were to suspect this may have happened. However, that Bultmann's ecclesiastical redactor should leave in the offensive material he wishes to correct by his additional insertions makes little sense. Surely, if Bultmann were correct in his theory that verses 28 and 29 have been

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<sup>43</sup> See pp. 79-80 above for a discussion of the difficulties inherent in any suggestion that the Fourth Gospel's theological problems can be resolved by proposing additions to the text by a secondary editor.

added as a corrective to verses 24 and 25, then the correcting editor would have wished to excise verses 24 and 25 from the text. Clearly he has not done this and we are left with the text as we find it. We believe that this is a weakness in Bultmann's theory which suggests we may be justified in saying that our hypothesis provides a better solution to the puzzle in that it makes better sense of the text as it has come down to us.

Secondly, the new eschatology of verses 24 and 25 is incomplete. It has no explicit consequences for those who refuse to hear Jesus or who hear his message and reject it. All we learn from these verses is the 'good news' for those who hear and accept through belief. It would seem strange if the evangelist had left his eschatology in such an incomplete state. Verses 28 and 29, in contrast, present both sides of the coin – both the 'good news' and the 'bad news.' But is this eschatology as traditional and corrective as Bultmann claims it is? It seems to be traditional for those who have done evil things – they can expect a resurrection to judgement, though the consequences of the judgement are not mentioned. But what of those who have done good things? They are resurrected not to judgement, but to life – that is, to life *without judgement*. But this is not traditional eschatology in every sense; it is only traditional in that it is postponed until some future eschatological event. Furthermore, it is not entirely traditional in that it has Jesus as the judge, although even Bultmann would accept that this development would have been acceptable in wider Christian circles. It seems that Bultmann wishes to propose that the editor is correcting the Gospel's incomplete, but new and radical eschatology with a complete, but perhaps equally new and radical eschatology. Again, we believe that this is a serious weakness in Bultmann's theory which gives us grounds to seek for an alternative proposal.

## Findings

Our examination of the stylistic characteristics of the various portions of John 5 that have enabled Rudolf Bultmann to detect the origins of some parts of that chapter in two putative source-documents while another part can be identified as the work of an editor has led us to reach a number of conclusions.

1. We believe that the stylistic criteria that Bultmann has used to identify his σημεῖα-source are not indicative that the source material can be differentiated from the remainder of the Gospel on stylistic grounds. Furthermore, Bultmann's use of the stylistic criteria he has identified is arbitrary and unscientific in that he seems to identify some characteristics in a portion of material without examining for the absence of these characteristics in surrounding material. We believe also that Bultmann's form-critical identification of the σημεῖα-source material as the source of both the healing miracle and the Sabbath controversy to be unlikely as it seems more likely that the Sabbath controversy is the composition of the evangelist. Also, we believe that the allocation of the kernel of the healing story (verses 2-9a) to a source does not militate against John 5 being a literary unity. Thus we conclude that the case Bultmann has presented for the material in John 5 that he wishes to assign to the σημεῖα-source is flawed on both stylistic and form-critical grounds and that only his theological argument that there is no relationship between sign and discourse stands in the way of any proposal of literary unity for the chapter.

2. In his treatment of John 5 Bultmann presents little in the way of argument to defend his allocation of his chosen material to the *Offenbarungsreden*. While it is clear that



some verses can be set down as poetic strophes, we have found this difficult to justify for the *Offenbarungsreden* material as a whole and particularly when it is laid together as a block. Also Bultmann has left out of the *Offenbarungsreden* some material that contains as much if not more potential for poetic presentation than the material he has included. Thus we conclude that on stylistic grounds Bultmann has failed to justify differentiating between the material he has allocated to the *Offenbarungsreden* and its surrounding material in John 5 and we believe we are justified in saying that his stylistic arguments for allocating some of John 5 to the *Offenbarungsreden* no longer stand in the way of a proposal that John 5 is a literary unity.

3. That the hand of the evangelist would be found somewhere in John 5 was never in doubt. Bultmann has managed to identify many stylistic characteristics which he believes mark out the evangelist's work throughout the Fourth Gospel and some of these are to be found in material he assigns to the evangelist in John 5. However, we have found that in the discourse of John 5 these markers do not clearly differentiate between material Bultmann assigns to the evangelist and surrounding material he assigns to the *Offenbarungsreden*. These characteristics of the evangelist occur in the surrounding material in sufficient numbers to suggest that they are non-indicative for differentiating between the text of the evangelist and his sources. It is important to stress here that we do not disagree that these markers show the hand of the evangelist. Rather we believe they show that the material Bultmann has assigned to the *Offenbarungsreden* in John 5 is likely also to have been written by the evangelist.

4. We have concluded that Bultmann's proposal that verses 28 and 29 and perhaps verse 27 have been inserted into John 5 by an editor is fraught with problems.

Bultmann proposes no stylistic evidence to suggest these verses are the work of a hand other than the evangelist's. His editor's *modus operandi* of inserting corrective material while failing to remove offensive or puzzling material is simply baffling. The theological grounds on which Bultmann proposes that these verses have been inserted – as a corrective to verses 24 and 25 – are not secure as the corrective material may be no more theologically traditional than the material it is supposedly correcting. Thus there is no stylistic justification for proposing an editorial hand at work in these verses and Bultmann's theological argument in support of this is weak at best. We conclude that the case for an ecclesiastical redactor's revision of John 5 is not proven and that Bultmann's theory does not stand in the way of a new theory of unified authorship of the chapter.

5. Once again we wish to take pains to state that our analysis has not disproved Bultmann's source theories for the Fourth Gospel – although we suggest that our arguments and conclusions will make his stance less secure. We have attempted to ascertain whether or not Bultmann's theories can be justified on stylistic grounds in the case of the text of John 5. While we have concluded that Bultmann is probably not justified in allocating parts of John 5 to the σημεῖα-source and to the *Offenbarungsreden*, we are not suggesting that these putative documents never existed – only that on stylistic grounds there is no evidence to suggest they played a part in the genesis of John 5. Nor are we suggesting that the Fourth Gospel was never revised by an editor or editors (known for convenience as the ecclesiastical redactor) – but not even Bultmann has put forward any stylistic evidence that he worked on John 5. Sadly, Bultmann's solutions to these problems are fraught with weaknesses. His methodology – as he presents it in the limited space of his commentary – seems to lack rigour and his

analytical techniques appear to be applied arbitrarily and thus we are led to conclude that he has failed to prove on stylistic grounds that in John 5 the σημεῖα-source and the *Offenbarungsreden* can be differentiated from the work of the evangelist. As Bultmann has failed to present any stylistic evidence to differentiate the work of the ecclesiastical redactor, we are free to conclude that on stylistic grounds John 5 can be said to be a unitive text.

6. Nevertheless, Bultmann has detected difficulties in John 5 with which we must wrestle. He is right to point out that verses 24 and 25 represent a new and radical eschatology. He is right to point out that verses 28 and 29 seem to offer an alternative view. While we disagree with his solutions to these problems, we salute him for highlighting the difficulties they present and for his courage in facing up to them, for a resolution to these difficulties is crucial for a clear understanding of the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel.



## Chapter 5

### John 5 and Johannine Christianity

The hypothesis we have proposed as a resolution to the Fourth Gospel's puzzling theology of judgement proposes the presence in John 5 of a unified bicameral eschatology applicable to two different groups of people. The hypothesis, therefore, clearly presupposes the existence of an identifiable group – a community – which stands apart from the rest of humanity and who claim for themselves a privileged eschatological fate. This chapter will attempt to discover to what extent we are justified in proposing the existence of an identifiable community with which the evangelist and, therefore, the Fourth Gospel itself are aligned – a community which for the sake of convenience we shall term *the Johannine community*. In addition to looking for evidence in the Gospel text that may suggest a Johannine community can be identified, we shall also be looking for specific evidence from John 5 from which we may attempt to infer how the community understood and used the theological propositions presented in the speech of Jesus in the discourse of that chapter.

#### A. Aspects of community

The idea that the text of the Fourth Gospel tells, to some extent at least, the story of the community which produced it is not new. Rudolf Bultmann's commentary, first published in Germany more than sixty years ago,<sup>1</sup> is not devoid of indicators that

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<sup>1</sup> Bultmann 1941.

Bultmann himself was reading the story of the Johannine community between the lines of the Gospel text.<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, however, had other concerns which to him were more pressing<sup>3</sup> and it fell to J.L. Martyn to develop a methodology aimed specifically at using the Fourth Gospel's text as a window through which to look in on the community of John.<sup>4</sup> We have discussed the work of Martyn already at some length, although he developed his thesis further in an essay originally published in 1977,<sup>5</sup> by which time the production of 'histories' of the Johannine community was in full-flow.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps one of the most imaginative of these studies is that of Raymond Brown,<sup>7</sup> a scholar who had initially begun to develop his ideas of the history behind the Fourth Gospel when developing his proposals for the Gospel's composition for publication as part of his commentary.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps a consequence of Brown's insights in his composition theory that allowed him to use that theory with only very slight modification as the basis for proposing his history of the Johannine community. We shall delay our

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<sup>2</sup> For example: "Manifestly the two stories in chs. 5 and 9 must be understood against the same historical background. Both reflect the relation of early Christianity to the surrounding hostile (and in the first place Jewish) world; in a peculiar way they reflect, too, the methods of its opponents, who directed their attacks against men who did not yet belong to the Christian community, but who had come into contact with it and experienced the power of the miraculous forces at work in it. These men were interrogated, and in this way their opponents attempted to collect evidence against the Christian community. Such stories provided the Evangelist with an external starting-point, and at the same time they were for him illustrations alike of the world's dilemma, as it was faced by the revelation, and of the world's hostility." Bultmann 1971, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> John Ashton believes that Bultmann had at best only a minimal interest in the socio-historical background to the Fourth Gospel. However, he notes that passages such as the one quoted in note 2 above "show that he [Bultmann] could have pursued this line of investigation if he had chosen to do so." Ashton 1991, p. 102, note 79.

<sup>4</sup> Martyn 1979, but see above, chapter 3, note 1 on p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Martyn 1977

<sup>6</sup> Richard Burridge notes how "the word *community* itself begins to appear regularly in titles of studies that attempt to reconstruct the group or church behind each of the Gospels – the so called Matthean or Johannine community. A good example is the way in which R.E. Brown and J.L. Martyn see theological issues, especially that of Christology, as defining the various stages of the development of the Johannine community..... Thus the Gospel writers have begun to be seen as theologians, while the subject matter has moved from the basic kerygma to the particular concerns of the writer's community; the audience is therefore defined very specifically as the church within which and for which this Gospel was written. The text is thus a window for the modern critic onto the ancient communities." Burridge 1998, p.117.

<sup>7</sup> Brown 1979

<sup>8</sup> See note 26 on p. 93 above. As John Painter points out, Brown's five proposed stages "allow for the development of the tradition, its oral shaping in transition, the formation of an ordered written tradition, its revision or revisions and finally a redaction. He [Brown] notes that it is not possible to specify precisely the number of editions. However, unless the author sat down and wrote the Gospel out of his head without reference to any tradition, some such process is inevitable." Painter 1991, pp. 43-44.

consideration of the conclusions Brown reached until we have considered for ourselves the possibilities within the text of the Fourth Gospel for constructing a community history. However, it will be worth noting at the outset the constraints that Brown himself considered necessary in constructing a community history by inference from the Gospel text.

Brown is aware of the possibilities of falling into the trap of "self-deception" on three fronts when inferring a possible community history from the text. His first concern is with the danger of over-elaboration when a simpler alternative inference can be drawn. He gives examples from Marcan studies where possible post-resurrectional attitudes have been incorrectly inferred from the text of Mark when it is probably preferable to take the text at face value.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, he is wary of inferring too much from the absence of a given motif in the Gospel unless the particular absence makes the Gospel unusual or unique compared to other New Testament documents. Thus the Fourth Gospel's silence on the issue of virgin-birth is of little significance to Brown as the motif is found only in Matthew and Luke, while he thinks the absence of the use of the term 'apostle,' given its widespread use throughout the New Testament, is deliberate and, therefore, indicative of the evangelist's – and by extension the Johannine community's – views on the significance of the individual apostles and their influence.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, he warns against the dangers of relying on entirely putative source documents as indicators of theological development within a Gospel. While such an approach may be feasible in synoptic studies, where Mark can be proposed as an actual source document for Matthew and Luke, in Johannine and Marcan studies this is not the case. The danger of circularity arises when theologically harmonious passages and motifs are

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<sup>9</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 19-20.



assigned to a putative source and the source begins to grow as more compatible material is added until a complete (although still putative) source document is proposed which has a theological outlook unsurprisingly characterised by no more than the discriminatory criteria used by the exegete in its construction.<sup>11</sup>

However, even in the light of the above cautions, Brown is still confident that it is possible to reconstruct two things by inference from the Gospel text. Firstly – and here we are in broad agreement with Brown’s method but not entirely with his results – the Gospel text gives us a ‘snapshot’ of issues of concern to those in the evangelist’s community at the time the Gospel was written. Secondly, Brown believes the Gospel contains hints of the historical development of the community from its inception and over a number of decades. While we agree with Brown to some extent that certain clues in the text may allow us to draw inferences of a general nature, we are more wary than he of falling into the first trap he described – that of over-elaboration. We agree with David Rensberger here, that confidence in too detailed a reconstruction is misplaced.<sup>12</sup> It is one thing to assume that contemporary issues facing the Fourth Gospel’s community have to some extent emerged in their account of Jesus of Nazareth and his utterances. The nature of the Gospel itself suggests it is reasonable to assume this has happened and that, therefore, the Gospel alludes to certain issues the Johannine community faced when the evangelist was writing.<sup>13</sup> However, to go beyond that and assume that in addition we can infer by a similar method the history of that community through a number of decades may be an assumption too far.

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<sup>11</sup> Brown 1979, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> “I do not believe it is possible to be confident of as much detail as some writers do.” Rensberger 1988, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> See chapter 3 above, particularly pp. 105-119, for our description and assessment of Martyn’s identification of these issues.

Our interest in this study is John 5, but we may only deal with the specifics of that chapter in the light of our assumptions about the Johannine community based on the Gospel as a whole. Therefore, we shall list here the inferences we feel we can draw about the Gospel's community along with a summary of the evidence for doing so. In addition to the characteristic christology and eschatology in which the Johannine Christians believed, we believe that the Fourth Gospel may indicate that its community consisted of Christians with identifiable origins in the Baptist sect, in Samaria, in pagan Gentiles and in synagogue Jews. Furthermore, this community felt the need to identify itself over and against the world in general as well as "the Jews" and Baptist sectarians.

### **Johannine christology**

We saw in chapter 1 that although exalted christologies are to be found elsewhere in the New Testament, the Fourth Gospel has its own uniquely developed christology.<sup>14</sup> The community behind the Fourth Gospel believed or at least were being taught that Jesus was the pre-existent Word that had been present with God prior to creation. The Word had become human flesh and blood in Jesus, yet still shone as an eternal light of truth surrounded by darkness. Only Jesus can reveal God the Father because only he has descended from heaven where he has seen and heard God. To see Jesus is to see the Father because Jesus is one with the Father and is able to say *ἐγώ εἰμι* – I am! In John 5 in particular, the developed christology is presented in terms of the unique Father-Son relationship with its dualistic poles of subservience and equality, the emissary christology of being sent with plenipotentiary powers, the giver of life and the eschatological judge. Thus John 5, while beginning with a healing story which would hardly have seemed out of place in any of the Synoptic Gospels, is developed through

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter 1 above, pp. 43-59.

dialogue into a detailed presentation of clearly defined christological propositions which take the Johannine ideas concerning the person of Christ – and of the man Jesus – well beyond anything which is attempted by the Synoptic evangelists.

### **Johannine eschatology**

Again in chapter 1 we saw how the Fourth Gospel presents a belief in salvation without judgement that the Johannine Christians held to be applicable only to those who accepted Jesus to be exactly who they claimed him to be.<sup>15</sup> Those who accept Jesus as God's son and representative are the inheritors of eternal life, both here and now and in eternity with God following bodily death. The new and unique benefit of this belief is the exemption from the eschatological judgement which awaits the rest of humanity. This adoption into eternal life and its accompanying exemption from judgement through belief in Christ is a new and unique contribution of the Fourth Gospel to Christian doctrine and it also serves to clearly distinguish Christian believers – both in this world and the next – from not only their opponents and persecutors, but also from the world of humanity in general. In John 5 this new eschatology is presented clearly along with an identification of Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man, the judge who will sit in judgement over all those who have not accepted him at the eschaton.

### **Converts from the disciples of John the Baptist**

The Fourth Gospel presents us with a curiously ambiguous picture of its attitude to John the Baptist and to his followers. As we shall see, at the time the Gospel was written it may have become necessary for the Johannine Christians to distance themselves from the claims of contemporary adherents of the Baptist, but as Raymond Brown has

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter 1 above, pp. 60-64.



pointed out, the Fourth Gospel by no means seeks to discredit John and his followers altogether.<sup>16</sup> Rather, John the Baptist's historical role as a man from God is acknowledged and the truth of his claims about Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is emphasised. Furthermore, the first followers of Jesus are directed to him by John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel's narrative. Despite contemporary tensions between Christians and Baptist Sectarians, we would agree with Raymond Brown that a possible explanation of the Johannine ambiguity about the Baptist and his followers is that a significant number of the Johannine Christians held John the Baptist and his teaching in sufficient reverence to suggest that there is some historical memory reflected in the Gospel narrative's link between the first followers of Jesus and the disciples of John. When this is combined with the likelihood that the Johannine Christians may have been seeking and in all probability making converts from the Baptist movement, it is not going too far to suggest that the Fourth Gospel's qualified reverence for John the Baptist reflects the presence of a significant proportion of converts to Christianity from the Baptist sect in the Johannine community.

### **Samaritan converts**

In a manner analogous to our detection of converts from the Baptist sect within the Johannine Church, we may detect the presence of converted Samaritans if an examination of the Fourth Gospel's treatment of the theme of Samaria/Samaritans reveals a broadly sympathetic approach by the evangelist. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus himself is responsible for the conversion of a large number of Samaritans and later on he is accused of actually being a Samaritan. Leaving aside all questions of the historicity of these narrative events (and in no sense wishing to go as far as Raymond

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<sup>16</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 69-71.

Brown in stating when Samaritans entered the Johannine Church, with whom and as a result of whose conversion of them),<sup>17</sup> it is perhaps going far enough to say that the presence of Samaritans who acknowledge Jesus as their saviour in the Gospel narrative, as well as an unanswered accusation of his being a Samaritan, is an indication that the evangelist and his community were broadly sympathetic to Samaritan interests where these coincided with Christian interests. Such a coincidence of interests would have existed where Samaritans were converted to Christianity and the Fourth Gospel may here be indicating that some members of the Johannine community were indeed converted Samaritans.

### **Converts from the synagogue**

That the Johannine Church consisted of at least some members who were converted to Christianity from Judaism and who initially maintained their faith in Christ while remaining within the community of the synagogue may seem too obvious to need labouring here. However, in our examination of the work of J.L. Martyn in chapter 3 above we noted his emphasis on the term ἀποσυνάγωγος (9:22, 12:42, 16:2) – ‘put out of the synagogue’ – and we agreed that to some degree the experience of contemporary Jewish Christians as they were being rejected by their synagogue communities was emerging and presenting itself in the Gospel narrative. It is the use of this term – ἀποσυνάγωγος – that indicates almost beyond doubt that at least some of the Johannine Christians were formerly Jews who had worshipped in the synagogue before being expelled as their Christian affinity became less and less acceptable to the synagogue authorities.

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<sup>17</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 34-40.

## **Gentile converts**

That the Fourth Gospel emerged from a community with some members who were Gentile converts to Christianity may be inferred on the grounds of the Gospel's explanatory asides and its theology. There are a number of instances where the evangelist includes explanations of terms whose meaning would be obvious to anyone of Palestinian origin or, indeed, of Diaspora Jewish origin, such as ῥαββί (1:38), τὸν Μεσσίαν (1:41 and again at 4:25) and Κηφᾶς (1:42). From this it may be inferred that the writer of the Gospel expected that amongst his readers would be at least some who had no knowledge of even the most familiar of Jewish terms. We may infer that these readers were Gentiles. However, it is taking quite a jump along a chain of inferences to simply conclude that because the author of the Fourth Gospel anticipated Gentile readers that his Gospel emerged from a community consisting of at least some Gentile converts. That such a jump might be justified is indicated by a number of comments in the Gospel text. For instance, Jesus is proclaimed by the Samaritans to be not just their saviour, but the saviour of the world (4:42) within the context of Jesus' teaching that true worship of the Father will be worship in spirit and in truth, but neither on Mount Gerizim nor at Jerusalem (4:21-24). The Gospel's prologue (1:12) defines the children of God as those who have accepted Jesus, while Jesus informs Nicodemus (3:3, 5-6) that being descended through the flesh (as the Children of Israel presumably) counts for nothing. These passages indicate that the Fourth Gospel has an interest in promoting the disinheritance of "the Jews" and in widening the franchise of "Israel" or "the children of God" to include anyone of any background who accepts the Johannine Jesus. This interest goes beyond merely enlightening a few gentile readers of otherwise puzzling Semitic words and phrases – it probably indicates that at the time the Gospel



was written, the Johannine community had an embedded constituency of gentile converts.

### **The Jews**

That the expulsion of Johannine Christians from the synagogue and their ongoing acrimonious exchanges with the “Jews” is a likely background to many of the Fourth Gospel’s dialogues, has been investigated and established above in chapter 3 in our critique of the work of J.L. Martyn.<sup>18</sup> Jewish communities centred around Synagogue worship were widely enough distributed in the early Christian era to make it seem unlikely that the Johannine Christians were able to live in an area of isolation from Jewish influence unless they were geographically isolated from society as a whole and the Fourth Gospel presents no evidence that this was the case. Furthermore, the attempts of the Jamnian authorities to formulate and enforce the observance of a single, ‘normative,’ form of Judaic practice and worship in the wake of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple may have given particular Jewish communities the impetus they required to commence sanctions against those of their members who had leanings towards the Christian faith with the result that some Johannine Christians had been subjected to particularly stringent discipline and discrimination within the synagogue community to which they formerly belonged. In the context of John 5 it is explicitly the “Jews” with whom Jesus is in dialogue over accusations arising from their attempts firstly to persecute and then to kill Jesus and we believe it may be justifiable to assume that the Gospel narrative here reflects a situation in which the Johannine Christians had begun to establish themselves as a community apart from, and even in hostile isolation to, their former Jewish colleagues. It is for this reason that we believe that the

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<sup>18</sup> See chapter 3 above, pp. 105-119 and note 2 on p. 106 regarding the contribution of W.D. Davies.

translation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, throughout the Fourth Gospel, is best rendered by the phrase “the Jews.” While a number of alternative translations of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι have been suggested (e.g. the Judeans; the leaders of the Jews; the religious authorities in Jerusalem), and while we agree that a case can be made for such understandings of some of the uses of the Greek phrase in the context of Jesus’ historical ministry,<sup>19</sup> we believe that in the context within which the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was writing, the English phrase “the Jews” best captures the connotation he wished to express. Given our belief that John’s Gospel is set against a background in which a Johannine community is ranged over against a probably local Diaspora Judaism in which notions of locale and temple hierarchy had disappeared or were fast disappearing, we feel “the Jews” most neatly encapsulates the connotation of *the membership of the Jewish religion in its entirety* which the evangelist sought to convey. Ultimately, the Johannine Christians with origins in the Synagogue were being made ἀποσυνάγωγος at a local level – not directly by Jamnian authorities – and it is the local representatives of

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<sup>19</sup> Even if John’s Gospel is understood to be a purely historical account of Jesus’ ministry, then the arguments of Malcolm Lowe remain unconvincing - οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John can not be best understood as “the Judeans” as distinct from Galileans, Samaritans and other inhabitants of the land of Israel in every instance as has been convincingly demonstrated by Maurice Casey - see Lowe 1976 and Casey 1996, pp. 116-127. As John Ashton has pointed out, even if read on a purely historical level, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι of John 6:41 are more likely to be Galilean than Judean. Ashton goes on to argue against Lowe’s position on the grounds that οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is equally as valid a term describing Galileans as it is as a description of Judeans and that there is no evidence to suggest that the term could effectively discriminate between the Jews of Judea and Jews of the Diaspora. Furthermore, he notes that Lowe fails to account for the general tone of hostility to be found in the Fourth Gospel towards οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι - see Ashton 1991, pp. 133-134. Ashton’s own solution is to suggest that John’s hostility is directed against those descendents of (or survivors of) the Pharisees and the temple priests who became the focus of authority within Judaism in the years following the destruction of the temple (Ashton 1991, pp. 157-159). In a subsequent article Ashton develops this thesis at some length, again in dialogue with Lowe, suggesting that John’s hostility towards the descendents of an identifiable Jewish sectarian group (i.e. Pharisees at Jamnia) may be indicative of the origins of the Johannine community within another (presumably disinherited) Jewish sectarian group – see Ashton 1994, pp. 36-70. While Ashton plausibly demonstrates that John’s use of the term Samaritans may have wider connotations than is usually understood (i.e. including Galileans and other rural Jews), and while he is elsewhere explicit in his belief that the evangelist was originally an Essene, he does not seem to consider to what extent Christian Jews within the Synagogues had become identifiable a Jewish sectarian group (and a disinherited one in terms of Jamnia) by the late First Century – see Ashton 1994, pp. 68-70 and Ashton 1991, p.237.

Judaism, against whom John's community were ranged, that must be understood by οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.

### **The World**

Leaving aside John 3:16 in which 'the world' is stated to be a specific object of God's love, in the Fourth Gospel the term 'the world' is generally synonymous with those who fail to accept the revelation of Christ and are, therefore, associated with the negative aspects of John's dualistic polarities – darkness, falsehood and judgement. For the Johannine Christians, the world beyond their community is peopled by the sons of darkness (12:35-36). It is a world which can not understand Jesus and his spirit (14:17; 16:8-11, 20; 17:14-16; 18:36). The world hates Jesus and those who have accepted him (7:7; 15:18-19; 16:20). It is a world for which Jesus can not pray (17:9) and which he must overcome (16:33). The world owes allegiance to its own Satanic Prince (12:31; 14:30). The Johannine faithful see themselves in stark contradistinction to this picture of the world – it is a world from which they stand apart and to which they no longer belong.

### **Baptist Sectarians**

Although C.K. Barrett advises a cautious assessment of the relationship between the Johannine Christians and contemporary followers of John the Baptist on the grounds that there is little or no evidence that a Baptist sect actually existed by the time the Gospel came to be written,<sup>20</sup> he accepts that "the fourth evangelist would not have written in such a pointedly negative way about the Baptist had he not known some who

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<sup>20</sup> "The difficulty we encounter here is the lack of concrete evidence for the existence of a Baptist sect." Barrett 1993, p. 347.



made equally pointed assertions about him.”<sup>21</sup> Such “pointedly negative” writing in the Fourth Gospel amounts to those passages in which the Baptist is, while being accorded honour, shown to stand in a markedly inferior position to that of Jesus. Thus we read that the Baptist himself denied that he was Christ, Elijah or prophet (1:20-23). His disciples desert him to follow Jesus (1:37) while he claims for himself only the status of the bridegroom’s friend – a necessary but less important figure (3:25-30). In the speech of Jesus, the Baptist is a witness – but not an important one whose testimony is required (5:33-36). We agree with Barrett that this frequent downplaying of the Baptist’s role probably indicates the ongoing role of a Baptist sectarian movement whose claims were felt to rival those of the Johannine Christians.

Thus we see that at the time the Fourth Gospel was written, the Johannine community may have consisted of Christians with origins in at least four distinct groups – the synagogue, the followers of John the Baptist, Samaritans and Gentiles. Moreover, we have inferred that the community was at pains to distinguish itself clearly from synagogue Jews, the world in general and the ongoing followers of John the Baptist. In the context of the wider Christian Church this community had developed or adopted a uniquely developed christology and they had eschatological beliefs that clearly distinguished between Christian believers and the rest of the world. Raymond Brown has identified other groups against whom he believes the Johannine Christians wished to distinguish themselves, including Jewish Christians of inadequate faith (amongst whom were the Palestinian Churches)<sup>22</sup> and Christians belonging to Churches of Apostolic foundation (whom he accuses of a kind of idolatry which valued the

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<sup>21</sup> Barrett 1993, p. 347.

<sup>22</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 73-81.

Apostolic leadership above the leadership of the paraclete).<sup>23</sup> Here we suspect he may have fallen into the trap of over-elaboration which he himself identified at the outset of his study, as we find his arguments for the existence of these two groups unconvincingly contrived. Brown's evidence for Johannine Christians wishing to distinguish themselves clearly from the Palestinian Churches is based on three strands of evidence, two of which we believe clearly point instead towards lapsed Christians and a third which alludes to tensions between Jesus and his family during his ministry. Brown believes this mirrors tensions between the Johannine Churches and the Palestinian Churches where the family of Jesus had remained prominent up to and beyond the time the Gospel was written. There is a certain irony in the fact that Brown himself, in his introduction, had twice warned against over-elaborate inferences about Mary the mother of Jesus in the context of Marcan studies. Given that the Gospel is set in the form of a biographical account of the ministry of Jesus, even if we accept that we may infer certain things from it about the community that produced it, it is surely simpler to accept the references to Jesus' brothers as a historical memory of tensions which did exist during his lifetime.

Brown's belief that the Fourth Gospel sets itself up in opposition to Churches of Apostolic foundation that paid insufficient attention to the leadership of the paraclete may also be carried too far. Given the Gospel's own claim to eye-witness testimony and its association with the beloved disciple, it is difficult to believe the Johannine Christians would wish to point the finger too closely at other Churches claiming parallel and perhaps better attested associations. That the Fourth Gospel does express a concern for seeking and acknowledging the leadership of the paraclete is however well founded,

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<sup>23</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 81-88.

but again Brown may have taken the argument a little too far in identifying a stance against other Churches in this regard.

Raymond Brown is critical of J.L. Martyn for not seeking to identify the source of the christology that characterises the Johannine community that produced the Fourth Gospel.<sup>24</sup> It may be that Martyn, like Rensberger, is simply cautious of inferring too much about the history behind the Johannine Christians from the reconstructed 'snapshot' of their community at the time the Gospel was written. Brown, for all his intended caution, is comparatively bold and speculative in his assertion that the 'catalyst' (as opposed to the actual source) for these developments was the arrival of a new group of Samaritan converts into the already established Johannine community. We have stated above that we suspect Brown's reasoning here may represent an assumption too far. While we believe the Gospel is representative of a Samaritan component in its community, we can not agree with Brown that it is possible to say when or how such a Samaritan group came to be part of the Johannine Church – if indeed, the Samaritan group was not part of the Johannine community from its inception. The chronological development of the community which came to produce the Fourth Gospel is largely a closed book to us and is likely to remain so.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the search for the origins of the uniquely Johannine theology of high christology and exclusive eschatology must be carried on elsewhere, and perhaps the most promising place to carry out that search is at the interface between New Testament exegesis and the social sciences.

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<sup>24</sup> Brown 1979, p. 174.

<sup>25</sup> John Painter provides an interesting summary of scholarship in this area along with his own insightful contribution. See Painter 1991, pp. 45-63 and also the dialogue between Judith Lieu and Raymond Brown in Lieu 1986 and Brown 1989.



### Wayne Meeks and David Rensberger

One of the first attempts to apply the insights of the social sciences to Johannine scholarship was the 1972 paper by W.A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,"<sup>26</sup> in an investigation into the function of the motif of the descending-ascending redeemer in the Fourth Gospel. Although Meeks' article did examine the literary function of the motif within the text, his main thrust was to ask how the descending-ascending redeemer motif functioned as myth in the social context of the community that produced the Gospel. Meeks takes as his point of departure the well-known assertion of Rudolph Bultmann that Christ's revelation in the Fourth Gospel is relatively devoid of content beyond the repeated assertion that Christ himself is the revealer.<sup>27</sup> Where Meeks parts company with the Bultmannian position is in his rejection of the need to posit an over-arching myth of a descending-ascending redeemer figure lying behind the Gospel which will make John plainly comprehensible to us and by which it was plainly interpreted by its first readers, whether such a putative myth be of gnostic origin or otherwise.<sup>28</sup> While not rejecting entirely the possibility that such a myth may have existed, Meeks believes firstly that Bultmann's proposal of a gnostic origin for such a myth has been effectively disproved. Secondly he believes that the existence of such a myth is highly questionable and that further searches for it are likely to prove fruitless. Thirdly he believes that it is unnecessary to posit such a myth at all in order to understand the nature of the Fourth Gospel's revelation and the function of a motif such as the descending-ascending redeemer on a literary level within the text and on a social level within the Johannine community.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Meeks 1972. The references given here are to the reproduction of Meeks' paper in Ashton 1997.

<sup>27</sup> See our Introduction above, note 18 on p. 6 and also Meeks 1972, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Meeks 1972, pp. 169-174.

On the literary level, Meeks' contention is that the Fourth Gospel's repetition of the theme of Jesus as a heavenly descending-ascending redeemer figure serves the function of communicating as often as possible the simple fact that Jesus is who he says he is to those who are willing and able to hear the message.<sup>30</sup> Running in parallel with this, Meeks believes that the Gospel deliberately sets out to emphasise the incomprehensibility of this message to those who are unwilling or unable to accept it – the "Jews" and the world.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for Meeks, the Gospel manifests, even on a clearly explicit literary level, a division of humanity into those who can and will accept the revelation of the Johannine Christ and those who can not or will not – a division into insiders and outsiders, those who are born from above and those who are from below, those who come to the light and those who prefer the darkness. Now, it may be worth pausing here to ask the question, if the revelation of the Johannine Christ is so incomprehensible to outsiders, is this because the outsiders lack the interpretative 'key' of a background myth, as proposed by Bultmann, to make the Gospel comprehensible? Meeks' answer is to sidestep this question and to propose that the inability of outsiders to comprehend the Gospel's message is largely beside the point. The point is that the message is ultimately comprehensible to insiders because of their social situation.<sup>32</sup> The question of myth is not to be considered in terms of a putative background to the Gospel, but in terms of the way the myths which are more or less explicitly presented in the Gospel functioned in the society in which and for which the Gospel was written.

With reference to mythological motifs which are less explicitly stated in the Fourth Gospel, Meeks is certain that the Gospel itself provides no mythological explanation as to why humanity is divided into those from above and those from below. The status of

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<sup>30</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> Meeks 1972, pp. 177-181.

<sup>32</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 181.

being 'from above' or of being 'from below' is 'conferred' rather than 'ontological,'<sup>33</sup> a situation which, he feels, may have left enough of an interpretative vacuum to account for later difficulties for the Johannine Christians after the Gospel was written.<sup>34</sup> However, in the context of the Gospel, Meeks believes that the motif of the descending-ascending redeemer contributes to an overall dualistic picture of the universe – an 'above' and a 'below' in which the Johannine believers, though marooned in the lower realm to which they no longer belong, are united with God through their acceptance of Christ as the redeemer. In the lower realm of the earthly world the faithful are not alone, for the world is populated by those who truly belong to it – those who are from below – and who are opposed to the faithful. The quintessential representatives of these opponents in the Fourth Gospel are the "Jews," whose opposition on a literary level is directed against the earthly Jesus. However, on the basis that the literary Jewish opposition to Jesus in the Gospel is representative of actual Jewish opposition to the Johannine Christians in their society, Meeks proposes that the dualistic metaphors and mythological division of the cosmos into 'above' and 'below' would have been instantly recognisable and understandable to the Gospel's first readers because such mythology mirrors the situation of social isolation and persecution in which they found themselves.<sup>35</sup> While we would cavil with Meeks' assertion that the Fourth Gospel as a book serves to reinforce the Johannine Christians' "largely negative" perception of their own self-identity,<sup>36</sup> we are in broad agreement with him that the key to understanding

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<sup>33</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 191.

<sup>34</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 194-195.

<sup>35</sup> Meeks 1972, pp. 191-192.

<sup>36</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 193. We hope to be able to show in chapter 6 below that the Johannine Christians viewed themselves as being uniquely privileged. Indeed, as part of what C. Lévi-Strauss calls "the paradox of cultural relativism," the Johannine Christians were becoming more and more like their dialogue partners as the dialogue progressed – in this case increasingly assured of their own unique access to the only means of achieving salvation. See Lévi-Strauss 1973, pp. 329-330.



the ‘puzzle’ of the Gospel is not in regarding it as “a chapter in the history of *ideas*”<sup>37</sup> as such, but in coming to view its system of myth and metaphor as a response to a specific social situation. Positing for the evangelist’s community a social situation of increasing isolation and hostility from the former parent group in the synagogue, resulting in the gradual erection of sectarian boundary markers along with the formulation of doctrines, myths and metaphors which bestow spiritual advantages upon the faithful believers while serving to vilify their opponents, is the key to increased understanding of the ‘puzzle’ of John. In terms of John 5, the ‘puzzle’ for us in this study is to locate the christological and eschatological claims of that chapter, their appearance and their function, within the emerging sectarian consciousness of the Johannine community.

A number of commentators on the Fourth Gospel, including Meeks and Rensberger,<sup>38</sup> have indicated their belief that the community behind the Gospel’s production displayed numerous characteristics of sectarianism and have argued that the term ‘sect’ is an appropriate description of the Johannine Church. Raymond Brown too thought that the Johannine community showed sectarian characteristics but pulled back from labelling them as a sect because he believed the term could only be applied to a particular church which had ‘broken communion’ with every other branch of the Christian Church.<sup>39</sup> (This was after Brown had shown that he believed the Fourth Gospel was critical of almost every other branch of the Christian Church.)<sup>40</sup> Our interest here is to focus on John 5 and the evidence in that chapter that indicates its author wrote from a sectarian

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<sup>37</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 191. An understanding of systems of myth and metaphor in relation to a specific social setting is not, of course, mutually exclusive with thinking in terms of a “history of ideas.” Indeed, history is ultimately understandable (as opposed to legend and myth) in terms of a degree of precision of context. While certain ideas can stand apart from history (e.g. mathematics), an appreciation of religious thought can only be improved by an understanding of the social setting in which those ideas appeared – even when such an understanding may only be inferred from the ideas themselves.

<sup>38</sup> Meeks 1972, p. 194; Rensberger 1988, pp. 27-28.

<sup>39</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 88-91.

<sup>40</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 71-88.

standpoint. In particular, the eschatological exclusivity of John 5 points to a belief amongst the Johannine Christians that they, and only they, were the inheritors of and benefactors of a new eschatology of 'eternal life' which exempted them from judgement at the eschaton and promised them a heavenly existence with God after death. The key to obtaining these benefits seems simply to have been to confess that the Johannine Christ was who he claimed to be – that is, who the Johannine Christians claimed him to be – the pre-existent, descending-ascending, son of God and judge who gives life and frees his followers from judgement. Those who made this confession and were prepared to live by it were amongst the privileged few – the few who would obtain eternal life immediately, would live with God after death and would be spared judgement at the eschaton. Failure to make this confession about Christ was to put oneself outside the privileged community, to align oneself with the world and to remain subject to judgement at the parousia-eschaton.

This belief in freedom from judgement for the Johannine Christians and for no one else is surely a clear indicator of their own sense of 'otherness,' of being set apart from the world around them. Clearly they regarded themselves as special, as uniquely privileged possessors of a tradition which they believed was traceable back to the historic ministry of Jesus himself, yet one which the world at large was choosing to ignore and which certain specific enemies, such as their former colleagues in the synagogue, were determined to quash. If to be a sect is to clearly demarcate one's own community from the rest of the world, then the Johannine Christians had done this with their eschatological claims. Only they would be saved. Only they knew the answers that would guarantee salvation by setting anyone who confessed belief in their Jesus free from judgement. Yet in no sense is the door to their Church closed. Membership of the

Johannine Church seems to remain open to anyone who will accept Christ on their terms. The Johannine Jesus builds his community of followers as he proceeds through the pages of the Fourth Gospel and, we have assumed, the Johannine Christians were themselves seeking new converts in the world around them – some perhaps paying the ultimate price for doing so in the context of a hostile synagogue community. And, it would seem, to become a Johannine Christian was perhaps easier for the interested outsider than it was for those who desired to enter the communities of other faiths such as Judaism; for all that was required for entry into the Johannine community was to accept Jesus as who the Fourth Gospel claimed him to be, to maintain that belief, to do so publicly and communally and the rewards were there to be had – eternal life beginning in this life and continuing in the next without the fear of coming judgement. Even though the door was not closed for the world to come in, it is through this belief, that those who were ‘in’ were free from judgement, that the Johannine community set itself firmly apart from the world outside which remained subject to eschatological judgement.

However, that there were great dangers inherent in the Johannine community’s sectarian stance has been well recognized by David Rensberger.<sup>41</sup> He rightly notes the ‘negative aspects’ of Johannine sectarianism as being at least the possibility of the development of “a xenophobia that would have little room for ordinary kindness, let alone self-giving love, towards outsiders” as well as the potential for an arrogant self-belief in the community as the sole possessor of the truth in a manner which would make dialogue with other Christian groups and especially other religious groups difficult if not impossible.<sup>42</sup> Against these dangers must be weighed the positive aspects of Johannine

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<sup>41</sup> Rensberger 1988, pp. 138-144.

<sup>42</sup> Rensberger 1988, pp. 138-140.



sectarianism. Rensberger notes not only the clarity of the Johannine confession but also the very nature of being a 'sect' – a body in opposition to the world's power structures offering an alternative stance and new answers to those dissatisfied with the society in which they lived or with the spiritual fulfilment they had so far been able to obtain.<sup>43</sup> But perhaps the greatest counterbalance to the dangers of Johannine sectarianism and the one which ultimately outweighed them was the 'open door,' not only the welcoming of new and willing converts but also the active mission in the world to seek converts amongst those who did not wish to be converted.<sup>44</sup> Rensberger sees in the Gospel allusions to missions amongst Synagogue communities, Samaritans, followers of John the Baptist and also amongst Gentiles. In all these mission areas it seems likely that a successful conversion would be one amongst a hundred or a thousand rejections. Rensberger rightly notes that the Fourth Gospel is not a missionary tract to any or all of these groups, but is rather something of a *vade mecum* through which the dispirited and dejected missionary could draw strength and inspiration by reading and meditating on the suffering and rejection of Christ through which his glorification was obtained. Only thus, by dedicating themselves and rededicating themselves again and again to mission outside their community in the hostile world could the Johannine Christians live out their professed belief in Christ and also guard against the ever-present dangers of being part of a too inward-looking elitist sectarian community.

### **The community and the Johannine Epistles**

David Rensberger's recognition that there were inherent dangers in the sectarian stance taken by the Johannine Christians suggests that some consideration of subsequent

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<sup>43</sup> Rensberger 1988, pp. 140-143.

<sup>44</sup> Rensberger 1988, pp. 144-150.

difficulties within and around the evangelist's community is appropriate. Rensberger's analysis is concerned with difficulties the community may have had in dealing with external groups – a situation reflected in the text of the Gospel itself. However, the Johannine Epistles present us with a response to a situation in which it seems there was dissent and schism *within* the Johannine community.<sup>45</sup> Raymond Brown has charted a most plausible 'history' of the relationship between the three Johannine Epistles and the Fourth Gospel.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, Brown proposes that since 1 John and 2 John address "the same doctrinal and moral issues" and since 2 John and 3 John are both "concerned with the acceptance of traveling teachers," the likelihood is that all three Epistles "come from the same phase of Johannine history" and are the work of the same author.<sup>47</sup> Common authorship with the Fourth Gospel, however, is not proposed.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Brown suggests that all three Epistles post-date the Gospel by about ten years on the grounds that at least that length of time would need to have elapsed in order for the Gospel's concern with the external conflict with the Synagogue to have faded from immediate view, as it appears to have done in the Epistles, and for the internal conflict caused by differing interpretations of the Johannine tradition to have matured into schism, which appears to be the situation the Epistles are addressing.<sup>49</sup>

In outline, 1 John 2:19, 4:5 indicate that a dissenting group has left the ranks of the Johannine community and is now presenting to a wider audience an interpretation of the Johannine tradition which had formerly caused disagreements within the community.<sup>50</sup>

The author of 1 John argues against the views and practices of this dissenting group.

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<sup>45</sup> This view is argued for with much variation in detail but generally with broad agreement by Raymond Brown, Martin Hengel and John Painter. See Brown 1979, pp. 93-144; Brown 1982, pp. 69-116; Hengel 1989, pp. 46-67; and Painter 1991, pp. 56-63, 371-399.

<sup>46</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 93-103; Brown 1982, pp. 69-73.

<sup>47</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 94-95.

<sup>48</sup> Brown 1979, p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Brown 1979, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Brown 1979, p. 103.

However, as Brown points out, any reconstruction of the beliefs of the dissenting group is, in reality, a reconstruction of what the author of the Epistle believed (or wishes his readers to believe) was the position of his opponents.<sup>51</sup> Such a reconstruction may produce an exaggerated or false picture of the real grounds for dispute. However, as no documentary evidence exists for the other side of the argument, the evidence of the Epistle must be cautiously relied upon. Brown's reconstruction is based on the assumption that the beliefs and practices of both sides in the Johannine schism are based on differing interpretations of the traditions known to us through the Fourth Gospel.<sup>52</sup> However, the failure of the Epistles to quote directly from the Gospel itself prevents Brown from being able to say that the author was familiar with actual text.<sup>53</sup> Brown is careful, therefore, to demonstrate in his interpretation that not only the views of the author of the Epistle, but also the putative views of the dissenting group, are both possible and plausible interpretations of the Johannine tradition.<sup>54</sup>

From the text of 1 John, Brown has been able to suggest that a major area of disagreement between the Epistle's author and his opponents was the christological interpretation of the Johannine tradition.<sup>55</sup> Brown's analysis of the statements of the Epistle's author shows that the thrust of the author's argument is one of qualification amounting to correction of mistaken inferences drawn from propositions within the Johannine tradition. For example, 1 John 2:22, 3:23, 4:2-3, 15, 5:1, 5 all lay a particular stress on the name *Jesus* in relation to other christological formulas which seems to want to emphasise the necessity of acknowledging the specific involvement of the

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<sup>51</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 103-104; Brown 1982, pp. 72-73.

<sup>52</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 106-107; Brown 1982, pp. 71-100.

<sup>53</sup> Brown 1979, p. 106, note 209, a view which is modified somewhat into a belief that the author of the Epistles knew an early form of the Fourth Gospel's text by Brown 1982, p. 86, note 190.

<sup>54</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 110-120, 120-123, 124-135.

<sup>55</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 109-123; Brown 1982, pp. 73-79.



earthly life and ministry of the man *Jesus of Nazareth* in the community's salvific beliefs. Brown believes that the author of the Epistle is here trying to correct a tendency to interpret the Fourth Gospel tradition in a way which minimizes the significance of the incarnation and the events of Jesus' ministry and which concentrates mainly or fully on the glory of the ascended Christ. It is possible, as Brown goes on to show, that the traditions of the Fourth Gospel can be interpreted in ways which allow for both the more exalted christology of the secessionists and the corrective view of the Epistle's author.

The text of 1 John also shows that its author was concerned with aspects of ethical belief and behaviour in those against whom he wrote.<sup>56</sup> In particular he writes to correct an ethic which seems to assume an automatic status of sinlessness and freedom from the guilt of sin. He is also concerned with an ethic which expresses itself in a lack of love for other Christians. For example, 1 John 1:6-7, 8, 9, 10, 2:3-4, 6, 9, 3:22-24, 5:2-3 are all concerned with correcting a tendency to assume some kind of salvific perfection which requires no moral response in terms of the keeping of the commandments in particular and love towards other Christians in general. Indeed, the passages 1 John 2:9-11, 3:11-18, 4:20-21 all specifically address the problem of a failure to obey the commandment to love one another (John 15:12). Again, Brown shows that an attitude which paid scant regard to the importance of ethical behaviour for salvation may have developed from christological beliefs amongst the secessionists which minimized the career and teaching of the earthly Jesus.

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<sup>56</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 123-135; Brown 1982, pp. 79-86.

That disagreements over these christological and ethical issues may have led to the schism recorded in the first two Johannine Epistles is possible. However, 1 John indicates that the trauma of the debates and the eventual split left their marks on the thinking of the remaining Johannine Christians of whom the author of the Epistles is representative.<sup>57</sup> It is in the area of 1 John's eschatology that we get some indication that perhaps the realized eschatology of the Fourth Gospel tradition had come to be perceived as too much of a good thing. At 1 John 2:28 an explicit reference is made to the reappearance of the risen Christ, while other passages such as 1 John 2:18, 22 and 4:1-3 allude to a belief in impending apocalyptic events. Perhaps the stance of the secessionists had sounded a warning note that the Gospel's instant unqualified gift of salvation through Christ needed to be somewhat tempered with reminders of the need to maintain high standards of moral behaviour and the necessity of keeping the commandments. Could it be that part of the response to the trauma of the schism was to resort to the language of future eschatology as not only a reminder to those remaining within the community, but also as a warning to those who had gone out from it?<sup>58</sup> It seems also that 1 John's interest in the parousia may reflect a re-awakening of interest in the events of the parousia-eschaton which had formerly played such a minor role in the eschatology of the community as reflected in the Fourth Gospel itself. A renewed interest in the events associated with future eschatology may well have come about as a result of the despair and grief of the post-Gospel community as they began to see their world collapse around them in dispute and schism.<sup>59</sup> If this interpretation is correct and

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<sup>57</sup> Brown 1979, pp. 135-138; Brown 1982, pp. 99-100.

<sup>58</sup> Brown 1979, p. 137 – "The seriousness of the schism lends a somber tone to the author's future eschatology, as he resorts to the language of Jewish and Christian apologetic." Brown 1982, p. 100 suggests that the introduction of future eschatological themes may have been done with the opponents of the Epistle's author firmly in mind – "The apocalyptic atmosphere [of 1 John] serves as a warning to those who think little of commandments and who walk in darkness while claiming to be in light."

<sup>59</sup> In our Introduction and in Chapter 6 below we deal with developments in belief in response to changing circumstances (worldview maintenance) with respect to John 5 in particular. However, such a mechanism may also be responsible 1 John's interest in future eschatology.

the Johannine Epistles do indeed reflect a period of schism and theological reassessment, then we must also conclude that the confidence expressed in the Fourth Gospel's heavenly eschatology and freedom of judgement for believers represents a high point in the fortunes of the Johannine community when the threat from the Synagogue was beginning to be overcome and the threat from internal dissent had not yet emerged.

### **The community and the Gospel audience**

We have noted above that while the work of Meeks and Rensberger has focused mainly on what may be inferred from the text about the particular concerns of the evangelist and, therefore by extension, about the community in which the Gospel was produced, both authors go on to express some limited views about the Gospel's assumed audience. Meeks is interested in the ability of the Gospel reader both to be able to respond to the evangelist's literary strategies and to understand the function (as opposed to content) of myth in the Gospel. Rensberger sees the Fourth Gospel as an aid to those involved in missionary activities. Interest in the possible identification of Gospel audiences has been sharply focused by the recent book edited by Richard Bauckham – *The Gospels for All Christians*.<sup>60</sup> In particular, the book contains three essays which are worth considering in the light of the deductions we have made so far in this chapter.<sup>61</sup> The basic argument behind all three essays is that there has been a mistaken scholarly consensus within New Testament studies which has assumed without argument or proof that the Gospels must have been written *for* specific local communities to read. In other words, the Gospel audiences have mistakenly<sup>o</sup> been identified with the Gospel

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<sup>60</sup> Bauckham 1998a.

<sup>61</sup> Bauckham 1998b, Burridge 1998 and Barton 1998.



communities. Bauckham, Burridge and Barton all propose that this mistaken scholarly consensus be replaced with one which assumes the Gospels, including John, were written with the idea of a much wider readership in mind, indeed that the intended audience of the Gospels was a general and widespread Christian one.<sup>62</sup>

The purpose of our present study is to address a specific problem presented by the text of John. Part of our methodology, particularly in this chapter, has been to assess to what extent we can make certain fairly general inferences about the community in which the Fourth Gospel was produced. These inferences are useful if they help us to understand the concerns of the evangelist and, therefore, the concerns of those with whom he lived, worshipped and talked about theological matters – in other words, the community behind the Gospel: the Johannine community. This we see as a different issue from that of Gospel audience. In making our inferences about the community behind the Gospel we do not consider it necessary to speculate about the nature of the audience which the evangelist had in mind when he wrote. Our methodology assumes that regardless of whether the evangelist intended his Gospel to be read in one Church, one city, one province, or whether he envisaged the ultimate universality of his work, the Fourth Gospel was shaped by the experiences and thinking of the community from which it grew. This is not to say that the community was, therefore, the audience. Ultimately the audience of the Gospel was immeasurably wider than the community which produced it and it may well be the case that the evangelist (and, indeed, his community) intended this from the start.

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<sup>62</sup> See Bauckham 1998b, pp. 12-13, 45-46; Burridge 1998, pp. 144-145; Barton 1998, pp. 193-194.

Insofar as our concern is with the community behind the Gospel and not the community (audience) initially intended to be in front of it, the arguments of Bauckham, Burridge and Barton need not impinge upon the application of our hypothesis or its usefulness in helping to resolve the puzzle of judgement in the Fourth Gospel. However, some of the arguments used by these authors in the formulation of their theses might seem to cast doubt on our methodology. Therefore we shall briefly discuss those arguments here. Bauckham's essay begins by questioning what he believes to be the generally held consensus position that the Gospels were written for specific communities. He wishes to argue that the Gospels were written with a general readership in mind. While we believe that the general thrust of Bauckham's argument has merit and that it does not adversely affect the application of our hypothesis, we would wish to question three of the lines of reasoning he uses.<sup>63</sup> Firstly, he suggests that the historical context in which the Gospels were produced can not be specified as the communities of the evangelists, but must be taken to be the wider context of early Christianity.<sup>64</sup> There may be in this argument something of a blurring of the clear distinction which must be kept in mind between the community behind the Gospel and its intended audience. The scholarly consensus within which we have chosen to work is that the nature of the Fourth Gospel has been profoundly shaped by the historical context in which it was produced, even if we are able only to infer generalities about that particular context. Such inferences may say a great deal about the community behind the Gospel, but little or nothing about those to whom it was addressed. Secondly, Bauckham is concerned that modern scholarship's interest in Gospel communities in some ways negates 1900 years of

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<sup>63</sup> Bauckham produces six concluding arguments: 1. Reconstruction of the Gospel audience is a mistaken hermeneutic; 2. The Gospel's were intended for a wide diversity of audience; 3. The historical context of Gospel production is not the communities of the evangelists, but wider early Christianity; 4. The mistaken hermeneutic disregards two millennia of previous interpretation; 5. The diversity of the Gospels themselves is not denied, only a diversity of readership; and 6. The search for historical specificity is misplaced. We are broadly in agreement with the first, second and fifth. We take issue above with the third, fourth and sixth. See Bauckham 1998b, pp. 44-48.

<sup>64</sup> Bauckham 1998b, p. 46.

comment and interest in the Gospels in which the idea of communities was never posited.<sup>65</sup> Once again we suspect the distinction between communities behind and audiences for the Gospels has slipped out of focus. We hope that this chapter has helped to show that the introduction of the idea of a community behind the Fourth Gospel has proved to be the key to fresh and insightful interpretations of John's text in the light of what may have been happening in the Johannine community. Again, this says very little about the intended audience of the Gospel. Thirdly, Bauckham suggests that the search for historical specificity in Gospel studies is misplaced.<sup>66</sup> Again we detect here a degree of confusion between the search for specificity about those who produced a Gospel and about those who read it. Bauckham seems to wish to use his dislike of methods used to infer audience specificity to criticize, by extension, the use of analogous reasoning to infer a degree of historical specificity about the community in which the Gospel was produced. Barton, too, is critical of attempts to infer the specific Gospel audience from evidence within the Gospel text and, to some extent like Bauckham, he also attacks methodologies which have been used in the main to infer Gospel communities rather than audiences. In particular, Barton is critical of Wayne Meeks for his attempts to say something about the readers of the Gospel.<sup>67</sup> However, as we noted above, the main concern of Meeks' essay is the community behind the Gospel. His comments about audience are almost peripheral to his thesis, yet Barton to some degree implies that the whole thrust of Meeks' argument is suspect because the idea of specific Gospel audiences is suspect. On the whole Barton seems to keep a clear distinction between Gospel community and Gospel audience in his essay,<sup>68</sup> yet it is in his engagement with Meeks that this distinction becomes blurred. Burrige, as the

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<sup>65</sup> Bauckham 1998b, p. 47.

<sup>66</sup> Bauckham 1998b, p. 48.

<sup>67</sup> Barton 1998, pp. 189-193 in dialogue with Meeks 1972.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Barton 1998, p. 193.



opening remarks of his essay show, is also keenly aware of the distinction to be made between Gospel audience and Gospel community and, as his conclusion shows, he is aware that there has been some degree of blurring of this distinction in recent scholarship.<sup>69</sup> Burrige's concern is with the Gospel genre as a form of ancient biography which would be written, almost by definition, for reading by as wide an audience as possible. He argues that as *biography* the idea that the Gospels could have been shaped by the communities in which they were produced is inappropriate and that the aims of the evangelists as *biographers* would have been a restraining influence on the intrusion of community concerns into the emerging Gospels.<sup>70</sup> Such a view, though, seems to take insufficient account of the degree to which a particular evangelist, as a biographer, has been shaped and influenced by the community, worship and theology in which he has grown and lived. Furthermore, Burrige's view seems to disallow any diversity of purpose in writing for the evangelists or, at least, it seems to suggest that they wrote their Gospels in isolation from those who might have influenced their writing. We feel this is something of a weakness in Burrige's argument although we do not believe his overall thesis of an intended generality of Gospel readership is necessarily wrong. Indeed, we do not disagree with the general thesis of the volume in which the essays of Bauckham, Burrige and Barton appear, nor do we feel that its overall argument particularly affects our own hypothesis, as long as a clear distinction between Gospel audiences and Gospel communities is kept firmly in mind.

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<sup>69</sup> Burrige 1998, pp. 113, 144.

<sup>70</sup> Burrige 1998, pp. 125-130.

## B. A story on two levels

In chapter 3 we examined the thesis of J.L. Martyn in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* with particular emphasis on his exposition of John 5. We noted that Martyn's primary concern was to look for evidence in the text that the Fourth Gospel's evangelist was intimating on a secondary literary level some measures taken against the Johannine Christians by the synagogue authorities and we further noted that Martyn had achieved his aim with some measure of success – although we also expressed concern that he might be attempting to be too specific at some points. We went on to point out that we believed there remains the potential to apply Martyn's method in an examination of the dialogue of John 5 in the search for clues that the evangelist was intimating in a similar way the arguments that the Johannine Christians were employing in their defence in the face of persecution from the synagogues.<sup>71</sup>

The dialogue of John 5 is found in verses 17, 19-47, and on Martyn's *einmalig* level is the speech of Jesus in its entirety. This *einmalig* level is the 'historical' context in which the evangelist has set this speech – it is the response of Jesus firstly to accusations of Sabbath-breaking (in verse 16) and secondly to the intimation (in verse 18) that "the Jews" were now seeking his death. Thus we see that the evangelist has set the dialogue of John 5 firmly in the context of not only verbal controversy, but also a death threat, which on the *einmalig* level is an early precursor to the events of Jesus' trial and execution. If we are to follow Martyn's method, we may propose that the John 5 dialogue contains examples of the arguments used by the Johannine Christians both

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<sup>71</sup> Raymond Brown has pointed out that regardless of whether the use of such material is contemporary with the writing of the Gospel or belongs to a previous phase of debate with the synagogue, "any religious group that has split off from another group will preserve in its arsenal arguments that justify the stance it took." Brown 1979, p. 68.

when they were involved in verbal controversies with their opponents in the synagogue and when they were being arraigned on capital charges in the kind of judicial process Martyn has described. In order to examine the John 5 dialogue for clues which might indicate such apologetic or polemic material, it will be found useful to split the text into a number of headings indicative of content. On the *einmalig* level the ‘argument’ of Jesus in the dialogue can be divided into the following sections:

- Christological claims 5:17-23
- Eschatological consequences of the christological claims 5:24-30
- Testimony in support of the christological claims 5:31-40
- Why “the Jews” can not accept the christological claims 5:41-44
- The testimony of Moses 5:45-47

We shall now take each of the above five sections in turn and examine it firstly to discern what the evangelist has Jesus saying on the *einmalig* level, and secondly to look for evidence that the speech contains apologetic or polemic comments which we may infer is the evangelist placing the beliefs of his own community in the mouth of Jesus. As a means of confirming that such material was used in this way, we shall also keep one eye focused on Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*,<sup>72</sup> a text of slightly later provenance (c. 135 C.E.) than the Fourth Gospel, but which is known as a specific example of early Christian apologetic and polemical material aimed either directly against Jews or at Christians involved in dialogue with Jews. It is not our aim here to attempt to suggest or establish any degree of literary relationship between John and Justin, nor do we feel it will be necessary to trawl further through the texts of the Church Fathers in order to

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<sup>72</sup> See Colson *et al.* 1929-53 and Yonge 1997 for translations of the works of Philo.



establish whether or not christological and eschatological beliefs of the kind found in John 5 were used in Church-Synagogue dialogue within at least a few years of the Fourth Gospel being written. We shall regard Justin's text as representative of its type and if we find that Justin uses arguments similar to those placed in the mouth of Jesus in John 5, we may conclude neither that Justin must have known John, nor that John must be using his own community's apologetic and polemic material as he writes. Rather we may conclude that the latter is at least a possibility.

### **The christological claims of John 5: 17 – 23**

The christological claims made by Jesus in this section of the John 5 dialogue are:

- Verse 17 – My Father is working still, and I am working.
- Verse 19 – The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.
- Verse 19 – Whatever he does, the son does likewise.
- Verse 20 – The Father loves the son.
- Verse 20 – And shows him all that he himself is doing.
- Verse 20 – Greater works than these will he show him.
- Verse 21 – As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he wills.
- Verse 22 – The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the son.
- Verse 23 – He who does not honour the son does not honour the Father who sent him.

On the *einmalig* level it is possible to trace a line of argument through the various statements that Jesus is making in his own defence in this passage:

Jesus is justified in performing certain tasks on the Sabbath because God his Father is still at work on that special day of rest. Jesus has a special relationship of 'sonship' with God the Father and he does whatever he sees his Father doing. Furthermore, in his special relationship as Father to the son, God shows his son all that he does and will go on to show him greater things than he has shown him up until now. Since he has seen what his Father does and is able to do the same things, Jesus is endowed with the divine prerogatives of God. He is able to give life and he is able to exercise judgement – in fact, the Father has passed on the prerogative of judgement to him. In view of his special relationship with God the Father and because Jesus is possessed of divine attributes, far from entering into controversy with him, his antagonists should be honouring him. Their failure to honour him is a failure to honour the Father who has sent him.

The starting point of Jesus' argument is that he has a special relationship of 'sonship' with God his Father. This point is developed to show that 'sonship' incorporates divine attributes and, therefore, "the Jews" are mistaken in the premises on which they have criticised Jesus and, furthermore, their whole attitude to him is inappropriate. Here, in the context of a Sabbath-controversy and amidst threats of violence, the evangelist has Jesus make some fundamental christological statements which, on the level of the Gospel's drama, have Jesus claim for himself a unique relationship with God including the ability and the right to exercise divine powers and the entitlement to be honoured as God because he has been sent from God.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter 1 above, pp. 52-54.

If we move from the *einmalig* level of the Gospel's drama and begin to infer the presence of arguments used by the Johannine Christians, we must bear in mind that the claims in this passage remain essentially christological. They are statements justifying the stance of the historical Jesus couched in the theological language of a later generation and as such are unlikely to have been directly applicable to the Johannine Christians themselves if cited in their defence. It is possible, therefore, that these christological statements could have been used by the Johannine Christians either to justify Jesus' stance towards Sabbath observance in the face of probable Jewish claims that he was well-known to have been a Sabbath-breaker, or they may have stood alone as an argument 'proving' his divinity on the grounds that he had been sent from God and had a special relationship of 'sonship' with God. Indeed, these claims may have been originally formulated as a theological 'proof,' only later becoming incorporated into Sabbath disputation. Whether this happened in the Johannine community prior to the writing of the Gospel or is purely the result of the evangelist's artfulness is almost impossible to decide. Martyn has proposed that the second-level drama of John 5 is centred around the arraignment of a Jewish Christian preacher on capital charges of 'leading the people astray,' and in such circumstances it is easy to see how this argument could have been used. Such an arraignment would presumably take place in a Jewish ecclesiastical court of some kind, therefore a defence using theological arguments would seem to be appropriate. However, we do not believe it is necessary to be quite so specific regarding the context in which such arguments could have been used. Given that these statements are christological, their use as apologetic arguments could have been appropriate in a number of contexts in which the Johannine Christians



felt they had to justify in dialogue the stance of Jesus himself or their own stance as his followers.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps a parallel use of christological belief in early Christian apologetic is to be found in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100, where Justin quotes Jesus as having said, "All things are delivered unto me by My Father" and "No man knoweth the Father but the Son; nor the Son but the Father, and they to whom the Son will reveal Him." While this is plainly an allusion to Matthew 11:27, the context of Justin's use of his christological understanding is clearly analogous to the situation we have proposed and may be being mirrored in the John 5 dialogue.<sup>75</sup>

#### **The eschatological consequences of the christological claims in John 5: 24 – 30**

Amongst the christological claims discussed above, an eschatological theme is introduced in verse 22 where Jesus claims that the divine prerogative of judgement has been delegated to him by God the Father. Clearly, this christological claim must have eschatological consequences in which the 'role' of Jesus as judge is explained and expanded upon. This is exactly what we find in verses 24-30, where the eschatological consequences of the christological claim are developed. As with the previous passage, in these verses the evangelist places a number of specific claims in the mouth of Jesus:

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<sup>74</sup> The Fourth Gospel is representative of a strand of belief in which the Christian believer not only represents Christ, but is in some sense Christ himself. Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* 26 also reflects this in that those who are persecuting Christians are spoken of as those who "are" persecuting Christ. While the work of J.L. Martyn has shown how this is perhaps represented in John 5 and 9, the Fourth Gospel hints more explicitly at this kind of belief in John 15, where the motif of μένω is presented as a reciprocal relationship of *abiding in* or *remaining in* in not quite a physical, but certainly a mystical sense.  
<sup>75</sup> See also *Dialogue with Trypho*, 136, which deals with the theme of God being rejected by those who reject Christ in terms clearly analogous to John 5:23.

- Verse 24 – Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, comes not into judgement and has passed from death to life.
- Verse 25 – Even now the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.
- Verses 26, 27 – The Father has given the son authority to execute judgement because he is the Son of Man.
- Verses 28, 29 – Soon those who are in their graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.
- Verse 30 – As I hear I judge, and my judgement is just because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Here we are dealing with one of the most difficult passages in the Fourth Gospel; so much so that many commentators have concluded that the contradictions between realised and future eschatology in these verses can only be resolved by proposing that verses 28 and 29 have been inserted into the text by a redactor. We confronted the likelihood of this being the case in chapter 4 above and concluded that it could not be justified on a stylistic analysis of the text. Nor could we understand why a redactor would insert corrective material without removing the material that offended him. Therefore, we shall proceed with the text as we find it and seek to find a solution that harmonizes the tensions between the realised eschatology of verse 24 and the future eschatology of verses 28 and 29.

On the *einmalig* level of the Gospel narrative, Jesus is once again making a series of claims and this time a linear argument running through and with them is harder to find.

Therefore, in an attempt to help us understand this passage, we shall seek to interpret it in light of the hypothesis we have proposed in our introductory chapter.<sup>76</sup> Let us assume that in one sense the commentators who proposed that John 5 contained two separate eschatologies were correct and that they were wrong only in their proposition of a redactional insertion of 5:28, 29. Let us further assume that the two eschatologies are present beside one another quite deliberately because, as part of the Fourth Gospel's unified eschatology, they are both believed to be true *but* are applicable to different classes of persons. Our assumption is that the realized eschatology applies to Christian believers while the future eschatology applies to everyone else – Jews, pagans and even former Christians. In the light of this assumption it is possible to trace a line of argument through this passage which originates in the christological claim of verse 22: Those who hear Jesus' message and accept God through him have eternal life now and will not go through any form of judgement – they will pass from death to life (eternal life). Even now people who are spiritually dead are hearing the voice of the son of God and are living as a result. Despite this, remember that the Father has authorised the son to act as judge (because he is the Son of Man) and that, therefore, there must be a judgement for some at least. This will happen soon enough for those who have died without having had the chance to accept Christ – the good to a resurrection of life, the bad to a resurrection of judgement. And the judgement Jesus gives is a just judgement because he does not seek his own will but the just will of God who sent him.

As a consequence of the christological claim that Jesus has had delegated to him from God the divine prerogative of judgement, he spells out what that means in this passage. For those who accept him as who he claims to be, acknowledging him as the son of

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<sup>76</sup> See our Introduction above, pp. 12-15.



God, there is no judgement. These people enter at once into eternal life and are exempted from judgement. (This theme is not new to the Fourth Gospel, having already been introduced at 3:18, where its obverse is also spelled out – those who reject Jesus will not only face judgement, they are already condemned.) This gift of eternal life has even been given to individuals who were formerly spiritually dead but who have accepted Jesus' message. However, a judgement process remains for those who reject Jesus and for those who have not had the chance to accept him, presumably those who have already died and those who will die without hearing about Jesus. It seems there will still be a *day of judgement* (the parousia-eschaton) to which all these individuals will be called by Jesus – not by God the Father – where they will be judged. Thus it seems that the new 'realised' eschatology of eternal life without judgement only applies to those who accept Jesus as the son of God and worship God through him. The 'future' eschatology, the 'day of judgement,' is still in place except that Christ has replaced God the Father as the judge. Christian believers are exempt from this judgement, it remains in place in order to judge all other classes of people. As with the christological claims, the eschatological consequences end with an acknowledgment that Jesus' involvement is only due to his special relationship with God the Father who has sent him.<sup>77</sup>

On a secondary level this passage tells us that the Johannine Christians believed they themselves had entered into eternal life and would not be subjected to any process of judgement as a result. They also believed that Christian believers were unique in enjoying these privileges as they applied to no one else. Such an eschatological proposition may have been a powerful weapon used by the evangelist's community in

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<sup>77</sup> See chapter 1 above, pp. 52-54.

its search for converts, as the instant removal of any concerns over an impending appearance at the parousia-eschaton would have been a powerful inducement to embrace the new Christian faith. Furthermore, the inducement is all the greater when the penalty for rejecting Christ is guaranteed condemnation. Hope of a favourable judgement at the parousia-eschaton remains only for those who have never heard of Christ and have lived good lives, a belief we find echoed in the context of apologetic dialogue by Justin in *Dialogue with Trypho*, 45.<sup>78</sup> Those who are offered the opportunity to accept him but do not do so are without hope. Thus there are positive inducements in this passage to convert to Christianity and there are also negative sanctions of a terrible nature for those who choose not to. But, are there indications of arguments used against the synagogue in this passage? As we have seen, the adherents of Judaism believed that their racial and religious heritage was to be their great saving grace at the day of judgement. Any argument that this would not be the case could be considered a direct slander against Judaism. This is a theme to which John 5 returns in its closing verses and we shall deal with it further on our comments on that passage. At this stage, though, it is worth pointing out that it can be no accident that the eschatology of this passage offers the synagogue opponents of the Johannine Christians less than a slim chance of acquittal at the parousia-eschaton – it offers them no hope at all because they are already condemned for rejecting Christ. Once again we find this view expressed more than once in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, where Justin tells his opponent that “those who have and do persecute Christ, if they do not repent, shall not inherit anything on the holy mountain.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In the context of those Jews who have lived and died without knowing of Christ, Justin says, “Since those who did that which is universally, naturally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, they shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection ...” *Dialogue with Trypho*, 45.

<sup>79</sup> See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 26 and 46 for the use of similar beliefs in apologetic dialogue. Note here also the clear equation of the persecution of Christ with the persecution of Christians.

### **The testimony in support of the christological claims in John 5: 31 – 40**

In these verses the eschatology of the preceding passage is left behind and the focus is now on the 'testimony' of 'witnesses' called to support the christological claims made in 5:17, 19-23. Firstly the evangelist has Jesus (speaking now in the first person) serve notice that his own testimony about himself is naturally invalid and that the human testimony of John the Baptist is not required. In sequence, these are the points made:

- Verses 31, 32 – My own witness to myself is invalid but I do have a witness whose testimony about me is valid.
- Verses 33, 34, 35 – You have already asked John the Baptist and he testified truly, although I do not need such human testimony. (Remember that while he was alive you accepted him as a righteous man.)
- Verse 36 – The deeds I do are a testimony to me – they are a testimony that I am sent from the Father.
- Verses 37, 38 – God the Father testifies about me. (You have neither heard him nor seen him. His word does not abide with you – if it did you would recognise me as being sent from him.)
- Verses 39, 40 – You place great reliance on the scriptures because you think that in them you will find life. But you fail to see that they testify about me and, therefore, you refuse to come to me to receive the life you seek.

On the *einmalig* level it is easy to follow Jesus' argument in these verses as he refers back to the claims he made about himself earlier:

I will not testify about myself because I know you do not regard such testimony as valid. Furthermore, I will not rely on the human testimony of John the Baptist in whom



you seemed to trust. But I have a witness who testifies for me and whose testimony is valid. God the Father testifies on my behalf. He testifies through the things he has given me to do. Also God testifies about me through his word. You do not know God in any way – you do not recognise his voice. If you did know God you would know that I have been sent from him and that the scriptures, which you venerate as his word and in which you seek salvation, testify about me. If you knew God and recognised his word you would come to me for the salvation you seek.

Although Jesus has three times previously in the John 5 dialogue addressed his opponents directly with, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you,’ (verses 19, 24 and 25) it is only in this passage that his argument turns from himself (the christological claims) and his role (eschatological consequences) to point out their failings. It is “the Jews” in their opposition to Jesus as God’s son and messenger who are at fault for failing to recognise that there is evidence before them that would justify Jesus if only they could recognise it. Even though Jesus does not accept such human testimony, “the Jews” have failed to recognise that it was Jesus of whom John the Baptist spoke when they questioned him (John 1:19-34). They have failed to recognise that God has been present in the works he has given Jesus to do – a clear reference back to the completely ignored healing miracle related in 5:2-9a. They have failed to recognise that God has testified about Jesus in the scriptures – the very scriptures that they themselves claim to venerate so highly. Because of their own failure to recognise these things they have failed to come to Jesus to receive what they really seek.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> As Andrew Lincoln points out, there is a sense in which the introduction of the possible testimony of John the Baptist serves only to allow Jesus to “toy with his accusers” in their discomfort at the adequacy of a witness of whom they, at one time at least, approved. (Lincoln 2000, pp. 77-78.) There is, however, also a sense of deliberate irony in the way the evangelist ‘toys’ with his readers by introducing a perfectly good witness only to dismiss his testimony.

On a secondary level this passage may well be revealing to us some Johannine polemic against the synagogues. Perhaps in a theological debate or perhaps as *ad hominem* arguments for the defence in the kind of arraignment before a tribunal that Martyn was alluding to, these verses from the John 5 dialogue are a direct attack on “the Jews.” Their role on the *einmalig* level is clear – Jesus is defending himself by attacking his opponents. But if there is a secondary level on which we are to read John’s Gospel, their role in it is equally clear. The evangelist’s community may have been engaged in some kind of debate, controversy or even judicial process which necessitated the formulating of arguments which are directed against specific opponents – in this case “the Jews.” The synagogue authorities who have been criticising or persecuting the Johannine Christians, perhaps even putting them on trial, are themselves guilty of failing to properly assess the evidence before them. They fail to realise the theological implications of the things Jesus did, the witness to him of John the Baptist and the witness to him in the Hebrew scriptures. Ironically, in failing to recognise Jesus for who and what he was, they have thrown away their chance to obtain that which they claim to crave – the ‘eternal life’ of verse 39. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* furnishes us with numerous examples of a similar argument, suggesting that the idea of the Hebrew scriptures as witnesses to Christ was a common one in early Christianity and a consistent theme of apologetic dialogue.<sup>81</sup>

#### **Why “the Jews” can not accept the christological claims: John 5: 41 – 44**

In this short passage there is a slight change of tack as Jesus moves on from pointing out his opponents’ mistakes to pointing out why they have been making these mistakes. He makes the following points:

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<sup>81</sup> A few examples will suffice here – *Dialogue with Trypho*, 40, 66, 75-78, 83-86, 90-91, 97-98, 104-107.

- Verse 41 – I do not accept human glory.
- Verse 42 – But I know you do not have the love of God within you.
- Verse 43 – I have come in the name of the Father and you have rejected me. Yet you will receive someone else if he comes in his own name.
- Verse 44 – How can you believe when you seek glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from God.

Jesus' *einmalig* dialogue with his accusers continues through these verses. As he is not seeking human glory, not only does he stand in contrast to them – since he states that they only seek glory from one another – but he is also free to say things they will find insulting, such as his assertion that they do not have the love of God within them. He contrasts his own coming in the Father's name with the coming of some other, probably hypothetical but presumably impressive, person with whom they would seek to align themselves in order to share in the favourable public opinion – the glory – that would then accrue to them. On the basis that the glory they seek is human glory in the form of favourable opinion from one another, he feels justified in questioning their faith – hence the assertion that they do not have the love of God within them.<sup>82</sup>

As with the previous passage, it is easy to see how an argument such as this could have been employed by the Johannine Christians in a controversy with their opponents from the synagogue. With only a little imagination one can picture a confrontational situation in which the Johannine Christians were contrasting their own rejection of worldly values, their disdain for glory from other people, with what they perceived as the seekers after public glory in the synagogue. “The Jews” had rejected Jesus in his

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<sup>82</sup> There is a clear sense of irony in the way this passage attacks the worldly values of “the Jews” as seekers after glory. As Malina and Rohrbaugh have observed, Jesus is “rejecting a core value of Mediterranean societies” in which self-respect and honour were paramount, but it would nevertheless be embarrassing for “the Jews” to realise they were being accused of aligning themselves with such a value system at the expense of honouring God. (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, pp. 121-124.)



lifetime and now they were rejecting his followers of a later generation. Those Christian followers might well be tempted to question the faith of their antagonists and it is quite conceivable that they might conclude that their enemies in the synagogue were devoid of the love of God. Such *ad hominem* arguments are common in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, a typical example being chapter 55 where Justin claims that God has withheld from the Jews the ability to interpret their own scriptures properly.<sup>83</sup>

### **The testimony of Moses in John 5: 45 – 47**

This closing passage of John 5 reintroduces both the themes of eschatology and of witness. Moses is cited as a further witness in support of Jesus and is identified as an accuser of “the Jews.” Again Jesus speaks in the first person:

- Verse 45 – I will not be your accuser before God the Father. Your accuser will be Moses in whom you place your hope.
- Verse 46 – If you believed what Moses wrote you would believe in me, for he was writing about me.
- Verse 47 – But since you do not believe in the writings of Moses, why should you believe what I say?

The *einmalig* drama of John 5 concludes with Jesus informing his opponents that in the eschatological great assize he will not be their accuser. In a terrible twist of irony their accuser will be Moses in whom they set their hope and whom, no doubt, they expected to be their defence counsel. But they have no right to expect this of Moses for they do

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<sup>83</sup> See also *Dialogue with Trypho*, 11-23, 68.

not believe what he wrote. His writings point to Jesus and if they believed what he had written, they would believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be.<sup>84</sup>

As with the last two passages, it is not difficult to imagine the Johannine Christians employing the argument of this little passage in controversies with their synagogue opponents. We have seen that Jewish eschatological belief about the last day would have expected God as a favourable judge and perhaps Moses as a defence counsel pleading on behalf of the children of Israel. It seems that the Johannine Christians were prepared to turn this picture on its head by replacing God the Father with Jesus as the judge and to switch the role of Moses from counsel for the defence to counsel for the prosecution. While the Johannine Christians no doubt sincerely believed in this eschatological scenario, the irony of the situation could not have escaped them, nor indeed of the assertion that the Jewish understanding of the writings of Moses was deficient. It may be that the Johannine Christians relied on a typology of the Pentateuch in their disputations with their synagogue persecutors, a reliance which led them to believe they had a fuller understanding of these scriptures than their Jewish opponents did. It is the obverse of this situation that is revealed in this passage. A deficient understanding of the Pentateuch by “the Jews” has led them to miss the fact that Moses is also a witness who testifies about Jesus – his testimony is contained in his writings. Once again we find that Justin has used related arguments in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. In particular and with regard to their salvation, Justin tells the Jews that they will be denied salvation because it is only to be found through Christ and, furthermore, the

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<sup>84</sup> For examples of Moses' intercessory role in Jewish theology, see *Jubilees* 1:20-21 (translation given in Wintermute 1985) and *Testament of Moses* 11:17 (translation given in Priest 1983). See also Harvey 1976, pp. 109-110.

observance of the Law, which they value as righteousness, will be discounted as worthless.<sup>85</sup>

## Findings

In this chapter we have found that the Fourth Gospel text presents sufficient evidence to allow us to draw some limited inferences about the nature of the Johannine community at the time the Gospel was written. Of particular significance is the finding that previous commentators have been justified in suggesting that the Johannine Christians were engaged in acrimonious exchanges with the synagogue authorities to whom they were probably previously allied. We have found that there is evidence which allows us to infer a sectarian consciousness behind the Fourth Gospel, indicative of a community which sees itself as set apart from or even in opposition to the rest of humanity in general and synagogue Jews in particular. Using a technique analogous to that of J.L. Martyn, we have found that it is possible to infer the content of the arguments used by the Johannine Christians in their acrimonious dialogue with their Jewish adversaries. In particular, from the speech of Jesus in John 5, we have inferred the presence of apologetic christological and eschatological propositions along with polemic against the synagogue and its theology which indicate the nature of a debate of some kind between Christians and Jews without the need to posit a specific judicial process for these exchanges. We do not, however, rule out the possibility of the kind of synagogue tribunal which J.L. Martyn has suggested. Furthermore, from our search through the apologetic and polemical arguments of Justin in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, we have

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<sup>85</sup> See *Dialogue with Trypho* 44 and 46.



established that similar arguments were used in Church-Synagogue dialogue within a few years of the Fourth Gospel's composition, suggesting that the Johannine Christians could have used these arguments in just such a context and that, if so, they may not have been alone in doing so.

In applying our hypothesis (of a unified bicameral eschatology applicable to two different groups of people) to the passage John 5:24-30, we have found that the passage can be read as a unity in which the sectarian awareness of the Johannine Christians is appropriating for itself a uniquely privileged eschatology which has no applicability for the rest of humanity. The privileged Johannine sect sees itself as free from eschatological judgement and already living in the eternal life offered by Christ. On the other side of the sectarian divide is the rest of humanity which remains subject to judgement at the parousia-eschaton.

We have found that the hypothesis which we have proposed in our introduction remains applicable in the light of our understanding of the Johannine Christians as a community with a sectarian outlook which sees itself as set apart from and in opposition to the wider world. Therefore, we believe we are justified in investigating further the applicability of this hypothesis in considering the Johannine worldview and its contribution to the development of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement.

## Chapter 6

### Legitimation and Theology in John 5

Our hypothesis for the resolution of the puzzle of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement proposes that there is a unified but bicameral eschatology presented in John 5, consisting of a new and uniquely Christian eschatological scenario which will apply only to believers in parallel with a more traditional eschatology which applies to the rest of humanity. Therefore, the hypothesis specifically presupposes a development in Johannine theology in which fresh christological and eschatological proposals are appearing. In particular, as we have seen in chapter two above, the Fourth Gospel proposes a christology in which the earthly Jesus of the narratives is unequivocally empowered with the divine attributes of life-giver and judge. Moreover, the Gospel proposes that Christians are exempt from eschatological judgement, that they have already entered into eternal life and that their eternal life will continue in the heavenly realm following physical death. In parallel, John also presents a more traditional eschatology for the un-Christian portion of humanity – a resurrection to judgement at the parousia-eschaton.

Our hypothesis will be supported and perhaps confirmed if we are able to show under what stimuli and by which mechanisms these developments in Johannine theology may have taken place. Therefore, in this chapter we shall examine the Fourth Gospel for whatever clues we may obtain about the background to the Gospel and the pressures which may have been acting upon the theologians who formulated the new doctrines as they are presented. In order to do this we shall look for evidence which will help us to

reconstruct the evangelist's worldview and ethos – his 'model of' and 'model for' reality. Also we shall search for evidence of the process of *legitimation* as it has helped to shape the theology with which we are presented.

#### A. John's worldview and ethos

The search by scholars to locate identifiable sources, influences and background in the literature, mythologies, philosophies and cultures of antiquity which have played a recognisable role in helping to shape the Fourth Gospel has proved ultimately to be less than conclusive. Indeed, the confusion of ideas proposed in the course of this search is occasionally matched by a confusion in the minds of some scholars as to how to define the differences between a source, an influence and a background and the varying degrees to which these *could* have contributed to the Gospel's final form.<sup>1</sup> It is clear enough that John is a *Gospel* in that it presents a characteristic biographical account of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth which culminates in an account of the passion and the resurrection along with, particularly in John's case, a good deal of theological doctrine which we may for the sake of convenience call the *Christian* mythology. But beyond this obvious observation, it must also be stated that the Fourth Gospel has many qualities to it which set it firmly apart from its Synoptic counterparts. It is the search for the *origin* of these uniquely Johannine qualities that has been the enduring impetus propelling the quest to get *behind* the Gospel, to get under its skin and examine every fibre of its inner tissues in the hope of unlocking its mysteries by learning how to interpret it not just in terms of early Christianity, but also in terms of the wider culture –

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<sup>1</sup> Ashton 1991, p. 96.



literary, historical, philosophical, religious, sociological and geographical – in which individual scholars have proposed that the Gospel was produced. Thus the search for sources, influences and background to the Fourth Gospel has ranged through many areas of ancient literature, including the Synoptic Gospels,<sup>2</sup> the rabbinic literature,<sup>3</sup> the Hermetic literature,<sup>4</sup> the works of Philo,<sup>5</sup> the literature of Mandaeism,<sup>6</sup> the literature of Samaritanism<sup>7</sup> and, not least, the literature of Qumran.<sup>8</sup> The resulting proposals for the provenance of John's Gospel have varied widely. The Fourth Gospel has been understood by some to be the product of a lone genius,<sup>9</sup> while at the same time it has been understood by others to be the product of a *school* of authors<sup>10</sup> and to have reached its final form as a result of a series of redactions over a considerable period of time.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars have proposed that it was written with the intended purpose of being read by all peoples in every time and place,<sup>12</sup> while others believe it addresses a specific social situation within the community in which it was written.<sup>13</sup> It has been understood to have been produced in both Ephesus<sup>14</sup> and in Palestine.<sup>15</sup> Some have proposed that it was originally written in Greek<sup>16</sup> while others insist that it is a translation from Aramaic.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars believe that John has no sources beyond remembered eye-witness tradition,<sup>18</sup> while others have proposed specific source documents of a putative

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<sup>2</sup> Barrett 1978 and Brodie 1993a.

<sup>3</sup> Dodd 1953 and Barrett 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Dodd 1953.

<sup>5</sup> Meeks 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Dodd 1953 and Meeks 1967.

<sup>7</sup> Meeks 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Brown 1966 and Beasley-Murray 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Robinson 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Cullman 1976.

<sup>11</sup> Smith 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Kysar 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Meeks 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Beasley-Murray 1987

<sup>15</sup> Ashton 1991

<sup>16</sup> Turner 1976

<sup>17</sup> Burney 1922

<sup>18</sup> Robinson 1985

nature.<sup>19</sup> Some believe the Fourth Gospel to be totally unrelated to Synoptic Gospels<sup>20</sup> while others have proposed that it is to some degree dependent upon them.<sup>21</sup>

The bewildering perplexity of these many proposals for the provenance of the Fourth Gospel is to some degree a reflection of both the variety of questions which scholars have asked of the text and the variety of scholarly and in some cases ecclesiastical agendas with which they have approached their study. Few studies, however, clarified the questions which needed to be asked of John's text more precisely than those of Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>22</sup> Bultmann's questions and his answers had both positive and negative effects. The clarity of his questioning of the text's difficulties remains to this day the benchmark by which all subsequent scholarship is measured. Similarly, the neatness of his all-embracing solution to those problems still presents any scholar with the task of justifying why his or her proposal should be accepted in preference to Bultmann's both ingenious and elegant source and redaction hypothesis. Yet Bultmann's proposals ultimately failed to produce a consensus position within Johannine scholarship and his proposal of a putative and specific documentary source for the Fourth Gospel's discourses no longer commands wide scholarly assent.

We have engaged extensively in this study with the work of J.L. Martyn<sup>23</sup> and we believe it was with the wide acceptance of Martyn's theories concerning the Fourth

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<sup>19</sup> Fortna 1988

<sup>20</sup> Gardner-Smith 1938

<sup>21</sup> Brodie 1993a

<sup>22</sup> John Ashton has given a particularly clear and insightful account of Bultmann's approach to the Fourth Gospel, condensing Bultmann's questions down to two fundamental ones: Are we justified in changing the order of the Fourth Gospel's text in order to relieve the tension caused by the famous aporias? And, if so, what account may we give for the text's apparent disorder as it stands? Furthermore, Ashton believes that Bultmann was able to identify two great riddles with which the Fourth Gospel presents its readers: What is the historical origin of the Gospel? And what is the Fourth Gospel's big idea – what is it trying to tell us? See Ashton 1991, pp. 44-66.

<sup>23</sup> See Martyn 1979 and chapters 3 and 5 above.

Gospel's reflection of a specific historical situation of conflict with the synagogue that a consensus position within Johannine scholarship on the provenance of the Fourth Gospel began to emerge. Martyn's proposals were built upon subsequently by scholars such as Meeks<sup>24</sup> and Rensberger<sup>25</sup> who sought to augment Martyn's historical approach with insights borrowed from work in the social sciences with the result that today, despite one or two voices of caution,<sup>26</sup> it can be said that there is a scholarly consensus position in Johannine studies concerning the provenance of the Fourth Gospel which places its production in the historical and social *milieu* we have described in the previous chapter. We believe that this consensus has been reached because the historical and social background we have described provides the best key yet devised to unlock the door to an increased understanding of what the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel is trying to say. This is not deliberately to detract from the immense scholarship of Hoskyns, Bultmann, Dodd and many others of previous generations who sought to identify the specific cultural influences which colour the Fourth Gospel's pages. It is, however, necessary to point out that despite all their painstaking scholarship over very many years, it did not ultimately fall to these scholars to devise a key which would unlock John's mysteries as successfully as Martyn and his successors have done.

So, what of the consensus position? What do its specifically historical and sociological insights tell us that previous generations of scholars did not? In order to answer this question it is still necessary to enquire about the background to the evangelist's thought, although for the purposes of this study the background we are interested in is perhaps more easily defined as his worldview – his 'model of' reality. In other words, beyond the Fourth Gospel's specifically Christian mythology, what does the text tell us about

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<sup>24</sup> Meeks 1972

<sup>25</sup> Rensberger 1988

<sup>26</sup> Bauckham 1998b, Barton 1998 and BurrIDGE 1998



the evangelist's cosmology? Only once we have firmly established the cosmology which formed part of the worldview of the evangelist and by implication the worldview of his community and his readers, can we attempt to map out how this worldview shaped the Christian ethos ('model for' reality) which the Gospel presents. Therefore, our task here is to describe (as far as it is possible to do so) the evangelist's worldview and the cosmology which lies within it.

As a means of entering into the worldview of the evangelist, it is perhaps worth beginning by examining the Fourth Gospel's use of the motif of Satan/the Devil/the Evil One. John links this motif with his conception of 'the world' in his designation of the Devil as 'the Prince of *this* world,' as one who is opposed to Jesus and to his followers.<sup>27</sup> However, this Satanic opposition is doomed to failure as the evangelist has Jesus three times declare his victory in some kind of cosmic struggle in which 'the Prince of this world' is defeated (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In what sense, therefore, is this victory achieved and what are the consequences of defeat for the Devil and for the world? After all, it is clear from other passages in John that Satan/the Devil/the Evil One is still at large in the world and is still able to harass those who follow Christ (13:27; 14:30; 16:15;). As John 17:15-16 makes clear, the followers of Jesus may not consider themselves as belonging to the world, but they do recognise that they are in the world and that the world is subject to trouble and tribulation because the Evil One still holds sway.<sup>28</sup> So what is meant by the notion of victory over the Prince of this world?

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<sup>27</sup> R.A. Piper is unconvinced by attempts to show how John has 'demythologized' the concept of a satanic being in opposition to Christ and Christians: "In John Jesus may not oppose Satan by means of exorcisms or in a temptation narrative, but there is a conflict nonetheless and it is one which appears to be invested with genuinely cosmic dimensions as well as social implications." Piper 2000, p. 271 and note 81.

<sup>28</sup> As Piper notes, an awareness of the Evil One's influence over the world is clearly reflected not only in the Fourth Gospel, but also in 1 John and 2 John. See Piper 2000, p.272, 1 John 2:13-14; 3:8-10; 5:18-19 and 2 John 7.

The answer to this may lie in the designation of the Evil One as the Prince of *this world*. The Devil is not the Prince of the universe or of the heavens as well as the earth – he is the Prince of *this world*, Prince of the lower, earthly realm of John’s dualistic universe.<sup>29</sup> In whatever sense a victory has been achieved, it has been achieved by the coming of Christ as God’s heavenly messenger into this world and the fruits of victory are to be enjoyed not here in this world, but above in the heavenly realm to which Jesus must return and in which his followers will join him. Even within the New Testament literature, the Fourth Gospel is not alone in presenting a mythology of this nature. Luke 10:18 reflects a belief that Satan has been cast out of heaven, a belief that may be found in quite literal terms in Revelation 12:7-12 where Satan, the Devil in the guise of the great dragon, is cast with his angels from the heavens onto the earth below – but for a short time only. Thus there is only a partial victory at this stage. The full victory is to come later with confinement in the lake of fire and sulphur of Revelation 20:10, a belief that may find parallel expression in the fear of the demons in Luke 8:30-31. It has been suggested that because the coming of Jesus into the world and his return to the Father has achieved only the first part of this two-stage victory, the early Christians believed themselves to be caught between the two stages of Satan’s complete destruction.<sup>30</sup> The Devil may have been defeated in heaven and expelled to the earth below, but on the earth below he still has power and is able to rule as the Prince of this world. Given, therefore, that in John’s cosmology the earth is a lower realm, separated from God and the heavens above and subject to terror and tribulation under the influence of the Evil One, how do the Johannine Christians see themselves in relation to the world? What is the ethos by which they differentiate themselves from the rest of humanity – their ‘model for’ reality?

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<sup>29</sup> So Lindars 1972, p. 433, Morris 1995, p. 531 and Kovacs 1995, pp. 229-235.

<sup>30</sup> So Piper 2000, p. 273.

The answer to this is surprisingly simple. Not only are the Johannine faithful 'not of this world,' in some sense they believe that they have left this world. John's worldview allows for an expression of a group identity which is separated from this world even now in the earthly present and in which they exist in union with the Father and the Son in a new mode of existence. Crucial to this new mode of existence is the presence of the Paraclete and the fellowship of the believing community, for it is only within the spiritual 'cocoon' of the believing group under the guiding activity of the Paraclete that the individual believer enters into the eternal life of the heavenly realm. It is by these means too that barriers are erected against the world and its evil influences in which the believers no longer see themselves as involved. Through group fellowship and spiritual access to heavenly life in the Paraclete, the group and its members are insulated not only from the pollution of the world which opposes them but also from the evil spiritual forces which rule the world.<sup>31</sup> The Johannine ethos can, therefore, be expressed as a remarkably simple 'model for' reality – accept Christ, join the community under the guidance of the Paraclete and become one of the privileged few. The Fourth Gospel itself expresses little else in terms of moral imperatives – it really does seem to be a case of accepting John's claims for Christ, without which damnation is almost certain.

However, neither John's worldview nor his ethos contradicts the absolute certainty of physical death. In the fullness of time all the believers – the group in its entirety – will die and will participate in the fruits of the heavenly victory by being taken to be with Christ in eternal life (John 12:32; 14:2). Ultimately, therefore, the world and its problems will be of no interest to the group or to any of its members. Yet John's ethos

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<sup>31</sup> See chapter 5 above, pp. 197-200, for our discussion of how the Johannine community displayed some of the characteristics of sectarian consciousness.



does project a degree of ambivalence towards the world – the Johannine Christians may indeed wish to dissociate themselves from the world, but there is also a sanguine recognition that it remains a dangerous place with which they still have to deal. In their ‘model of’ reality Satan may have been cast out from heaven, but the earthly world remains firmly his. Christ’s victory over Satan does not represent Satan’s final destruction, rather it represents his confinement to the earthly realm where he remains able to wield evil power. Yet it is hard to see where in the evangelist’s worldview things move on from here to a second stage of the total destruction of the Evil One. It is not that John sees the world as languishing in the power of evil indefinitely or eternally, rather it is a realization that the events which will bring about the second stage of Satan’s total destruction along with the establishment of a new world here on earth are no longer to be considered as happening soon and certainly not within the lifetime of individual believers. John’s worldview has left behind a belief in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton – there may someday be a day of judgement and a new heaven and earth thereafter, but for John it is a remote chimera which hardly impinges on the faith or the fate of the Johannine Christians. Thus the Fourth Gospel is representative of a worldview which is a modification of what is believed to be the more general early Christian position.<sup>32</sup>

Any description of the worldview underlying the Fourth Gospel such as this immediately raises the question: to what extent did John and his community literally believe in this compartmentalized cosmos and/or to what extent was such a

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<sup>32</sup> S.G.F. Brandon believes the fading belief in the imminence of the parousia was of fundamental importance to the development of doctrine in the latter part of the first Christian century. Schnackenburg and Lindars also believe the dawning realization of a distant parousia to have been at least partly responsible for theological developments at this time. See Brandon 1967, pp. 108-109 and Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 435-436 and Lindars 1990, p. 35. See note 4 on pp. 86-87 above with regard to the importance Bultmann placed on this change in belief.

representation merely a metaphorical picture language in terms of which they thought about the nature of the universe? In other words, to what extent is the Johannine worldview a subjectively or poetically *metaphorical* explanation of the universe as opposed to an objectively or scientifically *descriptive* one? Robert Kysar has proposed that this is not a distinction that John and his contemporaries would have recognised because in antiquity the metaphorical and poetical aspects of expression were in some way fused together with the descriptive and scientific thinking processes in a way that made it difficult if not impossible for the ancients to express separate subjective and objective views of the universe.<sup>33</sup> Such a view holds that for John, and indeed for all the biblical writers, the intrusion of metaphor into his way of expressing his view of reality was not only likely, but actually inevitable because John would have been unable to clearly distinguish between metaphor and reality and, therefore, unable to express himself in any other way. It is, however, necessary to point out in opposition to this view that the use of metaphor – and in particular the use of the extended simile – was an integral and well understood part of Christian teaching from its inception.<sup>34</sup> The Synoptic Gospels teem with examples of the deliberate metaphorical description of the world as it was believed it should be or as it was believed it would become in the extended similes of the kingdom – “The kingdom of heaven is like...” and “The kingdom of God is like...”<sup>35</sup> Regardless of whether such metaphorical expression can be traced back to the historical ministry of Jesus or not,<sup>36</sup> it can hardly be disputed that

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<sup>33</sup> A view proposed by Robert Kysar – see Kysar 1993, pp. 63-64.

<sup>34</sup> In the context of a discussion of the Synoptic parables, John Riches has pointed out that the use of the extended metaphor or simile in the New Testament is usually characterized by a degree of artificiality which not only makes the presence of metaphor immediately recognisable, but also enables the listener or reader to think of the world in new and perhaps challenging ways. But in no sense does he suggest that metaphor is not recognized for what it is. See Riches 1988, pp. 249-257.

<sup>35</sup> See Dodd 1935, Jeremias 1963 and Riches 1988, all *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> John Riches seems confident that at least some of the parables of the Synoptic Gospels were used by Jesus himself: “In the parables Jesus attempted to express what the coming kingdom would be like, what kind of society it would involve, and how such developments were consistent with God’s nature and actions as so far revealed to Jews.” Riches 1988, p. 236.

its use was deliberate and that it was understood by those who heard it and read it to be a deliberate use of metaphor to illustrate another reality. In other words, there is no question of a confusion in the minds of preachers and hearers, authors and readers, as to when metaphor was being used and to what it referred.

Admittedly the situation in the Fourth Gospel is somewhat different in that extended parabolic illustrations are almost entirely absent. Yet John is far from free of metaphorical expression, as the Gospel's dualistic polarities amply demonstrate and we shall discuss John's use of his dualistic expressions as a metaphorical illustration of his worldview below. It is necessary to point out first, though, that we believe the argument is not proven that the Fourth Gospel's cosmology is itself an entirely metaphorical construction even if we allow that the Johannine worldview is a 'model of' the Johannine perception of reality. Given that the 'model of' reality is confronted and confirmed by the 'model for' reality as expressed in the Johannine ethos, the 'model for' reality we have found in John is one of separation and otherness, a community standing apart from the world because it believes the world is not its true home. The Johannine Christians are not of this world and their 'model for' reality reflects and confirms their belief in another world which they believe to be their true home – the heavenly realm of God to which Jesus has returned. In some respects the Johannine worldview has been inferred from the metaphors used to describe it by the evangelist and we believe that his use of metaphor is his conscious and deliberate way of describing his 'model of' the reality which surrounded him.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See C.K. Barrett's essay "Paradox and Dualism" in Barrett 1982, pp. 98-115, for a discussion of the use of the light-darkness dualism as metaphor. In the same volume, his essay "Symbolism" looks at the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings in a similar way – Barrett 1982, pp. 65-79. See also Culpepper 1983, pp. 180-202 for another assessment of John's symbolism as metaphor and Peterson 1993, *passim*, for a much fuller discussion of the use of language in John with reference to the light-darkness duality.



What then do we mean when we talk of the *dualism* of the Fourth Gospel<sup>38</sup> and how are we to assess the evangelist's use of dualism in describing his worldview? To begin to answer this question it is only necessary to draw up a list of John's use of *opposites* – pairs of opposing themes, or opposing poles of a theme – with which he illustrates not only his own comments as narrator of the Gospel but also the speeches he has Jesus say. Such a list includes the Fourth Gospel's opposition between light and darkness; between spirit and flesh; between truth and falsehood; between eternal life and judgement; between above and below; between heaven and earth; between believers and the world. To some extent all of these dualistic polarities present John's readers with a choice. In this regard they represent a duality of decision – an ethical duality – in which the individual reader has to choose to be on the side of light, spirit, truth, eternal life, above, heaven and believers.<sup>39</sup> To choose these particular poles of the dualities which are presented would, of course, be to choose in accordance with the Johannine position – they are choices for Christ and for salvation. To choose the opposite poles, however, would be to turn away from Christ, to be aligned with *the world* which rejects Christ and to choose to exist without salvation or even an awareness of the need for it. From this it can be seen that a choice for all or any of the negative dualistic poles leads immediately back to one negative pole which embraces them all – *the world*. This is not only because the world stands in opposition to the position of Johannine faith and, therefore, clearly presents the individual with an ethical decision; also it is because the duality of above-below, heaven-earth, God-the world is a cosmic duality as well as an

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<sup>38</sup> Many authors on the Fourth Gospel have something to say about Johannine dualism and it would be impossible to list them all here. We have found the following to be particularly useful – Kysar 1975, pp. 131-137 and 215-221; Kysar 1993, 58-77; Ashton 1991, pp. 205-237.

<sup>39</sup> As Robert Kysar has noted, much modern research into the Johannine dualism has sought to establish a relationship between John and either some form of Gnostic cosmic dualism or an ethical dualism of the kind to be found in the Qumran literature. Examples of scholars who see a reflection of Qumranian ethical dualism in the Fourth Gospel include Raymond Brown, Leon Morris and John Ashton. See Brown 1966(1), pp. LXXI-LXXII; Morris 1969, pp. 329-335; Kysar 1975, pp. 131-137; Ashton 1991, pp. 232-237. For translations of the Qumran documents, see Eisenman and Wise 1992, Vermes 1995 and García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997-8.

ethical duality in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>40</sup> Thus duality in John is of two types – ethical and cosmic. On the one hand, the ethical aspect of all the dualities represents the choice with which the individual is presented – the choice for or against the Johannine ethos. Thus, ethical duality can be said to form part of the ‘model for’ reality. On the other hand, the cosmic aspect of some of the dualities represents an illustration of the evangelist’s worldview – an illustration of the belief in the heavenly realm of God. The cosmic duality can, therefore be said to form part of the ‘model of’ reality. This is not, however, to say that Johannine dualism is essentially the same as a Gnostic dualism in which the created world is not part of God’s creation. The Fourth Gospel’s prologue clearly states a belief in God’s creative activity in the world (John 1:3, 10-11), while 3:16 indicates a parallel belief in God’s ongoing responsibility for the created order. Rather, John’s dualism reflects a belief in two distinct and separated realms within God’s created order, a belief which might reflect a growing Johannine conviction that the “Kingdom of Heaven” is not, after all, going to be found here in a transformed world following the parousia-eschaton.

To investigate this further it is necessary to explore how exactly the evangelist uses the term *ὁ κόσμος* and what he means by it. There are two instances in the Fourth Gospel where the evangelist uses *ὁ κόσμος* in the sense that we would understand by the English term *cosmos* or universe (John 17:5, 24). However, more usually *ὁ κόσμος* is used in the Fourth Gospel to mean simply the earthly world inhabited by human beings,

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<sup>40</sup> That the Fourth Gospel’s dualism originated in Gnostic thought was the position taken by both Rudolf Bultmann and Rudolf Schnackenburg. See Bultmann 1955, pp. 26-32 and Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 225-237 and pp. 352-361. Interestingly, although Bultmann’s theories pre-date the Qumran discoveries, Schnackenburg, like Brown, Morris and Ashton, is fully aware of the possibility that Qumranian dualism may have been an influence on John’s thought and takes this into account in his analysis.

and in this sense the term is usually translated simply as *the world*.<sup>41</sup> In this usage the Fourth Gospel opposes *the world* to the heavenly realm, the realm of God from which Jesus has been sent. Thus Jesus can be said to be in the world which does not recognize him (1:10; 15:18). He can be said to be in the world for specific purposes (3:16; 9:39; 10:10 12:46). The Fourth Gospel claims that Jesus has been sent into the world (16:27-28; 17:16, 18; 17:23) and, therefore, is not of the world (17:16; 18:36). In an allusion to some kind of cosmic struggle, Jesus has overcome the world (16:33). Yet ultimately, his mission complete, Jesus must leave the world (12:31-33; 13:1; 16:28; 17:11). The opposition of the world to the realm of the divine is confirmed because Jesus' opponents are of the world (8:23; 15:19). Thus it comes as no surprise to learn that Jesus' followers are against the world (12:25; 15:19; 16:33) Yet, almost paradoxically, the world which stands in opposition to God, to Jesus and to the Johannine Christians is still part of God's creation and God still loves the world (1:10; 3:16). We see, then, that the Fourth Gospel uses *the world* to encapsulate not only the idea of location, but also of attitudes which are not in accord with Christ's origins, mission and purpose. In other words, *the world* represents *both* a physical place into which Jesus has been sent to complete his mission before returning to the Father in the place where he is naturally at home *and* an attitude or frame of mind commonly found amongst humanity which exemplifies an independence from God, from the need for salvation and is, therefore, intrinsically opposed to Jesus, his message and, by extension, his followers. Thus the dualism associated with *the world* is both cosmic and ethical. It asks the individual, "Where is your home – above or below – in the world or in eternity?" But at the same

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<sup>41</sup> So Marrow 2002, pp. 96-97. Marrow gives a brief account of the history of the use of the term *κόσμος* in classical literature and philosophy, the Septuagint, Philo, the New Testament in general and the Johannine literature in particular. However, his argument that the pejorative quality of the term refers solely to elements within the Johannine community is unconvincing.



time it also asks, “Who are you with? Are you with those who reject Christ or are you with those who accept him?”

That the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel should choose<sup>42</sup> to express himself using dualistic categories has led to endless debate in the commentaries on and introductions to John about where exactly his dualistic thought comes from.<sup>43</sup> For many scholars the identification of the source of John’s dualism has become a kind of search for the ‘Holy Grail,’ the finding of which will provide all the answers to all the questions which perplex students of the Fourth Gospel. Thus Bultmann was led to search for parallel dualistic expression in the literature of Gnosticism.<sup>44</sup> Although his eventual solution relied on the finding of far more than simply dualism within the texts he examined,<sup>45</sup> the result was his proposal of the existence of the *Offenbarungsreden*, the putative Gnostic revelation-discourses source document for the Johannine discourses.<sup>46</sup> While Bultmann was convinced of the Gnostic origin of John’s dualism, he believed that the evangelist was engaged in a programme of demythologizing that rejected all notion of cosmic duality and replaced it entirely with ethical dualism.<sup>47</sup> We have indicated above that we do not believe the Fourth Gospel has rejected cosmic dualism – below we shall disagree with Bultmann again when we consider the Gospel’s dualism as a facet of re-mythologizing rather than demythologizing.

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<sup>42</sup> John Ashton rejects the idea that the evangelist did, in fact, consciously choose to express himself in dualistic terms. He believes that the Fourth Gospel’s dualism reflects the writing of an author who had been trained to think instinctively in such terms. See Ashton 1991, pp. 235-237.

<sup>43</sup> See above, notes 39 and 40.

<sup>44</sup> See above, note 33 of chapter 4 on p. 147.

<sup>45</sup> Again see note 33 on p. 147 for Bultmann’s identification of a Gnostic redeemer myth as “the key to understanding the Fourth Gospel.”

<sup>46</sup> See above, pp. 143-150 and Smith 1965, pp. 15-34.

<sup>47</sup> See Bultmann 1955, pp. 15-32 and in particular p. 21.

More recently and moving away from Gnosticism, scholars such as Brown, Morris, Kysar and Ashton<sup>48</sup> have been convinced that the Johannine dualism has its source in Qumran, that in some way the evangelist was 'influenced' by Essene language and familiar with their patterns of thought. Ashton goes so far as to affirm that ultimately this can only mean that the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was an Essene who had been brought up and educated in the atmosphere of thought that uniquely belongs the world of Qumran.<sup>49</sup> Other scholars have located the origins of the Johannine thought in either the philosophical world of Middle-Platonism and Stoicism<sup>50</sup> or in the Jewish milieu of the Old Testament<sup>51</sup> and the rabbinic literature.<sup>52</sup> At one time it was considered important to try to interpret the Johannine dualism through comparison with the Hermetic literature but in the more recent commentaries the Hermetica hardly rates a mention.<sup>53</sup> It is impossible to enter into these debates in detail in the present study. It is possible to note, however, that the dogmatic assertions of scholars such as Bultmann and Ashton have not won the wide acceptance their mode of expression might have implied they expected. There is no scholarly consensus that John's dualism originates in a specific philosophical, religious, cultural or geographical background. Indeed, the very variety of these proposed backgrounds stands as a warning that a single solution is unlikely to be the correct one. Ultimately it has to be recognised that the Fourth Gospel is something of a *bricolage* – an eclectic document amongst other eclectic documents produced by eclectic communities in a world where many cultural influences were

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<sup>48</sup> See above, note 39 on p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> Ashton 1991, p. 237.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Barrett 1978, pp. 34-36.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett 1978, pp. 27-30.

<sup>52</sup> Dodd 1953, pp. 74-96 and Barrett 1978, pp. 31-34.

<sup>53</sup> Compare, for example, the forty-four pages of intense scholarship devoted by C.H. Dodd to this subject with the small dismissive paragraph of Ernst Haenchen, a similar treatment by Leon Morris and the absence of any reference at all in the commentary of F.F. Bruce. See Dodd 1953, pp. 10-53; Haenchen 1984(1), p. 9; Morris 1995, pp. 56-57; and Bruce 1983. That Dodd's thesis was unconvincing to at least some of his contemporaries is shown by G.D. Kilpatrick's short essay – Kilpatrick 1957.



overlapping and intermingling.<sup>54</sup> In some ways it is one of the tragedies of Johannine scholarship that the evangelist is constantly being confined in the literary straitjacket of having to have taken his work from this source or that source and to have written as he did because he had been taught to think as member of this school or that school. Such an approach necessarily restricts the likelihood of the author displaying independent thought and creativity and, at the same time, it seems to deny the possibility of there being real influences on his thought and a broad background to his world beyond the suggestion that John thought and wrote as he did because he was, for example, an Essene.<sup>55</sup> If we travel with John back into his own time and place we shall find that his is a truly multi-cultural world – a world where Hellenistic culture has brought together the previously separate worlds of the Hellenic, the Roman, the Egyptian, the Persian, the Anatolian and, not least, the Judaic. Many other documents contemporaneous with early Christianity display the influence of this mingling of cultures. Why should John's Gospel be different? Yet one of the reasons that both lay readers and scholars find the Fourth Gospel such a compelling area of study must lie to some extent in the genius of the author who lies behind it. Leaving aside questions of second editions and redactional insertions, our fascination with the text we are presented with must tell us

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<sup>54</sup> Writing in the context of Synoptic scholarship, John Riches borrows the idea of the *bricolage* from the cultural anthropologist C. Lévi-Strauss. "In France a *bricoleur* is someone who, unlike the trained tradesman who accepts only work for which he is properly equipped and trained, will undertake a variety of jobs working with whatever materials are to hand. Materials which may previously have served some quite different purpose will be pressed into service for the job in hand." The analogy serves to contrast the modern approach of the "systematician" who not only thinks from first principles, but also often feels constrained to write in a fashion and format which is acceptable to and understood by his or her academic peers, with a freer mode of communication which perhaps speaks to a wider audience using concepts and terminology freely circulating in contemporary culture. This is not to say that we believe John is guilty of sloppy thinking. We have already demonstrated that we believe the Fourth Gospel's eschatology is founded on a firm christological basis – its first principles. However, we believe that John speaks in the wider language of his time and not merely to Johannine theologians. Furthermore, as Riches goes on to point out, the finished *bricolage* is far more than the sum of its constituent parts: "It is perfectly possible to dismantle any given piece of *bricolage* and to attempt to identify the original function of the constituent parts; but the new assemblage has its own unity which both respects the quality of the components and their potential to fulfil a new role, and also freely co-opts them into some quite different purpose." See Riches 2000, pp. 176-179.

<sup>55</sup> In anticipating resistance to this suggestion, John Ashton accepts that "its apparent improbability is a consequence of its specificity." Ashton 1991, p. 237.



something about the genius of the author or authors who produced it – or most of it. Part of that genius lies in the evangelist's ability to pick and choose, as a *bricoleur*, the 'bits and pieces' from the various cultures around him.<sup>56</sup> The evangelist has been able to pick up ideas and symbolism from wherever he finds it, to then shape and polish what he has found before finally using it to construct his masterpiece. This is part of the genius that lies behind the writing of the Fourth Gospel. The folly of trying to pin this genius down and label him too precisely should be clear from the gradual disengagement that took place over many years from the proposals of Rudolph Bultmann.<sup>57</sup> Scholars should, therefore, be wary of too precise a labelling of the Fourth Gospel's author once more.

Given that we believe that the dualism of the Fourth Gospel is not the result of the evangelist's close affinity with particular documents or with a particular school of thought, but rather that it is a form of expression and illustration that was well-known in John's culture, what reason did the evangelist have for picking it up and using it so extensively? There may be two reasons for this. The first possibility is to follow up on Rudolf Bultmann's suggestion that the evangelist lacked a specific sayings-source with which to 'flesh out' the teaching of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>58</sup> This could help to explain the doctrinally developed feel of many of the Johannine discourses which are, of course, presented as speeches of Jesus. Yet even allowing for this, the evangelist has inherited a great deal of early Jesus material from somewhere and while it is not necessary to speculate here as to where this tradition came from, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the evangelist was aware that much of the teaching associated with Jesus was presented in the form of metaphor. Could it be that the evangelist has attempted to

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<sup>56</sup> See note 54 above.

<sup>57</sup> See Ashton 1991, pp. 67-111, where the progress of this disengagement is charted.

<sup>58</sup> Bultmann 1955, pp. 3-5, 63.

make up for his lack of traditional Jesus material in the form of extended metaphors and similes by providing metaphorical material of his own to fill the void? In the Synoptic Gospels metaphor is used repeatedly to represent an expected or hoped for worldview. We believe that in the Fourth Gospel, in the absence of traditional metaphorical teaching attributable to Jesus, the evangelist illustrated his worldview with metaphors too – the difference being that John’s metaphors are his own. The second possibility involves a realization that the Johannine Christians, far from having an interest in demythologizing, were involved in an ongoing programme of re-mythologizing – a reorientation of their worldview by legitimation in response to the altered circumstances of enduring persecution and abandoning their belief in an imminent parousia. While the metaphorical language of John is new and unusual in terms of the New Testament, the worldview it presents us with has many familiar features as well as its own unique point of view. Students of the Old Testament and the Synoptic Gospels will be familiar with the vertical dualism of above and below, the heavens and the earth. Familiar too will be the spiritual presence of evil in the world personified by Satan/the Devil/the Evil One/the Prince of this world. Also familiar will be the idea of a day of judgement. But while in the Fourth Gospel’s worldview this has receded far into the future – so far that the new age beyond it is no longer a matter of concern – in more traditional biblical worldviews the new age following the eschaton was considered imminent and, therefore, a matter of some importance. Lastly, John’s worldview pays no heed to the downward vertical component. The belief in the downward journey of the souls of the dead to the realm of Sheol has been replaced by the upward journey of the faithful, following Jesus into heaven. The Johannine Christians believed they were already saved and had already begun a journey that would ultimately take them into God’s heaven. Their ‘model for’ reality allowed only the best of outcomes for them and their



'model of' reality had no need, therefore, for a downward path. Outside the Johannine Community stood the unfaithful – those who had rejected Christ – standing condemned, both here and at the parousia-eschaton. But the fate of their souls in-between death and the resurrection to judgement is of little interest in the worldview of John.

## **B. Theology as legitimation**

In chapter 3 of this study we looked in some detail at a number of scholars who have paid specific attention to John 5. Of particular interest was the work of James McGrath who has attempted to identify newer developments of older christological themes in John 5 and to explain these developments as a process of legitimation.<sup>59</sup> As we noted in our examination of McGrath's work, his choice of material even within John 5 was limited by his specific interest in christological statements and by a methodological approach which ruled out examination of any theme which could not be considered to be a development of older or more traditional doctrine.<sup>60</sup> Thus McGrath has identified doctrinal developments in John 5 in the themes of Jesus as God's obedient Son and agent; Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man; and witnesses to Jesus as God's agent. We noted also that although McGrath clearly designates the developments within these christological themes as *legitimation* (in the sense of using an apologetic argument) within the context of dialogue between the Church and the synagogue, he fails to engage with that part of the legitimating process by which the evangelist arrives at the newly developed position. Furthermore, McGrath's failure to address the theme of Jesus as life-giver (John 5:21, 26) seems particularly odd given its clearly christological

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<sup>59</sup> See chapter 3 above, pp. 129-141, and McGrath 2001, pp. 80-102.

<sup>60</sup> McGrath 2001, pp. 45-46.



character and the possibilities which exist for tracing its development from earlier doctrines.

In this section we shall examine those doctrinal statements in John 5 which are of particular relevance to this study. We shall not necessarily restrict ourselves to commenting upon doctrinal statements which can be clearly seen as developments of more traditional doctrines because we believe it is possible to propose the legitimating nature of a theme's *first appearance* just as appropriately as it is possible to propose the legitimating nature of that theme's development.<sup>61</sup> However, where there is evidence of doctrinal development we shall consider how the Johannine material may be related to more traditional themes. We have identified five themes in John 5 which directly bear upon the subject of our study:

1. Jesus as life-giver (5:21);
2. Jesus as the eschatological judge (5:22, 30);
3. Exemption from judgement and the gift of life in accepting Jesus (5:24);
4. Now the 'dead' have life through hearing the Son (5:25);
5. Someday there will be a day of judgement (5:28-29).

Our purpose in examining each of these five themes in detail is threefold in that we wish to attempt to establish:

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<sup>61</sup> This marks the principal difference between our methodology and that of McGrath. McGrath's area of interest is the development of christology along paths such as 'low' to 'high' or 'primitive' to 'developed' and the role legitimation may have played in such a process. In this study, by contrast, we are interested not only in the *development* of christological and eschatological propositions, but also the *purpose they served* in the social setting in which they appeared. Thus we need not restrict ourselves to doctrines whose development we can trace from the Synoptics or from Paul, but we may also consider theological propositions which make a fresh appearance in the Fourth Gospel, such as the exemption from judgement for Johannine Christians.

- a. whether or not it is possible to propose that these Johannine themes, in terms of their *appearance* or their *development*, are being used as legitimating arguments in dialogue with the synagogue;
- b. whether or not it is possible to propose a similar legitimating function for these themes in terms of *worldview maintenance*;
- c. and finally, whether or not it is possible to trace a coherent theological argument through these statements which reconciles the presence of both futurist and realised eschatology, given our scepticism about Bultmann's redactional hypothesis as we discussed in chapter 4 of this study.<sup>62</sup>

### **1. Jesus as life-giver**

In Chapter 1 of this study we examined the christology of the Johannine Jesus as a giver of life.<sup>63</sup> We noted the relationship between John 5:21 and 5:26 which indicates that the life-giving powers of the Son are a gift from the Father. Furthermore, we noted that in the context of these verses *life* and *making alive* are not merely biological concepts. While they are to be encountered in earthly life, their real significance lies in their eschatological dimension.<sup>64</sup> Thus the Fourth Gospel begins to bridge the gap between the two previously separate concepts of biological life and eschatological life. Here we see the beginnings of his doctrine that eschatological life is not initially separate from but begins in biological life. But by any standards, to portray Jesus as the life-giver appears to be quite a bold theological step forward for the Johannine Christians – to appropriate to the earthly Jesus the unique powers of the only God. But in taking this step, where were they stepping from? Is it possible to trace the development of this

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<sup>62</sup> See above pp. 175-178.

<sup>63</sup> See pp. 54-56 above.

<sup>64</sup> So Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 352-361.



theme from an earlier, more traditional doctrine? And, if so, why was the step taken – why did development take place?

The concept of *life* or of *eternal life* is to be found in the Synoptic Gospels. In every case, though, the Synoptic evangelists use these terms to describe life as it will be in the age to come. *Life* or *eternal life* in the Synoptics is post-eschatological life – life as it will be lived by those who have found salvation once God's eschatological kingdom has dawned. The story of the rich man in Mark 10:17-22 illustrates this point. The eternal life which the rich man sought was felt to be something that would be inherited through righteousness in the future, rather than something that could be apprehended and lived out in the present. Further synoptic references all share this view (Matthew 25:46; Mark 10:23-25; Luke 10:25), eternal life is the resurrection life in God's eschatological kingdom. No less does the shorter term *life* mean the same. Matthew 7:14; Mark 9:43, 45 all point towards the gaining of the blessings of eschatological existence in the new age. Thus we see that the Synoptic Gospels are of very little help in our search for a precursor to the Johannine theme of Jesus as the life-giver even though they are familiar with the eschatological significance of the terms *life* and *eternal life*.

However, in the Pauline correspondence we may begin to get a clue as to the origins of the Johannine doctrine of Jesus the life-giver. While chapter 15 of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is, as in the case of the Synoptic Gospels, concerned with the resurrection life of the age to come, it is here that Paul gives his insight into the relevance of the resurrection of Christ for the fate of Christian believers. Paul draws a clear distinction between biological life and eschatological life. All biological life will end in death – as it did for the first Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22) – but in Christ 'all will be made alive,' but only in the appropriate



eschatological circumstances which he describes in the verses which follow (15:23-26). Paul revisits this theme of the first and the last Adam at 15:45 where the last Adam (the resurrected Christ) has become a 'life-giving spirit.' Even though Paul is referring exclusively to eschatological life in the resurrection, the connection with the life-giver in John 5:21 is unmistakable. The passive Greek construction of ζωοποιηθήσονται (15:22) and the participle of ζωοποιούν (15:45) are both closely enough related to the ζωοποιεῖ of John 5:21 to suggest some kind of relationship between this concept in Paul and its reappearance in John. The nature of such a relationship is impossible to define. Whether John was familiar with Paul's Corinthian correspondence or whether he had heard Paul and/or his letters preached on or debated about is beyond specifying, but it is possible that somehow or other the Pauline concept of the risen Christ as a spiritual life-giver made its way into Johannine circles where it evolved into Jesus the life-giver. The purely spiritual and eschatological life-giver of the Pauline correspondence may have re-emerged as the earthly bringer of life to the Johannine Christians. It is, of course, quite an assumption to infer from these texts that (a) there is a Pauline doctrine re-emerging in a radically altered form in John, and (b) that all the development of the doctrine was done by Johannine theologians immediately prior to the production of the Fourth Gospel. There are other alternatives. However, all we have to go on is a comparison of the two texts – one early and Pauline – the other late and Johannine. We know nothing of the historical and social circumstances of the Corinthian Christians in the decades following the Pauline correspondence, while we are able to infer something of the historical and social circumstances of the Johannine Christians prior to the writing of their Gospel. Even allowing for a certain degree of circularity as we discussed in our introduction, it is this insight into the world of the Johannine Christians which allows us to at least suspect that they were being criticised

and perhaps persecuted for their theological beliefs and that such pressures may have provided the necessary impetus for legitimating developments in their system of beliefs.

We have already stated that we believe that the Johannine worldview was changing due to a fading belief in the imminence of the parousia. While this belief had been urgent and widespread in early Christianity, by the close of the first Christian century a realization must have already set-in that such beliefs had been ill-founded or had been based on misunderstandings and that the eschatological events of which the parousia was a part were going to be happening in the distant future if they were going to happen at all. There is no reason to suppose that this realization was imposed on the Johannine Christians from outside. Such a revision of traditional beliefs probably took place spontaneously in many places over very many years and there is no reason to think that John's community should have been different in this respect. Therefore, it was probably within the Johannine Churches themselves that the imminence of the parousia began to be questioned. However, once such doubts had been raised and a new position agreed upon about a now distant parousia and eschaton, the worldview or symbolic universe of the Johannine Christians had to change too and, furthermore, new doctrines would begin to appear to support the new worldview. With the parousia-eschaton receding into the distant future, the Johannine theologians may have been asking themselves what in particular were the salvific benefits of Christianity to the current generation beyond those of say, Judaism. If they came up with an answer which suggested there was little to choose between two faiths waiting for a distant eschatological event, then they may have decided it was possible to make their own faith more attractive to converts and more comforting to the existing faithful by bringing the salvific benefits of the eschaton forward into the present. To some degree



this is what we see beginning to happen in John 5:21. The earthly Jesus of John's Gospel is being endowed with the powers elsewhere ascribed to the eschatological Jesus and the impetus for this process has been an internal theological debate about the timing of the eschaton.

This is not to say, however, that the Johannine doctrine of Jesus the life-giver did not serve a legitimating function in the dialogues with the synagogue which may lie behind the Gospel narratives. In essence the dialogue with the synagogue which the Gospel presents as confrontations between Jesus and the "Jews" boils down to a contest in which each side tries to prove that its theology is more certain than the other's, that its magic is stronger than the other's and that its medicine works faster than the other's. Viewed in this way, it is possible to see that Johannine theology was moving into a position where it could attempt to show that Christianity now promised instant eschatological benefits thanks to an eschatological Jesus with the powers of a God who had lived and breathed and walked amongst them. There was now no need to wait for the eschaton. The adoption of such doctrines would certainly have been of immense comfort to those who had already been converted to Christianity – worries about the non-appearance of the parousia-eschaton were no longer relevant. But beyond this, to those involved in the dialogues with the synagogue this new doctrine would have provided powerful ammunition against a Judaism whose salvation was both distant and uncertain. The Fourth Gospel's use of this new doctrine in a discourse of Jesus directed at an audience of "Jews" (in the narrative) suggests that its value as legitimating propaganda had not gone unnoticed by the evangelist.



Thus we see that in terms of worldview or a 'model of' reality, the process of legitimation had taken Jesus of Nazareth all the way to being the divinely empowered life-giving representative of God not only within the lives of the Johannine Christians, but also within the lifetime of the Jesus of the Gospel. But what of the Johannine Christians? What does this adjusted worldview, this new 'model of' reality, suggest about the Johannine ethos – the Johannine 'model for' reality? Clearly there has been a substantial shift in ethos from a previously well understood position where salvation was earned by good deeds, exemplified by the Matthean Great Assize and carried forward into Johannine eschatology with respect to that portion of humanity which has not had the chance to encounter Christ. But regarding themselves, the Johannine Christians seem to have believed that their acceptance of Christ and their participation in his community was all that they had to do to earn salvation. Christ was the giver of life and he had given it to the Johannine Christians. Furthermore, for those remaining outside the community and persisting in their rejection of Christ there seems to have been no hope at all. This represents a massive shift in Christian community ethos – “we are saved and *only* we are saved” – and the laying down of very firm lines of demarcation. But the lines of demarcation are not barriers – they can be crossed, and crossed with remarkable ease it would seem, for the Gospel stipulates no further moral imperatives upon believers than that they accept Christ. Presumably any who did so would be welcomed by a community whose remarkable ethos was paradoxically both elitist and welcoming.<sup>65</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, there were very real

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<sup>65</sup> Rudolf Bultmann shows a remarkable insight into this entry into Johannine salvation, albeit in rather existential terms, when he writes of the moment of salvation being a new assessment of the believer's past life – a decision for Christ being a clear recognition of the sinful nature of one's life up to that point, while a rejection of Christ is seen as a tacit approval of continuing in a sinful life. See Bultmann 1971, pp. 158-160. Such a view, whether couched in existential or in community terms, would tend to suggest that Johannine salvation need not have been considered as a once and for all event as far as potential converts were concerned. Possibly the offer to accept Christ and to join with the Johannine Christians remained open to those who had already rejected them perhaps many times. A decision to reassess one's sinful past could be taken to include a realization of the sinfulness of previous rejections of Christ. 1 John

dangers inherent in the kind of elitist sectarianism which characterized the community of the Fourth Gospel and these dangers were guarded against only so long as the community committed and recommitted itself to Christian mission in the world which had forsaken God, Christ and Christians. If God still loved the world despite all its failings and if Christ had overcome the world despite the worst it could possibly do to him, then it remained incumbent upon the Johannine Christians to love the world and to seek to overcome its evil and its ignorance through mission as a Church and a community.<sup>66</sup>

## **2. Jesus as the eschatological judge**

We saw in Chapter 1 above how the function of Jesus as a judge in the Fourth Gospel can be described christologically as a delegated power from God the Father which is a necessary counter to the widespread rejection of Jesus' offer of eternal life.<sup>67</sup> We also saw that the concept of Jesus as an eschatological judge was not unique to the Fourth Gospel and could be traced back through presumably earlier New Testament documents such as Mark, Acts and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. We noted, however, the Johannine development by which the entirely future nature of judgement in these earlier documents had been brought forward into the present of the Johannine Jesus who is already bringing judgement to his opponents in the Fourth Gospel.

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gives some indications that the Johannine Christians also had some experience with insincere Christians whose faith is to be considered as a least suspect (1 John 1:6-10; 2:4, 9, 11,15) but perhaps not beyond redemption through correction. While the Fourth Gospel itself may be alluding to lapsed Christians who have parted company with the Johannine Church at 6:66, it is in 1 John that we find that those who have left the community are to be considered as 'antichrists' (1 John 2:18-19) – a term suggesting a special and specific condemnation which may have placed lapsed Johannine Christians beyond all hope of re-acceptance by their former brethren in the Johannine community.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter 5 above, pp. 198-199.

<sup>67</sup> See pp. 56-57 above.



We have already noted in chapter 3 of this study how James McGrath sought to show that the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was using the theme of the apocalyptic Son of Man – a theme already familiar in both Judaism and early Christianity – to augment both the humanity and the authority of the earthly Jesus. McGrath believes this double augmentation occurs because the phrase *Son of Man* was associated both with apocalyptic judgement and with the activity of a human being. This double association would have been apparent to the contemporaries of Jesus, to the early Christians and also to Jews and, no doubt, the use of the Son of Man motif in the Synoptic Gospels was also meant to convey a firm belief in the involvement of the risen Christ, who had been a human being as Jesus of Nazareth, in an apocalyptic judgement scenario. McGrath sees it as “a subtle but nonetheless significant development”<sup>68</sup> that the evangelist should adapt this tradition by allowing the Johannine Jesus to use it to defend his own authority in John 5. But is this a correct interpretation of what John has done with this motif and is it really so subtle? After all, in the Synoptic Gospels the earthly Jesus is doing more or less the same thing with the use of the ‘Son of Man’ motif. The Synoptic evangelists use the earthly Jesus’ claim to be ‘the Son of Man’ as a means of bolstering his authority by producing his apocalyptic (eschatological) credentials. Thus McGrath’s description of the Fourth Gospel’s use of ‘Son of Man’ at 5:27 seems to amount to very little in the way of doctrinal development. However, in John 5 the evangelist does more than cite Jesus’ role in a distant eschatological event in order to bolster his earthly authority. The Jesus of John 5 is already a judge in a way that the Synoptic Jesus is not. This is the Fourth Gospel’s new doctrine with respect to Jesus as a judge and its exposition is hardly subtle. Three times in John 5 we are given explicit statements about Jesus the judge: the Father has delegated all authority for judgement to the Son;

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<sup>68</sup> McGrath 2001, p. 100.



the Son has the power to judge because he is 'Son of Man'; his judgement is just because it is in accord with the will of the Father (5:22, 27, 30). Here, as elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus is presented in his earthly ministry as already being not simply *a* judge, but *the* judge – the eschatological judge of apocalyptic tradition. John's Jesus may not have come wishing to judge, but the intransigence of humanity has meant that judgement is inevitable and once more in the Fourth Gospel we find the events of the eschaton being pulled forward into the present. The eschatological role of the risen Christ is being played out in the ministry of the Johannine Jesus.

That the Fourth Gospel should present the earthly Jesus as carrying out eschatological functions in his earthly ministry is consistent with our observation that John was modifying Christian doctrine in response to changes in his own worldview as a result of a fading belief in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton. As we shall see shortly, the activity of Jesus as a judge may have had little direct bearing on the Johannine Christians who were being taught that they were exempt from judgement. However, the significance of Jesus' judging activity in John lies in its implications for those who reject Christ and who oppose Christians. While John may have believed that the parousia-eschaton was now a long way off in the future, that he still believed in such an event is shown by 5:28-29 and also by 5:45. Again as we shall see shortly, 5:28-29 is evidence that John now believed in a definite but distant parousia-eschaton – even if the Christians were to be exempted from it – and that Jesus would be the eschatological judge. However, it is at 5:45 that we see that John is presenting Jesus as the eschatological judge in a context that is explicitly disadvantageous to "the Jews." Once again the use of the 'Jesus as judge' theme in a discourse of Jesus with "the Jews" shows how this theme could have been used as a legitimating argument in dialogues

between the Johannine Christians and the Synagogue. In 5:45 Jesus tells his Jewish interlocutors that he 'will not be their accuser' and that their accuser will be Moses. What John is implying here in the speech of Jesus is that at the eschaton there will be a tribunal in which Jesus will sit as judge (5:22, 27, 30) and in which Moses will appear as prosecuting counsel *against* 'the Jews.' To Jewish ears this would be deeply shocking. Their view of the eschaton would be a tribunal in which God would sit in judgement of the nations and in which Moses would appear as defence counsel, pleading the case *for* Israel – for "the Jews." Thus 5:45 seems to be a direct attack on Judaism and on the belief of the Synagogue Jews that they were the true and only inheritors of all that being 'Israel' meant. The location of such an attack within Church-Synagogue dialogue seems likely and the value of this argument as legitimation to a Church trying to prove the superiority of its salvific beliefs is obvious. The Johannine Christians were legitimizing their own position and their own beliefs by asserting the disadvantages of their opponents' position. They believed there would be a day of judgement. They believed Jesus would be the judge. They believed "the Jews" would be judged by Jesus and prosecuted by Moses. In this scenario all the advantages are accrued by the Christians, while all the advantages thought to have been held by "the Jews" have been lost.

In terms of a Johannine ethos, a 'model for' reality, the clear designation of Christ as the only eschatological judge serves to emphasise a judgemental stance which the Johannine Christians had adopted towards those outside their community who had rejected Jesus. In declining the gift of life, the harvest of judgement was gathered in and the judge would be the special protector of the Johannine community. In fairness, the Fourth Gospel has little to say about the consequences of adverse judgement (or



condemnation) at the parousia-eschaton and it is far from clear what the Johannine 'model of' reality held in store for those destined to be out of favour on judgement day. Nevertheless, as believers in the heavenly judge and as recipients of his special favour, the Johannine Christians had developed an ethos where they too felt justified in judging the opponents of their master and the Fourth Gospel indicates that they did so with impunity.

### **3. Exemption from judgement and the gift of life in accepting Jesus**

In John 5:24 the evangelist has Jesus state three specific benefits for those who accept him: (a) they have eternal life; (b) they will not face judgement; and (c) they move from death into life. The first and last of these are related to the statement in 5:21 about Jesus' life-giving powers and our comments above under the heading of 'Jesus the life-giver' apply here also. This is particularly so in relation to *life* in its eschatological sense. Here the eschatological dimension of the term *life* is made explicit by the term αἰώνιον – *eternal* – and by the explanation that believers come to life from death. Clearly the Johannine Christians and the readers of the Gospel are not physically dead – nor are those whom Jesus encounters in the Gospel narrative – so that *dead* in this instance refers to being spiritually dead. Spiritual life which is eternal – *eternal life* – is being contrasted with spiritual death which is a lack of the awareness of the need for salvation. Thus 5:24 is saying that the spiritually dead – even those who have no awareness of God and no awareness of an inner need to find salvation – can have eternal life by accepting Jesus Christ, accepting that he is sent from God and embracing him as the source of salvation. This eternal life begins in this worldly life and continues beyond death in eternity. But 5:24 is saying more than this. We are also told that those



who accept Christ as the source of salvation will not face judgement. This is a reiteration of a theme that first surfaces in John 3:18 where the believer's freedom from judgement is contrasted with the certain judgement of the unbeliever. But it is not a reiteration of a theme that is found in earlier Christian literature, as nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels or in Paul do we find any allusion to an exemption from judgement for believers. These earlier Christian writings were the product of a worldview in which everyone would be judged – and soon, as their authors almost certainly believed in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton.

It could be argued that an exemption from judgement for believers is a modification of a doctrine of judgement and that here the evangelist has simply taken a pre-Johannine doctrine and modified it in a certain way. However, such a stance could only really be justified if John had modified an older doctrine of judgement into one where Christians could claim that they had already been judged *favourably*. But that is not the case here. The exemption from judgement presented in 3:18 and 5:24 is not simply a modification of a doctrine; it is more of a rejection of a doctrine – at least as far as Christian believers are concerned. This was a relatively bold step for John to take in view of the traditions of a belief in the day of judgement in both early Christianity and Judaism which we noted in our introduction.<sup>69</sup> How, therefore, are we to account for such a bold step in the introduction of this new doctrine?

Once again we think the answer may lie in terms of *worldview maintenance* and is a result of the demise of a belief in the imminence of the parousia-eschaton. The worldview behind the Fourth Gospel had changed in that the parousia-eschaton had

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<sup>69</sup> See above pp. 24-41. Also S.G.F. Brandon has noted that certain Pauline positions rendered the idea of a *post-mortem* judgement obsolete for Christian believers. We discuss this idea more fully in the following section below, but see Brandon 1967, pp. 106-107.

receded far into the future. In the early Christian worldview the benefits of salvation were associated with the parousia-eschaton, but now these benefits were believed to have moved into the distant future too. Thus the Johannine Christians were altering their theologies in ways which were bringing the benefits of salvation back nearer to them – in fact into the present – while still leaving the parousia-eschaton in the future. However, how could the benefits of salvation be brought into the present *if* any salvific gains were conditional and subject to the outcome of a judgement to be made at the great assize? The answer seems to have been very simple indeed. The doctrine of judgement no longer applied to Christian believers – Christians, and only Christians, are to be exempted from judgement. Thus, at a stroke, the Johannine theologians had ensured that in a world where the parousia-eschaton and all its benefits were plainly a long way off, the instant salvific efficacy of Christianity was preserved. From the point of view both of making converts and of comforting existing believers the new doctrine of exemption from judgement could not fail to impress. It was both attractive and reassuring in that it offered a salvation which commenced immediately during earthly life and continued beyond death throughout eternity. Furthermore, this offer of salvation came with the enormous advantage of a removal of the believer's anxieties about facing divine judgement in the hereafter.

In the context of Church-Synagogue dialogue, a doctrine of exemption from judgement for Christians – and *only* Christians – may well have served a legitimating purpose in trying to establish the surer and quicker efficacy of Christianity as a means of salvation when compared to Judaism. The incorporation of this theme into a discourse of Jesus with “the Jews” in John 5 indicates the applicability of a claim such as this one to Christian-Jewish dialogue. Whether such dialogue is viewed as taking place between



Jesus and his adversaries in the Gospel narrative, or as taking place between Johannine Christians and their critics in the Synagogue, it seems clear that the context is one of debate – a debate in which the Christian position is being presented as superior (in terms of timing and certainty of salvific efficacy) to the Jewish position. Whether or not the narratological opponents of Jesus or the actual opponents of the Johannine Christians were impressed by such arguments is beside the point. The point is that the Christian readers of the Gospel or the Johannine Christians involved in dialogue with the Synagogue would have been both strengthened in their belief in their own salvation and assured of the inferiority and the weakness of the arguments of those who opposed them. Thus it is possible to say that a belief in an exemption from judgement for Christians legitimates the Johannine Christian worldview by emphasising the advantages which Christianity brings while simultaneously erecting a barrier which their opponents cannot cross.

Once again we may detect a massive shift in the ethos of a Christian community emphasizing their belief in their own elitist position and their own unique relationship with God through eternity. In being exempted from judgement, the Johannine Christians saw themselves as uniquely privileged in terms of salvation and to a certain extent already embarked on their journey to heaven. That such an ethos should survive through a number of years or generations in the face of backsliding, deviant behaviour and the possible emergence of fearless libertinism does not invite a particularly optimistic response. However, the Fourth Gospel seems to provide us with a snapshot of what may have been a high point in the confidence of the community to express such an ethos. Their 'model of' reality had removed the fear of judgement from the Johannine Christians. Their 'model for' reality seems to have been, initially at least,



one where orderly and pious lives could be lived in partnership with the Paraclete and in expectation of much greater things to come.

#### **4. Now the 'dead' have life through hearing the Son**

John 5:25 continues the theme of the previous verse by confirming the final proposition of verse 24. In 5:24 the evangelist has Jesus say that those who accept Jesus will move from death to life and we have stated in the previous section above why we are justified in interpreting 'dead' in terms of a spiritual death characterised by a lack of an awareness of the need for salvation. The key to this interpretation of 5:25 lies firstly in the continuation of the theme of death, in the movement from *ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου* – *from death* – in 5:24 to *οἱ νεκροὶ* – *the dead* – who have undergone the transition. Secondly, there is the use of the term *νῦν ἐστίν* – *now is* – in 5:25, indicating that the movement of the spiritually dead from a state of spiritual death into a condition of eternal life has already commenced for those who hear the voice of the Son and have responded positively to it. One again this verse illustrates the transference of the benefits previously associated with the parousia-eschaton back into the lives of Christian believers. Here the gift or prize associated with salvation in Christianity has been taken away from the now too distant future and has been granted in the present to those – but only to those – who acknowledge Jesus Christ as the bringer of that salvation.

While this advancement of the benefits of salvation from a 'day of judgement' in the now distant future into the lives of Johannine Christians is consistent with our proposal of John's worldview changing in order to accommodate his new cosmology in which

the parousia-eschaton is no longer imminent, it is worth noting the similarities of thought, if not in wording, between this Johannine doctrine and the theology of Paul.

Commenting on Romans 6:3-11, and in particular on the use of the phrase ζῶντας δὲ

τῷ Θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, S.G.F. Brandon has noted:

The effect of the rite of baptism, according to this passage, was to initiate the neophyte into a new form of life 'in Christ Jesus.' In other words, baptism, as Paul represents it here, consists of a ritual dying and rebirth to a state of incorporated being in the divine saviour. The rite was a ritual re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ...

To Paul, accordingly, the baptized Christian, by being thus regenerated and incorporated into Christ, was saved and had entered into eternal life. In other words, his ritual death had anticipated his physical death, and he had already commenced an existence of immortal beatitude while still living in his material body...

Paul's soteriology thus, in effect, rendered the idea of a *post-mortem* judgment unnecessary, at least so far as baptized Christians were concerned; and it is difficult to see what significance it could have had relative to the rest of mankind, since they were already doomed to a state of perdition. It is true that in the course of his writings Paul makes many incidental references to the judgment of God after death, but they only indicate that, like most of his contemporaries, he generally accepted the idea of a *post-mortem* judgment and did not notice the implicit contradiction that such references constituted to the logic of the view that the baptized Christian was *in Christo*.<sup>70</sup>

Sadly, Brandon's assessment of Johannine eschatology is less than cursory in comparison to his examination of the beliefs of Paul and he makes no attempt to trace the development of ideas from Paul to John.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the concept of exemption from judgement, quite explicitly stated in John, has been thought to have been at least implicit in the theology of Paul. We have discussed above the possibility that Pauline doctrine might have re-emerged in modified form in

<sup>70</sup> Brandon 1967, pp. 106-107.

<sup>71</sup> Brandon mentions Johannine eschatology only in passing, although he does link John's 'de-eschatologizing' to a growing belief that the parousia-eschaton was no longer imminent: "The continuing delay of the second coming of Christ, however, meant that the Church had gradually to adapt itself to living in a world that persisted, contrary to expectation, in existing." Brandon 1967, pp. 108-109.



Johannine theology and we suggest that it is no more than a remote possibility here. However, whatever contradictions Paul was wrestling with, according to Brandon, it is clear that a realization of an indefinitely delayed parousia-eschaton was not one of them and such a realization played no part in the formation of Paul's doctrines. For the Johannine theologians, on the other hand, this realization may have been a primary concern in their thinking. Their worldview had had to change in order to accommodate this new reality and it is, therefore, not surprising that their theology should also change as a result.

In terms of the use of this doctrine as a legitimating argument in Church-Synagogue dialogues, it need only be pointed out that the  $\nu\tilde{\upsilon}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$  of 5:25 indicates the obvious advantages of the Johannine Christian position. Whatever offer of salvation was being made in Judaism was now believed to be a long way off in the future. The Johannine Christians, while arguing that the Synagogue's offer of salvation was of no value whatever whenever it should arrive, were able to state a belief in an offer of salvation which was available here and now in the present without having to wait. The community ethos, too, is governed by the  $\nu\tilde{\upsilon}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$  of 5:25 and again we may propose a massive shift in ethos from one of waiting – the default position in Judaism and early Christianity – to one of having. Again the 'haves' – the evangelist's community – see themselves in the position of a privileged elite when compared to the 'have nots' in the communities around them. The Johannine ethos is one of living out one's life already in the time of salvation, despite the apparent contradictory reality of the world around.



## **5. Someday there will be a day of judgement**

We have been attempting to show that throughout the passage John 5:21-30 the Fourth Gospel has been proposing a belief in a doctrine which affects both believers and non-believers. Through acceptance of Christ, believers enjoy the privilege of eternal life commencing in the present and continuing beyond physical death. Additionally they are relieved of the anxiety attached to an anticipation of divine judgement in the after-life because all followers of Christ are to be exempted from the judgement process. Non-believers, on the other hand, face judgement at the parousia-eschaton where they should not expect a favourable outcome as Christ will sit in judgement upon them. We have argued that such a doctrine has been formulated in response to a realization that the parousia-eschaton is not, as previously expected, about to happen imminently, but will happen at some time in the indefinite future. Whether this realization has dawned upon the Johannine Christians as a result of their own reflections upon the failure of the parousia-eschaton to materialize or whether it is the result of the critical observations of their opponents in the Synagogue is impossible to tell. In any event, the parousia-eschaton had receded beyond the horizon of immediate Johannine Christian experience and was no longer an issue for those who put their faith in Christ. However, the Johannine Christians had not disposed of their belief in the parousia-eschaton altogether. It was still a coming reality at some indefinite future time and, although it would not affect the Christians themselves directly, they believed it was a matter of great importance for the rest of humanity. John 5:28-29 reflects this belief. Here the Johannine Jesus spells out the Johannine view of what would eventually happen to all those who had not accepted Christ or had not had the chance to accept or reject Christ. There would eventually be a day of judgement at which individuals would be judged according to their works. Here, at the parousia-eschaton, the opponents of the earthly

Jesus would be dealt with. Here the opponents of the Johannine Christians would be given their appropriate dues. Here the evil, unjust and ungodly amongst humanity would find out what divine justice finally meant. Here, for the Johannine Christians, would be a final day of reckoning for all those who opposed them.

In terms of their worldview, it was necessary for the Johannine Christians to keep the parousia-eschaton just within it in order that such a day of reckoning could take place. To have dispensed with a day of judgement altogether would have meant there could be no day of reckoning for those who opposed Christianity. Thus by retaining the parousia-eschaton within their 'model of' reality, although now at a distance, the Johannine Christians were reconciled to a worldview in which much of *the world* was against them. What did it matter if the whole world was against them if it was certain that someday the whole world get its come-uppance when Christ finally came in judgement? The Johannine worldview demanded a day of judgement for the non-Christian world – even if not for Christians themselves. John 5:28-29 is the theological response to this need – the day of judgement is still there lying in wait for those who oppose Christ.

To have used such an argument in the context of Church-Synagogue debate would not initially have caused much of a stir in the breasts of the opponents of the Johannine Christians. After all, they too believed in an eschatological day of judgement, even if not in the parousia of Christ. However, the value of this doctrine as legitimation for the Christians lies in their belief that (a) they themselves would not be facing judgement at the great assize, and (b) the judge of their opponents would be Jesus Christ himself. These two aspects of the Johannine parousia-eschaton serve together to enhance the



Christian position at the expense of the Synagogue view. The “Jews” of John 5 are put at an immediate disadvantage, relative to the followers of Christ, because they will have to undergo a judgement-hearing which the Christians will not face and they will be judged by the eschatological Christ – the saviour of the Christians. In terms of legitimation this is a double advantage to the Johannine Christians and, in their view, a double blow to their Synagogue opponents. Once again the setting of this argument in a discourse of Jesus with his Jewish opponents in John 5 may be indicative of the use of such arguments in Church-Synagogue dialogue.

In terms of community ethos, of a ‘model for’ reality, the belief that their opponents faced an unpleasant eschatological future which the Johannine Christians themselves would not have to endure fits well with the picture of a Johannine ethos which has been building up as we have progressed through this chapter. A ‘model of’ reality in which those outside the circle of Johannine Christianity were doomed to a fearful eschatological fate would be reflected in the judgemental ethos we have already noted for those living within the Johannine ‘model for’ reality. Altogether we have noted an ethos in the Fourth Gospel which seems to have moved markedly from previously detectable positions. Here we find a community or group of communities which, while facing persecution on the one hand, seems to be living out an ethos of tremendous self-confidence, an elitism, engendered by a belief in its own sense of occupying a uniquely privileged position in relation to God and the heavenly realm. This sense of elitism, almost a self-satisfaction with their own good fortune, is accompanied, perhaps not surprisingly, with a judgementalism bordering on contempt towards those who do not agree with them. But as we have noted, this far from attractive representation of the Johannine ethos is tempered, paradoxically, by a willingness to welcome converts who



could convert to following Christ with remarkable ease. Such an ethos looked unpleasant when observed from the outside, but when experienced and lived out from within, in the full belief of the certainty of Johannine salvation, it was no doubt both powerful and comforting as a 'model for' reality.

## **Findings**

In this chapter we have found that the Fourth Gospel presents evidence from which we may infer the worldview of the evangelist, the cosmology underlying that worldview and the particular Christian ethos which the Gospel reflects. In addition, we have been able to propose a mechanism of worldview maintenance by which some of the Gospel's characteristic theological propositions may have been developed and we have shown how these theological propositions may have been used as legitimation by the Johannine Christians in their disputations with their Jewish opponents in the synagogue. In particular, we have shown that our hypothesis of a unified bicameral eschatology in John 5 – for both Christians and for the rest of humanity – fits very well with the beliefs, ethos, developing theology and apologetic stance we have detected. Above all, we believe that an abandoned expectation of the imminence of the parousia-eschaton has contributed to a reformulation of beliefs by the Johannine Christians which has resulted in an advancement of the expected salvational benefits for Christians from the end-time into the present. This has been brought about in part by christological developments in which the earthly Jesus of the Johannine narratives is empowered as life-giver and judge in a manner which other New Testament writings hint is appropriate only for the ascended and exalted Christ. Thus we have found that that in

terms of their own expectations for themselves, the Johannine Christians believe that they are free from the fear of judgement – they will not face judgement at all – and they already enjoy the commencement of eternal life in their earthly lives with the expectation that this will continue beyond death in heaven. Their belief in these benefits extends only to themselves, however. For those who are not Christians, a resurrection to judgement at the eschaton remains waiting in the indefinite future. Thus the Johannine Christians have been able to reformulate their theology not only to deal with the apparent delay in the parousia-eschaton, but also to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism as a means of salvation.

In the light of our findings in this chapter in terms of mythology, worldview, development of doctrine and legitimating arguments, we are able to say that our hypothesis offers a plausible explanation of the eschatological puzzle we are presented with in John 5.

## **Chapter 7**

### **An exegetical examination of John 5**

We began this study by proposing a hypothesis of a specifically Johannine bicameral eschatology as a solution to the apparent puzzle of judgement as it is presented in John 5. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this study have attempted to establish that the principal foundation blocks on which our hypothesis sits are in place and that the hypothesis is, therefore, applicable to John 5. Thus in chapter 4 we examined arguments for and against the unity of the text of John 5 and we were able to conclude that it would be reasonable to proceed on the basis of the unified text which our hypothesis requires. In chapter 5 we investigated the possibility of inferring the existence of a distinctive Johannine community from the text of John. Without needing to be specific in terms of location or spread of such a community, we concluded that it is reasonable to propose a Johannine community with a distinctively sectarian ethos which was involved in acrimonious dialogue with a Jewish community. Furthermore we were able to infer from the text of John 5 some specific arguments used by the Johannine Christians in this dialogue and we found that these arguments fitted well not only with a sectarian consciousness, but also with a belief in the unified bicameral eschatology which our hypothesis proposes. In chapter 6 we continued our examination of the community consciousness behind the Fourth Gospel in an attempt to describe a specifically Johannine ethos and worldview. We were able to conclude that the Johannine worldview was one in which the earthly world and the heavenly world make up two parts of a dualistic universe and that the Johannine Jesus is very much an other-worldly visitor to the earthly world from the heavens. We also found that it is likely that the



Johannine Christians had abandoned any belief that the parousia-eschaton was either imminent or relevant to their own salvation. They believed they had been granted eternal life simply by adopting the Christian faith. The now distant parousia-eschaton was, they believed, only of relevance to non-Christians. In parallel to the Johannine worldview, we found the probable Johannine ethos to be one of a sense of privilege and elitism which engendered judgemental and even scathing attitudes towards those outside their community. Such an ethos readily divides humanity into two camps – in this case the Johannine Christians and everyone else. Lastly in chapter 6 we looked at how the christology, eschatology, apologetics and polemics of John 5 could perhaps be explained as legitimation through worldview maintenance. We were able to conclude that the double challenge to an earlier Christian worldview of a critical Synagogue and a parousia-eschaton which had failed to appear had resulted in the formulation of the detectable Johannine position by a process of worldview maintenance.

Thus by the end of chapter 6 we are in a position to say that all the requirements of our hypothesis seem to be detectable in John 5 :- unified text; specific community with sectarian consciousness; dualistic worldview; elitist and judgemental ethos; abandoned belief in an imminent parousia-eschaton; and acrimonious dialogue with the Synagogue. If the prerequisites of the hypothesis are in place and the hypothesis is, therefore, considered to be applicable to John 5, it remains to be established that John 5 in its entirety will allow the hypothesis to be applied to it. In other words, we have established that all the parts of our hypothesis are suitable for application to John 5, but we have yet to establish if all the parts of John 5 are compatible with the hypothesis. This we must now attempt to establish by an exegesis of the text of John 5. Essentially, we have already established in chapters 5 and 6 of this study that the christological and

eschatological basis on which our hypothesis rests can already be found in John 5. In addition to confirming these results, our aim in this exegetical chapter must now be to establish whether or not John 5 contains any additional material that is incompatible with the hypothesis. It is only once we are satisfied that our hypothesis can be applied to the entirety of a unified John 5 text that we shall be able to suggest that the hypothesis offers a resolution to the puzzle of judgement presented in that chapter.

The exegesis will seek to assess the text using various approaches. These approaches will include:

- An examination of the grammar of the Greek text to enable not only a translation into English, but also an attempt to assess whether or not the style of the Greek throughout John 5 suggests a unity of composition by a single author;
- An examination of the christology and eschatology of John 5 in the sequence in which it is presented to ascertain whether or not it forms a coherent theological argument which is consistent with our hypothesis;
- Literary-critical analysis will be used to attempt to ascertain whether or not the whole of John 5 consistently engages with the reader as a unified piece of literature;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This study has not so far engaged with analysis of the Fourth Gospel's text in terms of narratological techniques. This should not, however, be understood as a wish to ignore or abandon such approaches on our part. Rather, it is only now in this exegetical chapter as we look at the text of John 5 as a whole that we find their application appropriate. We are in agreement with Motyer that text-immanent approaches such as reader-response criticism must be used in conjunction with a thorough application of historical critical methods if there is to be any chance of understanding what (in this case) the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was trying to communicate to his contemporaries. See Motyer 1997, pp. 27-44. Allowing for this qualification, we believe reader-response criticism and other narratological techniques are of use in allowing us to examine the way in which the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel has sought to communicate with his audience through his text as a literary artefact. For introductions to narratological analyses of the Fourth Gospel see Culpepper 1983 and 1990. For a specific application of reader-response methods to the Fourth Gospel see Staley 1988, *passim*, and particularly pp. 1-49. The importance of Staley's contribution is confirmed by the responses in Botha 1990, p. 189; Stibbe 1992, pp. 9, 28; Lee 1994, pp. 15-16; Tovey 1997, pp. 25-26 and 67-68; and Motyer 1997, pp. 29-31. See also, however, the notes of caution in Jasper 1987, p. 43 and Ashton 1994, pp. 141-145. We shall rely throughout this chapter on two recent narratological examinations of the text of John 5, Lozada 2000, pp.



- An assessment of whether or not the events and controversies in John 5 consistently reflect conditions in the community in which the text was produced;
- An examination of whether or not the text of John 5 alludes to elements of a worldview and ethos that is not explicitly stated;
- An examination of the degree to which John 5 indicates a process of legitimation as worldview maintenance as proposed by our hypothesis.

Following our translation of the text, we shall limit our comments in the notes to topics with a direct bearing on the issues listed above, leaving comment on wider issues of scholarly interest to the footnotes. After discussing the degree to which the text is compatible with our hypothesis, we shall conclude by assessing whether or not the hypothesis can be applied to the text of John 5 as a whole.

#### **A. Translation of John 5:1-47**

*(1) After this there was a festival of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem itself, near to the sheep-gate, a pool – its Hebrew name is Bethzatha – surrounded by five porches. (3) In these porches lay many sick people – the blind, the lame and the wasted. (5) Now, there was a certain man there who had been ill for thirty eight years. (6) Jesus, seeing the man lying there and knowing that he had been ill for a long time, said to him, ‘Do you wish to become well?’ (7) The sick*



man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is disturbed. For whenever I try, someone else gets in before me.' (8) Jesus said to him, 'Get up, take your mat and walk.' (9) And at once the man became well, took his mat and started to walk. Now it was a Sabbath on that day. (10) Therefore the Jews said to the man who was healed, 'It is a Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.' (11) But he answered them, 'The one who made me well – he told me, "Take your mat and walk."' (12) They asked him, 'Who is this man, the one who told you to take and to walk?' (13) But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had melted away into the crowd that was there.

(14) After this Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have become well. Sin no more lest something worse happens to you.' (15) The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. (16) Therefore the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he was doing these things on a Sabbath. (17) But he answered them, 'My Father is still working and I too am working.' (18) Because of this, therefore, the Jews began seeking actually to kill him because not only did he break the Sabbath, but also he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (19) Jesus said this in answer to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you people, the Son can do nothing on his own – only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever things the Father does, these things the Son does also. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows to him everything he is doing. And greater works than these he will show him, so that you people will be amazed. (21) For just as the Father raises the dead and makes alive, so also The Son makes alive whomsoever he wishes. (22) Furthermore, the Father judges no one, but has delegated all judgement to the Son, (23) that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son, does not honour the Father who sent him.' (24) 'Truly, truly, I say to you people, that

*whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come to judgement, but passes from death into life. (25) Truly, truly, I say to you people, that the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and having heard, they will have life. (26) For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he allows the Son to have life in himself (27) and has given to him the power to hand down judgement because he is the Son of Man. (28) Don't be amazed at this, because an hour is coming in which all those in their graves will hear his voice; (29) and they will come forth – those having done good things to a resurrection of life; but those whose deeds are evil to a resurrection of judgement. (30) I am not able to do anything on my own; as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.'*

*(31) 'If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. (32) There is another who testifies about me, and I know that his testimony about me is true. (33) You people sent to John (the Baptist) and he testified the truth. (34) But I do not accept human testimony. Nevertheless, I say these things that you people might be saved. (35) He was a lamp that burned and shined; and for a while you people were willing to rejoice in his light. (36) But I have a testimony greater than John's; for the works which the Father has given to me to complete, the works which I am doing, testify about me that the Father has sent me. (37) And the Father who sent me – he has testified about me. You have never heard his voice, nor have you seen his form (38) and you do not have his word dwelling within you because you people do not believe the one he has sent. (39) You search the scriptures because you think in them you possess eternal life, yet these are the scriptures testifying about me, (40) yet you do not want to come to me that you might have life.' (41) 'I do not accept glory from humanity, (42) but I know you people and that you do not have the love of God within you. (43) I have come in the name of*



*my Father, but you people do not accept me. But if another were to come in his own name, you will accept him. (44) How are you people able to believe, when you accept glory from one another, yet you do not seek glory from the only God?' (45) 'Do not think that I shall accuse you people before God. Your accuser is Moses, in whom you people have hoped. (46) For if you did believe in Moses, then you would believe in me, for he wrote about me. (47) And if you do not believe his writing, how will you believe my words?'*

## **B. Exegetical Notes**

**5:1** Μετὰ ταῦτα – *after this* (or literally, *after these things*) – is, as Lozada has pointed out, a mark of the evangelist's style.<sup>2</sup> The anarthrous ἑορτή – a religious *feast* or *festival* – suggests that it is unimportant to the narrator which festival Jesus is attending.<sup>3</sup> The evangelist probably uses a religious festival simply as a means of getting Jesus up to Jerusalem, where his activities will bring him into conflict and controversy with “the Jews.”<sup>4</sup> The use of τῶν Ἰουδαίων – *of the Jews* – provides an

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<sup>2</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 68, 74.

<sup>3</sup> Many commentators are willing to speculate as to which feast this could have been. Ladd notes the possibility that it could have been a Passover feast and that the period of Jesus' ministry covered by the Fourth Gospel might be increased if that were so – Ladd 1993, p. 251. Bernard and Bultmann are both confident that this verse does refer to the Passover feast, Bernard even going so far as to provide a date of A.D. 28. Both these commentators are advocates of transposing chapters 5 and 6, thus placing 5:1 after 6:4 – a reference to the Passover – Bernard 1928(1), pp. 225-226; Bultmann 1971, p. 240. Perhaps the most exhaustive treatment and the most ingenious argument in that of John Bowman, suggesting the feast was Purim – Bowman 1971, pp. 43-56. Barrett seems nearer the mark in noting that the anarthrous nature of the noun probably indicates that the author was simply using the device of a feast to get Jesus up to Jerusalem – Barrett 1978, pp. 250-251. Lindars agrees – “accepting the text as it stands, we have no right to specify the feast” – Lindars 1972, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> So Schnelle 1992, p. 96 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 60.



ominous hint<sup>5</sup> that trouble lies not far ahead as “the Jews” are known to be against Christ (in the world of the Gospel) and against Christians (in the world of the evangelist and his readers). As Haenchen observes, “the Jews” represent the world.<sup>6</sup> But in terms of their sectarian consciousness, the evangelist and his readers owe no allegiance to the world – they have acknowledged Jesus Christ and accepted eternal life. The Christian readers of the Gospel are no longer of this world.<sup>7</sup>

**5:2** This verse has resulted in much discussion in the commentaries regarding the historical details provided by the evangelist, particularly regarding the location of the pool<sup>8</sup> and its name.<sup>9</sup> The healing story begins here in verse 2, although the amount of

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<sup>5</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 60, but contrast with Brodie in his ‘literary’ commentary. He regards 5:1 as distinctive for its easy, relaxing tone prior to the “swarming suffering” of verse 2. Brodie 1993b, p. 235. See pp. 188-190 above for an assessment of the appropriate use of “the Jews” in translation.

<sup>6</sup> Haenchen 1984(1), p. 243. The theme of “the Jews” pervades the whole of John 5, with specific references in verses 1, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18, while verse 19 begins a sequence (continued in verses 24, 25, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 47) in which they are repeatedly addressed by Jesus as “you people.” See above pp. 87-101, 104, 127, 169-170 and 175 where we discuss the stance of the Johannine Christians towards “the Jews” in dialogue with Bultmann, Schnackenburg, Martyn, Brown and Meeks.

<sup>7</sup> For our discussion of the sectarian nature of the Johannine community in its stance against the world, see pp. 179-205 above where we are in dialogue with Bultmann, Martyn, Brown, Painter, Meeks and Rensberger.

<sup>8</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 251. He notes that several textual variations might be attempts by copyists to address this problem themselves. Raymond Brown suggests that the missing word may simply be “pool” – two pools in the sentence reflecting two nearby pools in Jerusalem, one better known than the other – Brown 1966(1), p. 206 – a suggestion that is perhaps at least as likely as the automatic ellipsis of πύλη – *gate* – as suggested by Bultmann and others but rejected as unprecedented by Morris. Bultmann 1971, p. 240 and Morris 1995, p. 266. For the Greek text of John 5 see Aland *et al.* 1993, pp. 259-263. Textual variants of John 5:2 relate solely to the name of the pool and offer no resolution to the problem of a probable missing word. See Metzger 1994, pp. 178-179. This verse is an example of an awkward Greek construction, which on any reading seems to indicate a missing word. One possibility is that the dative ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ – *near the sheep* – should be accompanied by a missing dative noun, in which case κολυμβήθρα – *a pool* – is the substantive nominative to which verb the Ἔστιν at the beginning of the sentence refers along with ἡ ἐπιλεγόμενη – *which is called*. Alternatively, κολυμβήθρα is the dative noun accompanying ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ, meaning that the missing word is the substantive nominative noun to which ἡ ἐπιλεγόμενη and the verb Ἔστιν refer. In either case a noun indicating location or place, either in the dative or in the nominative, is required to make perfect sense of the sentence. If an unspecific noun such as ‘place’ is inserted in each case, the sentence can be translated, *there is in Jerusalem by the place of the sheep a pool, which is called .....*; or, *there is in Jerusalem by the pool of the sheep a place, which is called .....* Barrett prefers the second option, however, with Schnelle (Schnelle 1992, p. 96) we prefer the first option on the grounds that the passage wishes to draw our attention to a pool (near the sheep-place) rather than to an unspecified place (near the sheep-pool).



historicizing detail in this verse suggests that the evangelist wishes to draw his readers into a story coloured with plausibly realistic detail.<sup>10</sup>

**5:3** Here the scene focuses in on the suffering of the many invalids who lie in the porches around the pool, apparently awaiting healing – the blind, the lame and the withered. It is tempting to link, as Brodie has done, this pathetic scene of suffering waiting for a cure to the flavour of Jewishness that has pervaded the preceding two verses. This passage “refers to “the Jews,” to Jerusalem (twice), to Hebrew and to the name [of the pool] which ..... is thoroughly semitic. To some extent, the text evokes an image of the Jews as a suffering flock. Such is the setting – pathetic and vivid.”<sup>11</sup> Lozada, too, notes the significance of a scene of “swarming suffering.”<sup>12</sup>

**5:5** The Greek in this verse is awkward at least, although Bultmann surely goes too far in stating it to be ultimately impossible.<sup>13</sup> Both Bernard and Barrett believe it to be

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<sup>9</sup> Metzger 1994, pp. 178-179. Beyond the issue of the pool’s name, discussion of its exact location is extensive in the commentaries, both in terms of the textual evidence and terms of modern archaeological evidence. See Barrett 1978, pp. 251-253 for a full account. Such discussion suggests a firm belief in some kind of reliable historical tradition behind the narrative or its putative sources. Textual variants have given rise to much discussion of the name of the pool. Metzger and a majority of his colleagues have opted for Βηθζαθα, although the variant readings of Βηθεσδα, Βηθσαϊδα, Βηζαθα and Βελζεθα are noted. Of these, he notes that Βηθεσδα is supported by evidence from Qumran and that a minority of his colleagues accepted this as evidence in its corroboration.

<sup>10</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Brodie 1993b, p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> Lozada 2000, p. 75. The earliest manuscripts end this passage with the word ξηρῶν - *withered*, as in withered limbs – but later copyists have added explanatory glosses amounting to verses 3b, 4 – familiar from their inclusion in the translation known as the King James Bible. The additional material alludes to John 5:7 and explains that the pool is periodically disturbed by an angel and that the first person to enter the water after the disturbance is cured of all illness. While these explanatory glosses may reflect traditions contemporaneous with the writing of the Gospel or even with the ministry of Jesus, they are not believed to form part of the text of the Gospel. See St John 5:3-4 in the King James Bible, the discussion in Metzger 1994, p. 179 and the comment of Hartwig Thyen in his postscript to Bultmann’s commentary where the textual evidence for the late addition of this passage is assessed – Bultmann 1971, p. 742. See also Fee 1982 and note 75 on p. 80 above.

<sup>13</sup> See Bultmann 1971, p. 241, note 6, where he proposes examples of “correct usage.”

representative of the evangelist's style.<sup>14</sup> The man's illness is not specified here, though we may infer from verses 7-8 that he was some kind of paralytic who required the help of other people to move. He has been ill for thirty eight years, a figure of no convincing symbolism<sup>15</sup> beyond a magnitude that reflects the power of the healing to follow.<sup>16</sup>

**5:6** Somehow Jesus is aware that the man has been ill for a long time and the evangelist gives us no clues as to whether this is because Jesus had overheard some talk about the man, or because Jesus was able to infer from simple observation that the man was no stranger to his condition, or even if it was because Jesus was possessed of supernatural knowledge. A deduction from simple observation seems as likely a solution as any, but we must not forget that Jesus' supernatural knowledge has been a theme in the Gospel prior to this point – it is explicit in John 1:47-48 and implicit in John 4:17-18, 29. Given the explicit beginning of this theme and its implicit continuance, we are probably meant to infer its involvement in this episode too and we may further assume that the evangelist intends to portray Jesus not only as being a visitor from an otherworldly, heavenly realm, but also as a visitor possessed of otherworldly (i.e. supernatural) knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Although not uniquely Johannine (as all four Gospels attribute some degree of supernatural power and knowledge to the earthly Jesus), this is tending towards a christology of omniscience in which Jesus knows everything that is happening and that is going to happen – qualities belonging more appropriately to the divinity than to the man from Nazareth. But as we have seen, the

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<sup>14</sup> Bernard gives John 8:57, 9:21 and 11:17 as other examples of "length of time, governed by *ἔχειν*." Barrett agrees and adds 5:6 as another example, stating this construction to be "a mark of John's style." See Bernard 1928(1), p. 229 and Barrett 1978, p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce is representative of many commentators in his dismissal of allegorical symbolism here and elsewhere in the Gospel. He shows his impatience with such interpretations with his, "This will convince whom it will." Bruce 1983, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> So Schnelle 1992, p. 96, Lozada 2000, pp. 75-76 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> So Schnelle 1992, p. 75 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 62-63.



Johannine Jesus is God's representative and has been empowered so to act. Here we may have the first evidence in John 5 of the Fourth Gospel's dualistic worldview – supernatural or heavenly knowledge in contrast to natural or worldly knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus' question to the man serves to dispel any doubts that a healing miracle is about to take place. The answer, which was hardly to be doubted, could have been inferred from the man's presence at a pool with supposedly healing qualities.<sup>19</sup> However, Jesus has to be sure that the man will co-operate with *him* in *his* ministry of healing. Both for Jesus in the narrative and for the reader of the Gospel, it is essential to be sure that the man is a willing participant not simply in his own healing, but in the healing effected by Jesus.

5:7 In this context, κύριε does not carry the worshipful piety of *Lord*, and it can confidently be translated simply as *Sir*.<sup>20</sup> The sick man does not know who Jesus is, nor does he have any expectation of being healed by him.<sup>21</sup> He has no one to help him into the water at the crucial moment when the pool is stirred up, with the result that someone else always gets in first.<sup>22</sup> Just as we have not been told how long the sick man has been waiting to get into the pool (only that he has been sick for thirty eight years), we are not told how often the opportunity for a healing arises when the waters of the pool are stirred up. Significantly, Barrett points out that the Greek of the phrase ἵνα ..... βάλλῃ could be improved upon with the use of the infinitive of the verb – βάλλειν.

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<sup>18</sup> For an account of Rudolf Bultmann's *History of Religions* theory of the entry of 'Divine Man' attributes into christology from Hellenistic beliefs, see Bultmann 1955(1), pp. 128-133 and Bultmann 1971, pp. 101-107 and particularly note 1 on p. 102. However, such a *History of Religions* interpretation no longer commands wide scholarly assent in terms of the origins of 'Divine Man' christology in the wider religion and culture of Hellenism. See Fuller 1965, pp. 68-72 for an account of why the origins of such christological beliefs may be more likely to be thoroughly biblical.

<sup>19</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p.63.

<sup>20</sup> Fuller 1965, pp. 67-68.

<sup>21</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 64.

<sup>22</sup> See Lozada 2000, p. 77.

The use of the subjunctive with ἵνα is, Barrett believes, a characteristic of John's idiomatic Greek.<sup>23</sup>

5:8 Note the asyndeton of ἔγειρε ἄρον – *Get up! Take* ..... Asyndeton is a recognisable characteristic of Johannine Greek which some commentators have taken as an indicator that the text is a translation from Aramaic or that at least the evangelist's use of Greek was coloured by Semitic influences. In this case a reported speech of Jesus (with a Synoptic parallel<sup>24</sup>) could possibly, even probably, have its origin in an oral Aramaic tradition. However, the characteristic asyndeton of the Fourth Gospel is not restricted merely to the speech of Jesus and may be taken, in general terms, to be indicative of the evangelist's composition.<sup>25</sup> The act of healing is a simple word of command. Jesus has no contact with the man being healed and no act of faith in the man is implied. Nor, apparently, does Jesus instruct him concerning where to go or what to do next. Here, for the second time in John 5, we find evidence of Jesus' empowerment with divine attributes.<sup>26</sup> The healing of the man is achieved without medical or surgical intervention. Nor is there any indication of a psychological component. Christologically, the Johannine Jesus is empowered by God as the life-giver, both in biological and in spiritual terms and, as such, the life-giver is able to give

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<sup>23</sup> Barrett 1978, p. 254.

<sup>24</sup> The parallelism between this verse and Mark 2:11 is striking to say the least. Some commentators have used this to suggest that the two passages are variants of the same story that have come down to the two authors, while others deny there is any relationship between the two passages. Regardless of the details of this healing story and leaving aside any considerations of its historicity, it is possible that John's use of the phrase, *Get up, take your mat and walk*, simply reflects his use of a saying that was traditionally associated with Jesus' healing activity. Perhaps both John and Mark have inherited a remembered tradition, quite possibly an oral one, in which it was recalled that Jesus used this phrase in connection with a miraculous healing. Indeed, its persistence in two separate traditions suggests that this was a familiar usage of the historical Jesus and that he may have used a phrase very like this (in Aramaic) on more than one occasion. See McGrath 2001, pp. 81-86 and Dodd 1963, pp. 174-180.

<sup>25</sup> Nigel Turner considers asyndeton to be "an important element in Johannine Greek: scores of verses are asyndetic, even when verbs of speaking are left out of account." Turner 1976, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 77-78.



life (in this case biological health) through an act of healing which is accomplished by the simple utterance of human speech.<sup>27</sup>

**5:9** The healing takes place immediately. The man is well, takes up his mat and starts walking about. Given the length of the man's illness, there can be little doubt as to the nature of the cure we are meant to infer – it is a miraculous healing.<sup>28</sup> The details of the healing story end at this point and the narrative moves on to inform us that all these things happened on a Sabbath. This introduces the note of controversy on which the following dialogue hinges.<sup>29</sup>

**5:10** Sabbath controversies are a familiar theme in the Gospel narratives<sup>30</sup> and while they probably reflect a tradition of controversies which dogged Jesus' career, they may also reflect the situations of controversy which were familiar to the communities in which the Gospels were written. The Johannine Christians may have had to answer the dual accusation from their critics in the Synagogue that not only were they the followers of a Sabbath-breaker, but also that they themselves were Sabbath-breakers. Nevertheless, as Sabbath-breakers facing criticism on this issue, the Johannine Christians stood together as a group and together with Christ in the face of adversity and we see here the basis of a sectarian consciousness which stands apart from a hostile

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<sup>27</sup> For our assessment of the evidence for a *life-giver* christology in the Fourth Gospel, see above pp. 54-56 and 249-255.

<sup>28</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> So Lozada 2000, pp. 79-80 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 66-67.

<sup>30</sup> The christological claims which follow in the next section (5:16-23) and which are presented as a defence of Jesus' activity on the Sabbath can be compared with other defences of his Sabbath activity in John and in the Synoptic Gospels. Luke 13:15 and 14:5 describe the kind of purely practical exceptions that were allowed to the Sabbath prohibitions – in these cases the rescue of trapped livestock. John 7:22-23 has Jesus appeal to the need to circumcise on the Sabbath as a fulfilment of the Law. Similarly, Matthew 12:5 has Jesus appeal to the liturgical activity of temple priests on the Sabbath and this too leads on to a christological claim in 12:6 and 8. Leaving aside the christological claims, the arguments that certain activities were permitted on the Sabbath were well known. Barrett quotes the Mishnaic tract *Shabbath* as giving examples of what was and was not permitted activity on the Sabbath. See Barrett 1978, pp. 254-255 and Neusner 1998, pp. 179-208 for a translation of *Shabbath*. See Weiss 1991, Thatcher 1999 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, *passim*, on the Fourth Gospel's use of the Sabbath motif.



world while remaining confident of the enjoyment of special spiritual privileges.<sup>31</sup> In this case the controversy is sparked not by the healing of the man, but by the fact that he is going around carrying his mat on the Sabbath. “The Jews” enter the narrative here and we may assume that the reference is not an ethnic one (which presumably would have included the healed man himself), but rather John’s familiar label for the religious authorities.<sup>32</sup> They point out to the healed man, not to Jesus, that he is infringing the Sabbath commandment by carrying his mat.

**5:11** The healed man’s answer, perhaps intended to absolve him of responsibility for his actions,<sup>33</sup> points out two things to his accusers: firstly that he had been the recent recipient of a healing of some kind; and secondly that he was acting on the instructions of the one who had healed him. The emphatic use of ἐκεῖνός – *he or that one* – is a characteristic usage in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>34</sup>

**5:12** The man’s questioners simply ignore the matter of the healing. Their sole interest now is in who has authorized the healed man’s infringement of the Sabbath.<sup>35</sup> There is a sense of dramatic irony in the way the narrative relates this response which serves to highlight the evangelist’s view of how deficient “the Jews” are in their understanding of God’s work.<sup>36</sup> From the Johannine point of view, what is important is

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<sup>31</sup> H. Weiss argues that the Johannine Christians may have provoked such criticism through “eschatologizing” the Sabbath through their christological beliefs and thereby releasing it from “the weekly chronological cycle.” However, it is hard to see how the Johannine Sabbath would differ in this respect from the remainder of the week. See Weiss 1991, particularly pp. 318-320.

<sup>32</sup> See pp.188-190 above.

<sup>33</sup> So Lozada 2000, pp. 80-81.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard relies on Burney’s estimate that it is found 51 times in John and only 11 times in the three Synoptic Gospels. Bultmann seems to agree but asserts that the evangelist has inserted it into his source. Bernard 1928(1), pp. 9, 233, Burney 1922, p. 82 and Bultmann 1971, p. 243.

<sup>35</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Duke argues that there are three facets to literary irony, all of which are typically found in ironic usage in the Fourth Gospel. Firstly, there is double-layered meaning – a phrase which says one thing but means another. Secondly, there is a degree of tension between the layers of meaning, thus differentiating

that a work of God has been revealed through Christ in terms of Jesus' power to heal the man's wasted body. As portrayed by the evangelist, the important and shocking issue for "the Jews" is what they perceive to be a cavalier breach of the Commandment regarding Sabbath observance. Here is evidence that the evangelist's community saw themselves in complete contradistinction to the kind of pedantic legalism they believed to be characteristic of Synagogue communities.<sup>37</sup> At the same time the Johannine Christians were appalled at what they may have regarded as the obtuseness of "the Jews" in not only failing to observe but also choosing to ignore the revelation of God's power in the person of Christ. "The Jews" were driven by an ethos in which Sabbath-observance remained an important means of grace and in which Christ played no part.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the ethos of the Johannine Christians was one which had little regard for the Jewish Sabbath, for in their worldview Jesus Christ was the true revelation of God's grace to the world.<sup>39</sup>

**5:14** Again the evangelist uses the phrase *μετὰ ταῦτα* – *after this* – a distinctive marker of his style. The first part of Jesus' statement to the healed man confirms that the effects of the healing are ongoing.<sup>40</sup> John's readers are confirmed and comforted in this fulfilment of their expectations. However, the rather grim warning that follows

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irony from metaphor and allegory. Thirdly, there has to be some sense in which the irony can be missed by some though not all readers – as opposed to sarcasm which is rarely intended to be missed. (Duke 1985, pp. 14-18). See also MacRae 1973, pp. 103-113 and Thatcher 1999, pp. 53-77.

<sup>37</sup> See Witkamp 1985, pp. 33-36.

<sup>38</sup> For an introduction to the term *ethos* as a *model for reality* by which a community comes to terms with the implications of its worldview, see above pp. 23-24.

<sup>39</sup> Asiedu-Peprah notes a clear "difference in perspective" being revealed in 5:12. Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 69-70.

<sup>40</sup> That there is a confirmation that a healing has taken place is, as Martyn has noted, one of the usual form-critical characteristics of a New Testament healing story. See above pp. 108-109 and particularly note 6.



introduces a note of discomfort into the narrative.<sup>41</sup> Had the man sinned before? If so, then in what way and for how long? Is Jesus implying that the illness of thirty eight years was some kind of punishment for these past sins? What worse thing will follow if he does not mend his ways? Elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel (9:3) Jesus is dismissive of a belief that physical infirmity is dealt out as divine retribution for sin and we can assume that the same applies here. Just as the man's past infirmities were not given to him as a punishment for committed sin, so Jesus is not now threatening the man with a worse physical condition if he continues to sin.<sup>42</sup> Rather, the "something worse" that might befall him may be the eternal consequence of the judgement that will become the theme of a later part of this chapter.<sup>43</sup>

**5:15** Some commentators compare the actions of the man in this verse with the actions of the blind man who is healed by Jesus in John chapter 9.<sup>44</sup> In one sense this is inappropriate, for we, as readers of the Gospel, have not yet been introduced to the blind man of chapter 9. Rather, we have to assess the actions of the man on their own merits. If we were to read the Gospel from a historical standpoint, as if the event was an actual episode in the career of Jesus, then we would have no way of knowing what kind of pressure the man might have been under to reveal his benefactor to the authorities. Alternatively, if we assume that the events in the narrative reflect the struggles of the evangelist's community and the man is a representative of unspecified characters who have benefited from the evangelist's Church only to later betray them in some way to

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<sup>41</sup> That the readers of the Fourth Gospel might, in some sense, be subjected to a form of emotional manipulation is an insight of reader-response criticism. See Staley 1998, pp. 1-49 and note 1 above on p. 273.

<sup>42</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Asiedu-Pepurah considers the judgement or condemnation to be the likely consequence of the healed man's ongoing sin of unbelief. See Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, pp. 72-73.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Bernard 1928(1), p. 235; Macgregor 1928, p.171; Hoskyns and Davey 1947, p. 266; Martyn 1979, p. 71.



the synagogue authorities (“the Jews”),<sup>45</sup> then we might assume that the evangelist wishes us to infer that the healed man has acted out of the basest of motives. However, it is perhaps not without significance that in reporting back to “the Jews,” the man does not answer their question as to who it was who authorised him to carry his mat on the Sabbath.<sup>46</sup> Rather, he informs them of the identity of his healer. There is evidence here of the evangelist contrasting the apparent intransigence of “the Jews” in their failure to acknowledge Johannine christological beliefs with a dawning realization on the part of the healed man that he had been the recipient of genuine divine grace. However, taking the narrative as it stands we can only assume that the man who was healed is a small wheel amongst the big gears of this chapter’s machinery. He has served his purpose, which was to bring Jesus into controversy with “the Jews” and we hear of him no more after this verse.

**5:16** This is a connecting verse which interplays both with what has gone before it and what comes after it. Not only does 5:16 immediately pick up the theme from the previous passage of “the Jews” seeking out the guilty party who has authorised an infringement of the Sabbath Commandment, but also the stage is firmly set for what follows. Jesus’ actions have incurred the wrath of the religious authorities in Jerusalem. He is now in conflict with them. The themes of this verse are: “Jews” – persecution – Sabbath.<sup>47</sup> We have already noted how the Johannine sectarian consciousness is reinforced by the negative connotations of both Jewishness and the Sabbath – negative symbols in the Johannine cosmology. Here we see also how persecution – another area of negativity – is introduced in the same context, helping to reinforce the Johannine

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<sup>45</sup> See above, pp. 117-118 for a discussion of why we would wish to be considerably less specific than J.L. Martyn regarding the role or identity of possibly historical characters from the evangelist’s community who are being allegorized in the narrative.

<sup>46</sup> See Lozada 2000, p. 83 and Asicdu-Peprah 2001, pp. 73-74.

<sup>47</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 84-85 and Asicdu-Peprah 2001, pp. 74-75.

sectarian worldview in which trouble (persecution) comes to the believers principally from the direction of “the Jews.”

**5:17** There is ample evidence that Jesus’ assertion here that God is always at work, even on the Sabbath, was commonplace and widely accepted in Jewish circles in the first century.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the claim that the Father was at work on the Sabbath need not have caused offence to Jesus’ persecutors. However, Jesus’ claim to have a special relationship with the Father (understood in terms of divine sonship) which allowed Jesus also to work on the Sabbath was another matter,<sup>49</sup> as we shall see in the next verse. The implied claim to divine sonship marks the beginning of a series of claims in the verses to follow of a christological nature.<sup>50</sup> In the Gospel narrative these christological claims are made by Jesus himself and they arouse hostility amongst those opposed to him – the Jerusalem religious authorities – designated “the Jews” by the evangelist. On a historical level this may reflect hostility actually faced by Jesus in Jerusalem and elsewhere. On another level it is possible to infer from the hostility shown to Jesus in the written narrative as a result of these christological claims that the Johannine churches were facing hostility and charges of blasphemy in their communities, and probably from the Synagogues, because the christological claims they were making were unpalatable to the point of blasphemy to the leaders of the parent Jewish faith.<sup>51</sup> In either case, 5:17 implies a belief in a christology of divine sonship in which Jesus comes as God’s special agent or envoy and is authorized to do the things which only God can do – in this case work on the Sabbath. We also get a glimpse of the

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<sup>48</sup> See Bernard 1928(1), pp. 236-237 and Barrett 1978, pp. 255-256 for examples of Rabbinic teaching confirming their belief that God was still at work on the Sabbath. See also Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> See above pp. 45-48 for our examination of the christology of sonship in the Fourth Gospel and in particular of our view that the Johannine position was one of dependence of the Son upon the Father rather than equality between the two. See also McGrath 1998 and McGrath 2001, pp. 86-89.

<sup>51</sup> See Martyn 1979, pp. 64-81.



Johannine symbolic universe in which Jesus the heavenly Son is the representative of God the heavenly Father.

**5:18** The charge against Jesus has now grown from Sabbath breaking to blasphemy. Jesus has claimed a special relationship of sonship with God the Father. However, notwithstanding the *καὶ γὰρ* – *I too* – of the previous verse, he has not necessarily claimed equality with the Father.<sup>52</sup> In the narrative this charge is an inference made by his antagonists rather than a claim made by Jesus himself.<sup>53</sup> Whether this verse represents an historical reality in which Jesus' claims were misunderstood or exaggerated by his opponents or whether it represents the kind of opposition the Johannine Christians faced is hard to tell. However, we have described in chapter 1 above why it may have been that the Johannine christological claims led to counter-claims that the Johannine Jesus was indeed 'equal to God.'<sup>54</sup>

**5:19** John's use of the phrase *ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν* – *truly, truly I say to you people* – is distinctively characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. It is found nowhere else in the New Testament with the double *ἀμὴν*, yet it is found twenty times in the Fourth Gospel with exactly this wording and a further five times with the single addressee *σοι*<sup>55</sup> and may be considered as a distinctive marker of the evangelist's work. Its use seems to indicate the introduction of a particularly important point with appropriate emphasis.<sup>56</sup> The use of the dative *ὑμῖν* may indicate a specific rather than a general audience. Within the narrative these remarks are directed towards "the Jews," a group

<sup>52</sup> See note 50 on p. 288.

<sup>53</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 86 and Asiedu-Pcprah 2001, pp. 78-80.

<sup>54</sup> See p. 48 above.

<sup>55</sup> According to Moulton *et al.* 1978, p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 88 and Asiedu-Pcprah 2001, p. 81, note 123.



from whom Jesus rather oddly seems to stand apart. Perhaps this is a reflection of the directing of such arguments towards critics in the Synagogue by the evangelist's community.<sup>57</sup> Again we find the evangelist's distinctive use of the emphatic ἐκεῖνος. The charge of equality with God is effectively denied in this verse. Regardless of how the outcome may appear to those seeing Jesus the Son doing the work of God, the work is done not from a position of equality but rather it is done in imitation. Here the christology of sonship is qualified by an admission of the dependence of the Son upon the Father and a denial that a claim of equality has been made.<sup>58</sup> Verses 19 and 20a are an expansion on Jesus' justifying statement in verse 17.<sup>59</sup> They serve to establish the relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father which will serve as the basis of the two great christological claims to follow in verses 21-24 and the eschatological consequences of these claims to follow in verses 25-30.

**5:20** In this verse Jesus' claim to have a special relationship with God the Father is maintained<sup>60</sup> – the Father loves the Son. Moreover, the Son has insight into everything the Father does because the Father shows the Son πάντα ..... αὐτὸς ποιεῖ – *everything he is doing*. There is then a reference back to the healing miracle,<sup>61</sup> the significance of which will be surpassed by the μείζονα ..... ἔργα – *greater works* – which have yet to be revealed to the Son. Jesus again addresses his antagonists directly – ὑμεῖς – *you people* will be amazed by the works still to be revealed, indicating that

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<sup>57</sup> See Martyn 1979, pp. 64-81.

<sup>58</sup> From verse 9 to the end of John 5, Jesus remains in dialogue with the "Jews" and all references in 5:19-47 using ὑμεῖς remain essentially as references to the "Jews."

<sup>59</sup> C.H.Dodd has proposed that verses 19-20a is in the form an embedded parable within the narrative. However, as G.R. Beasley-Murray has pointed out, the motif of the Son is too prevalent throughout the Fourth Gospel to allow for such specificity in one instance. See Dodd 1968 and Beasley-Murray 1987, p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> See pp. 45-48 above.

<sup>61</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 89 and Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, pp. 84-85.

these greater works will be revealed to them through the Son. As in the previous verse, Jesus' rather odd use of ὑμεῖς may indicate the desire of the evangelist to clearly demarcate his own community from the recipients of the remarks in the context of Church-Synagogue dialogue. It is tempting to relate the promise of further revelation to what is to come later in the narrative, as Bernard has done.<sup>62</sup> However, from a narrative standpoint, Jesus' antagonists are as yet ignorant of what the greater works are and it is safe for us to assume that these promises serve to arouse the expectations of the reader.<sup>63</sup>

**5:21** The special relationship between Father and Son has given rise to a great christological claim in this verse – because the Father *makes life* – ζῳοποιεῖ – the Son also is able to *make alive* or to *give life*.<sup>64</sup> The Son has claimed the power to make life, a creative power understood to be the sole prerogative of the creator God. The Son may only do what he sees the Father doing (v.19), but it seems that he shares in all the Father's activities – even the most exclusive.<sup>65</sup> The defence of Jesus as the observant and dutiful Son (v. 18) is here being obscured by the necessary perspective, which we noted in chapter 1, through which humanity experiences the activity of the Son acting for the Father.<sup>66</sup> The inability of humanity to distinguish clearly between the Father and the Son as sources of divine activity immediately leads to a confusion of perceived identity, regardless of the claim of either Christ or his followers for a subordinate role for the Son.

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<sup>62</sup> Bernard 1928(1), p. 240. 'In the following verses, these "greater works" are specified, viz. that of raising the dead, and that of judging mankind.'

<sup>63</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, pp. 84-85.

<sup>64</sup> See pp. 54-46 above.

<sup>65</sup> See Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 85.

<sup>66</sup> See pp. 52-53 above.



**5:22** The second great christological claim – that it is now the Son, not the Father, who judges – augments the impression gained from the previous verse that the Son has been authorised to act as the Father would act.<sup>67</sup> Eschatological judgement is the second exclusive activity of the Father that is now carried out by the Son. The life-giving of verse 21 seems to be conducted along with the Father, but the judgement of this verse is conducted in the Father's place, albeit under his authority. The Father no longer judges. Judgement is now the prerogative of the Son – again as the Father's agent or vice-regent. This christological claim appears to be a contradiction of a previous claim made by Jesus that he did not come into the world for judgement (3:17).<sup>68</sup> Previously the Son was only indirectly involved in divine judgement. Now it appears he is its specific executor. Given the unequivocal nature of the claims about Jesus as a judge in John 5, the statement in 3:17 must be viewed in a new light. It may be that the evangelist is being ironic in 3:17 and that we are meant to assume he actually means the opposite.<sup>69</sup> Within the context of 3:17-19 there are grounds to doubt that the evangelist means us to take him at his word in 3:17.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For our assessment of the Fourth Gospel's christology of judgement, see pp. 56-57 and 255-259 above.

<sup>68</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 86.

<sup>69</sup> See note 36 on pp. 284-285 above. John 3:17 could be said to be ironic if we accept that the statement about the Son not coming for judgement is incongruous with what we believe (or are about to find out) about Jesus. That any ironic intent here could be missed hardly needs pointing out.

<sup>70</sup> There is something of a play on words going on in 3:17-19 that works well in Greek with the related terms of κρίνη (v.17), κρίνεται, κέκριται (v.18) and κρίσις (v.19) following one another through the text. This word-play works better in English if the Greek words are translated in terms of 'to judge' rather than in terms of 'to condemn' because ἡ κρίσις of v.19 is inelegantly awkward if rendered as 'the condemnation.' See above, pp. 82-83, for a discussion of the merits of translating in terms of 'judgement' rather than 'condemnation.' Clearly Jesus is not acting in judgement in v.17, nor is he explicitly identified as the magistrate responsible for the judgements in vv.18-19. However, to say that Jesus is not acting in judgement and is not explicitly identified as a judge in those verses is not the same as saying that Jesus will not act in judgement or that Jesus never judges. The key to understanding the dialectic between 3:17 and 5:22 lies in the vagueness of 3:18. In 3:17 Jesus is not judging – or at least it is not his primary function. In 3:18 those who have accepted Jesus are exempt from judgement, while those who reject him are already judged. Thus 3:18 has introduced an element of doubt – by whom have they been judged? 5:22 reveals that it is the Son. On one level 5:22 does contradict 3:17, but the seeds of doubt about 3:17's reliability were sown as long ago as 3:18.



**5:23** The christological claims of the previous verses are continued here. As a consequence of possessing the divine attributes of life-giver and judge, the Son is now due the honour that was previously due only to the Father when the Father alone was life-giver and judge.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, we are told that the Son has been sent by the Father.<sup>72</sup> The Father has sent the Son in possession of the Father's divine attributes and, therefore, the Son is due the same honour as the Father. Failure to honour the Son in the same manner as the Father is honoured is a failure to honour the Father himself – a direct challenge to the opponents of Jesus in the narrative and a note of polemic against those who oppose Christians in the world.

**5:24** On John's use of the phrase ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν in this and the following verse, see the notes on verse 19. The speech of Jesus in verses 17, 19-23 has been about himself – a christological statement of who he is, what his relationship to the Father is, which divine attributes he has and the honour he is due. In this verse the focus is on those who accept Jesus and his claims. The advantages that will accrue to those who accept Jesus are spelt out here. As the result of hearing the things Jesus has to say and believing that God the Father has sent him (and by implication believing the things that Jesus says about himself), the believer will:

- Pass from death into life;
- Obtain eternal life;
- Be exempted from judgement.

Passing from death into life is open to double interpretation. Acceptance of Jesus may mean passing from a current state of spiritual death into a new condition of spiritual life and fulfilment. Or it may mean passing through physical death into a new heavenly

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<sup>71</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 90. See note 4 on p. 263.

<sup>72</sup> For our discussion of agency christology, see above pp. 52-54.

existence beyond the grave. The spiritual option is supported by what we are about to find out in verse 25 about the dead hearing and having life. However, choosing between these options may not be necessary in this case as it is unlikely that the author was trying to be ironic in this context.<sup>73</sup> It is more likely that the evangelist is simply being mysterious (or even economical) here and we can allow the two meanings to stand side by side, not necessarily dialectically juxtaposed, as both may be appropriate in the case of any particular believer. We have shown earlier that eternal life is part of the heavenly eschatology of the Fourth Gospel<sup>74</sup>. Acceptance of Jesus and belief in his claims about himself will lead to entry into a heavenly afterlife following physical death. There will be no process of judgement for the believer, either following physical death or as part of some eschatological event. Belief in who Jesus is (the Son sent from God) and in what he says about himself (the christological claims of verses 17-23) obtains an exemption from judgement for the believer.<sup>75</sup> We believe this new eschatological proposition has a legitimating function in the evangelist's worldview and is a response both to concerns about the delay in the parousia and to external criticism of Christian claims.<sup>76</sup> The advantages of this new doctrine for Christian believers are clearly in line with the Johannine elitist and sectarian ethos which necessitates a clear demarcation between the fortunate Christians and the unfortunate world.<sup>77</sup>

**5:25** The key to understanding this verse is in interpreting it in the light of the previous verse. The 'dead' of this verse does not refer to individuals who have

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<sup>73</sup> The statement that believers will pass from death to life in 5:24 clearly has two layers of meaning and the layers could be in opposition if we feel we must choose between them. However, it is not necessary to choose between them – they can stand together. See note 36 on p. 284-285.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 1 above, particularly pp. 63-69, for our assessment of the themes of eternal life and heavenly eschatology in the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>75</sup> For our description and discussion of the Fourth Gospel's new eschatology of eternal life with exemption from judgement for believers, see above pp. 63-69 and 259-263.

<sup>76</sup> As we have attempted to demonstrate above on pp. 259-263.

<sup>77</sup> See pp. 194-200 above.



physically died – rather it refers to those in verse 24 who have moved from death into life.<sup>78</sup> Thus the reference is not to the physically dead but to the spiritually dead who have found new life in Christ. Again the emphasis is on the benefits of accepting Jesus. The spiritually dead will hear Jesus' voice – the voice of the Son of God – and having heard his voice, and by implication accepted what it says, they will have life. *Life* here is a short-hand for the benefits described in the previous verse.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, this is already happening – not only is the hour coming *but it now is* – *καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν* – some spiritually dead people are already finding new spiritual life through their acceptance of Christ.

**5:26, 27** The focus of the narrative turns back from the believer to the christological claims of Christ. The great claims of verses 21 and 22 are repeated here,<sup>80</sup> perhaps for emphasis, and we are told again that the Son shares the Father's life-giving power and has been given the Father's role of judge. In creation and in eschatology, the Son has the powers of the Father because the Father has given these powers to the Son. In this there is nothing new – we have heard it before in verses 21 and 22. It is only at the end of verse 27 that we are given the additional piece of information that these things have happened because the Son is *(the or a) Son of Man*,<sup>81</sup> a christological title which has associations with heavenly judgement.

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<sup>78</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 91 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> See note 75 on p. 294 above.

<sup>80</sup> See pp. 291-292 above.

<sup>81</sup> From its frequent citation in the Synoptic Gospels it may be reasonable to conclude that Jesus used the title *the Son of Man* about himself. The title with the definite article is used of Jesus eight times in the Fourth Gospel as well. Here alone it appears in the anarthrous form and it is tempting to suggest that this is because the evangelist is paraphrasing the title associated with Jesus to suit the eschatological context of these verses in accordance with its anarthrous appearance in an eschatological context in the Septuagint's Daniel 7:13. See Brown 1966(1), p. 220, for a similar assessment of this usage and chapter 1 above, pp. 31-34 for a discussion of John's use of Son of Man as a christological title. For the Greek text of the Septuagint, see Rahlfs 1935 and Brenton 1851.



**5:28, 29**      The *μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο* – *do not be amazed at this* – is a reference to everything Jesus has said so far since his promise that his hearers will be amazed at the greater things yet to be revealed (in verse 20). They were not amazed by the healing miracle at the start of this chapter. The things Jesus has said to them will not amaze them either. What will amaze them is what is going to happen at the parousia-eschaton.<sup>82</sup> In this verse the hour is still coming but it is not accompanied by the *καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν* – *and now is* – of verse 25, therefore these things are not happening in the present. Jesus is no longer referring to the benefits that will accrue to those who accept him and his message in this life. Now he is talking about the parousia-eschaton and the day of final judgement.<sup>83</sup> Those who have accepted him already will have no part in this judgement scenario – they already have eternal life. But the parousia-eschaton will involve two classes of people – those already dead and in their graves who have never had the chance to hear about Jesus or to accept him (or reject him) – and those who have now and will in future reject him. This last group will go down to their graves only to be resurrected at the last day to face judgement at the great assize. Jesus' hearers will fall into this group and the amazement promised earlier (verse 20) will be theirs when they find out that Jesus is their judge.<sup>84</sup> These verses spell out the unified bicameral eschatology found in John 5. The two fates are not the dialectical poles of an eschatological debate, nor are they result of redactional insertions. Rather, they reflect a theology in which one eschatological fate applies to Christian believers (eternal life consisting of spiritual fulfilment in this life, heavenly life after physical death and exemption from judgement) and another eschatological fate which applies to those who have not accepted Christ (a resurrection to judgement at the last day where Christ is the

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<sup>82</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> So Lozada 2000, pp. 93-94 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 93-94.

<sup>84</sup> See note 67 on p. 292.

judge). The second eschatological fate applies both to those who have not had the chance to accept or reject Christ and those who have actively rejected him. Consequently, at the parousia eschaton there will be those who are judged favourably because their deeds were good and those who will be judged unfavourably (condemned) because their deeds were evil. The matter of punishment for the condemned is not entered into here. The amazement which will be felt by Jesus' antagonists will be twofold: they will be amazed because their judge at the parousia-eschaton will be Christ; and they will be amazed because they will be judged not on their membership of the people of Israel, but on their conduct when they were alive. It is probable that Jesus' adversaries here believed that by being Jews and by being righteous they would be judged favourably because they were amongst the 'elect.' In the Fourth Gospel the evangelist has Jesus make clear that there is now a new 'elect', a new people of God – those who have accepted him and become Christians.<sup>85</sup> The idea of a new 'elect,' subject to a new eschatology, was probably behind tensions and perhaps persecutions in the communities of the Johannine churches. Just as Jesus' hearers in the Gospel narrative are horrified at his blasphemy and would indeed be amazed (perhaps horrified) at the eschatological outcome that Jesus was forecasting for them, it may be that the Synagogues considered the christological claims of the Johannine Christians to be blasphemous and their eschatological claims to be outrageous.

**5:30** The use of ἐμαυτοῦ – *myself* – is a characteristic Johannine usage. It occurs sixteen times in John as ἐμαυτοῦ or ἐμαυτόν, but only three times in the synoptic Gospels.<sup>86</sup> Here Jesus returns to speaking in the first person. There is a restatement of

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<sup>85</sup> See pp. 194-200 above.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew 8:9; Luke 7:7, 8.



the earlier theme (verse 19) that he can do nothing on his own.<sup>87</sup> In the context of judgement this means that he has heard the judgements of the Father. The judgements of Jesus are in accordance with the Father's wishes, not necessarily his own wishes, and therefore his judgements are just, reflecting the natural justice of God the Father. The idea of agency is revisited here (verses 23 and 24) as Jesus refers to the Father as *the one who sent me*.<sup>88</sup>

**5:31** The οὐκ ... ἀληθῆς – *not true* – is more appropriately translated as *not valid* in this context.<sup>89</sup> One person's testimony about themselves may be true or untrue, but even if true its validity is likely to be in question.<sup>90</sup> This verse refers to Jesus' testimony about himself in verses 17-30. All through this passage Jesus has made claims about himself without recourse to evidence or witnesses that will corroborate his statement. Here Jesus addresses that deficiency and in the verses that follow he will produce witnesses to testify on his behalf. The theme of 'witness' and 'testimony' is one which runs through the whole of the Fourth Gospel and, as we have seen, the testimony of two particular witnesses – John the Baptist in the prologue and the beloved disciple in the epilogue – have been considered as forming an *inclusio* around the Gospel.<sup>91</sup> Once again, the appearance of a criticism of Jesus' position in the narrative (this time a self-criticism by Jesus himself) might indicate that this was a criticism of Jesus used in the

<sup>87</sup> As Asiedu-Pepurah points out, these two closely related statements in verses 19 and 30 form an *inclusio* around verses 19c-29. See Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> See pp. 52-54 above.

<sup>89</sup> So Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, p. 98.

<sup>90</sup> The validity of the testimony of a single witness was always suspect in the biblical tradition. Numbers 35:30 and Deuteronomy 17:6 both specify that in trials for grave offences the testimony of one person was not enough to secure the death penalty, while Deuteronomy 19:15 broadens the issue out to specify the requirement for the testimony of two or more witnesses to secure a conviction on any charge. The context of Jesus' statement that his own testimony on his own behalf is invalid is related rather than identical. That Jesus should question the validity of his own testimony here suggests that testifying on one's own behalf was considered invalid under any circumstances, regardless of how many other witnesses were providing supporting testimony.

<sup>91</sup> As proposed by Lincoln 2000, p. 22. See also Harvey 1976, pp. 20-45 and for an overview of these themes in John and in the rest of the New Testament see Coenen 1986.



Synagogues with which the Johannine churches were in dialogue. The testimony on behalf of Jesus by other witnesses in the verses which follow could then be considered to be legitimating arguments put forward by the Johannine churches in support of their christological claims about Jesus. Certainly the nature of verses 31-40 is generally apologetic with, as we shall see, a movement towards polemic as the passage progresses.

**5:32** Because the ἀληθής – *true* – testimony of another witness in this verse is *valid* by implication, the translation *true* is appropriate here. Having introduced the note of doubt in the last verse, this verse seeks to relieve the tension by playing a trump card. There is another witness. Initially, the following verse seems to be going to indicate that this other witness is John the Baptist, but verse 34 rules this out. The real witness is God the Father as revealed in verse 36-40.<sup>92</sup>

**5:33** This verse initially tends to indicate that the other witness referred to in verse 32 is John the Baptist, whose validity is established here. The next verse proves, perhaps surprisingly, that this is not the case. Verses 32 and 33 seem in one sense to be ‘toying’ with the reader, initially indicating that the Baptist’s testimony will be used to help vindicate what Jesus has been saying.<sup>93</sup>

**5:34** The Baptist’s human testimony is not required. Jesus has greater witnesses than this to testify on his behalf. Thus the Baptist is revealed, despite the truth of his valid testimony, not to be the other witness of verse 32. This comes as something of a surprise to the reader who has been led to believe by the previous verse that the other

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<sup>92</sup> So Lozada 2000, pp. 95-96. See also Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 98-100.

<sup>93</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 96-97 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 100-101.

witness would be John. Is this another indication of sources of tension in the Johannine community? Could it be that the Baptist's word is not to be utterly relied upon because he still has followers, contemporary with the Johannine Christians, who are critical of the christological claims being made by the Gospel community?<sup>94</sup> Lozada points out that although John's credentials are established here, his testimony remains of a lesser order (from below) to that on which Jesus will call (from above).<sup>95</sup>

**5:35** This verse has the third use of John's characteristic *ἐκεῖνος* – *that one* – in this chapter. The evangelist uses the metaphor of a lamp, which burns brightly before going out, to show the transience of human popularity and, of course, the fickleness of the Baptist's former admirers.<sup>96</sup> While his testimony may not be required, it remains true as it is presented in the Gospel and therefore, it remains a source of salvation for those who would accept it. The testimony of the Baptist in support of Jesus has been presented as 'true' already in the Gospel (1:6-8, 15, 19-27, 29-34, 36; 3:27-30). However, the reluctance to use this testimony in the forum of public debate suggests that there may be some tension or inconsistency between the Gospel's account of the Baptist's testimony about Jesus and what was known or believed to have been his actual statements about Jesus.<sup>97</sup> There is a hint of polemic appearing in this verse as Jesus voices a criticism of the "Jews" for the transience of their favour of the Baptist.

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<sup>94</sup> The Fourth Gospel's alternating enthusiasm for and caution towards John the Baptist is well known. For a discussion of the possibility that the Johannine community may have consisted of at least some converts from a Baptist movement, see above pp. 184-185. However, that such a Baptist movement still presented some kind of challenge to the Church is discussed on pp. 190-191. See also Brown 1979, pp. 69-71 and Barrett 1993, p. 347.

<sup>95</sup> Lozada 2000, p. 97.

<sup>96</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 102-103.

<sup>97</sup> See Dodd 1963, pp. 251-278, Smith 1995, pp. 103-105 and Pryor 1997, pp. 15-26.



**5:36** Barrett points out another occurrence of John's distinctive use of ἵνα, in this case with τελειώσω – *that I might complete*.<sup>98</sup> Finally, Jesus calls a witness on whose testimony he will rely. This witness is the 'works' or 'deeds' that the Father has given him to do and to complete. These works – presumably including the healing miracle at the beginning of John 5 – testify that not only has Jesus been sent as God's representative, but also that he has been appropriately empowered to act as God's representative.<sup>99</sup> After the hint of polemic in the previous verse, the apologetic tone is resumed here with the theme of witness in support of Jesus' claims.

**5:37, 38, 39** John's characteristic ἐκεῖνος – *that one* – occurs for a fourth and a fifth time in these verses. Verses 37 and 38 form a preamble to the introduction of the next witness – God's word in the scriptures (in verse 39). The claim is that God (having sent Jesus – more 'agency' christology) has testified about Jesus. Furthermore, whatever form this testimony of God's takes, it is a testimony that Jesus' opponents do not have access to. For they have never heard his voice or seen his face. The perfect tenses of ἀκηκόατε and ἐώρακάτε indicate the ongoing consequences of this lack of access – continued ignorance. Finally a clue is given: τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ – *his word*. God's testimony about Jesus is to be found in God's word. Yet, to heap insult upon insult, Jesus then states that his opponents do not have God's word dwelling within them. They may be the possessors of God's word but they have not understood it, therefore it does not *remain* μένοντα in them in any meaningful way.<sup>100</sup> Despite all their diligent

<sup>98</sup> See the notes on verse 7 on pp. 281-282 above.

<sup>99</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 98.

<sup>100</sup> Many commentators point to the statement in the Mishnaic tract *Abot* 2.7.D, "[If] he has gotten himself the words of Torah, he has gotten himself life eternal." (See Neusner 1988, pp. 672-689 for a translation of *Abot*.) While in some sense anticipating the rewards of salvation by hinting that 'life eternal' can be grasped in the present, this rabbinic statement shows a clear belief that the key to salvation



searching “the Jews” have missed the point. Eternal life is not to be found in the scriptures themselves, but in the person to whom they point – Jesus.<sup>101</sup>

Although verse 37 begins on the same apologetic note as the previous verse (in terms of witness testimony in support of Jesus), the form of verses 37b-39 is stridently polemic in its criticism of Jesus’ opponents and, therefore, it is tempting to look for parallels between the events and statements in the Gospel narrative and dialogue between the Johannine Church and the Synagogue. Did the Johannine Christians accuse their critics in the synagogues of being unworthy or ignorant guardians of God’s word in the sacred Hebrew scriptures? As the outcome of a process of legitimation, this would qualify as an example of Lévi-Stauss’ “paradox of cultural relativism,” where ultimately the arguments used by the persecuted Christians begin to look remarkably like those originally used against them by their persecuting opponents.<sup>102</sup>

**5:40** The evangelist’s characteristic style is shown by the use of *καὶ* with the meaning of *yet*<sup>103</sup> and with another example of *ἵνα* with the subjunctive. This verse continues the polemic<sup>104</sup> developed in the last three verses by pointing out the perversity of those who seek life in the scriptures, yet fail to follow the path which the Johannine Christians believe is shown there – the path to life through accepting that Jesus is who he says he is.

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lay in the Hebrew scriptures. See note 74 on p. 215 for a discussion of the use of the theme of *μένω* in the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>101</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> See note 36 on p. 196 above.

<sup>103</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 109.

<sup>104</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 100.

**5:41,42** The line of argument changes somewhat in these verses. From pointing out where his opponents have gone wrong, Jesus now moves to an explanation of why they have made these mistakes. The opening denial of his need for human praise probably reflects that what Jesus has been saying and is about to say is going to be insulting to his hearers. Jesus' hearers neither know him nor understand him, but he knows them. He has come to know them through experience and he has reached an understanding of them. For all their outward piety and their diligent searching of the scriptures, they are inwardly irreligious people because they do not have the love of God within them. This innate lack of a religious sensitivity is, according to the Gospel's Jesus, why they have failed to spot the pointers in the scriptural texts that should have led them to him. Again this heated polemical exchange between Jesus and "the Jews," his opponents, may be a reflection of acrimonious exchanges between Church and Synagogue which had become familiar by the time the Fourth Gospel was written.

**5:43** Here there is the sixth use in this chapter of the evangelist's distinctive ἐκεῖνος – *that one*. In this verse there is a restatement of the theme of agency christology and its failure to impress "the Jews" who have not accepted Jesus' claim that he comes in the name of the Father.<sup>105</sup> The somewhat puzzling sentence about another coming in his own name need not be taken as an allusion to an actual person or event.<sup>106</sup> Rather, the contrast is being drawn here between Jesus, who comes in God's name and is from the heavenly realm, and *another* coming in his own name and, therefore, from the world.<sup>107</sup> This phrase simply reflects the twofold cosmology of the Johannine Christians which is

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<sup>105</sup> See pp. 52-53 above.

<sup>106</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 111.

<sup>107</sup> So Lozada 2000, p. 101 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 111-112.



given explicit expression at John 3:31-36. Those who accept Jesus are, by implication, aligning themselves with the heavenly side of the Johannine cosmos. “The Jews,” having rejected Jesus, are part of the earthly world and anyone whom they accept or acknowledge is part of the earthly world too.<sup>108</sup> The polemical tone of the previous two verses is maintained in this verse.

**5:44** Once again the apparent cosmological divide between the worlds of the Johannine Christians and “the Jews” is highlighted here. “The Jews” are of this earthly world and their values are those to be expected of the inhabitants of this world – a self-congratulatory seeking after favourable public opinion – δόξα.<sup>109</sup> Because this worldly glory is their true desire, they have no real interest in the true glory which (in the Johannine ‘model of’ reality) comes from knowing God – the *only* God. Not only are Jesus’ opponents not part of the other-worldly realm of God, they have no interest in the values of God’s realm – their ethos or ‘model for’ reality is not attuned to those values.<sup>110</sup> On this basis, and continuing the polemical tone of the passage, the Gospel has Jesus question the validity of their faith, reflecting the questions Christians were asking the Synagogue “Jews” in the controversies surrounding the Gospel community.

**5:45** Here, at the end of John 5, the theme of traditional or futurist eschatology is revisited.<sup>111</sup> Having claimed earlier the role of the divine judge (verses 22-30),<sup>112</sup> Jesus here denies that he will also be the counsel for the prosecution.<sup>113</sup> Jesus will not prosecute “the Jews” before God the Father at the parousia-eschaton. Rather they will

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<sup>108</sup> For a discussion of the Fourth Gospel’s worldview, see pp. 233-247 above.

<sup>109</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 101-102 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> See pp. 23-24 above.

<sup>111</sup> So Asiedu-Peprah 2001, p. 113.

<sup>112</sup> See note 67 on p. 292.

<sup>113</sup> So Bernard 1928(1), p. 257 and Lozada 2000, p. 102.



be prosecuted by Moses before Jesus as judge.<sup>114</sup> The irony of this eschatological situation is clear.<sup>115</sup> “The Jews” would have expected Moses to be their own advocate.<sup>116</sup> This polemical assertion turns the eschatological expectations of Jesus’ opponents upside-down. Their expectation would be to have Moses as their advocate and God as their judge. Now they are being told that Moses is their prosecutor and Jesus is their judge. These statements in the mouth of Jesus clearly illustrate the non-Christian compartment of the bicameral eschatology of the Johannine Christians. The Christians themselves have been exempted from judgement (5:24), but there will be a judgement court on the last day where Jesus is to be the eschatological judge of all those who have not accepted Christ. That “the Jews” are to have a special prosecutor at this hearing, and that the special prosecutor is to be Moses, may represent an increasing level of acrimony in the exchanges between Church and Synagogue in the Johannine communities.

**5:46-47** These two verses contain the seventh and eighth use of the emphatic *ἐκεῖνος* – *that one* – a consistent marker of the Johannine style.<sup>117</sup> The eschatological interlude of the last verse served to introduce Moses into the narrative and now the reason for introducing him is revealed. Moses is the next witness Jesus is calling to testify on his behalf. The argument is that Moses wrote about Jesus, yet “the Jews” do not believe those things which Moses has written, and since they do not believe the

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<sup>114</sup> Moses is first introduced in the Gospel’s prologue at 1:17 in a rather polemical notice of the Johannine belief in the inferiority of the Mosaic dispensation to the Christian offer of ‘grace and truth’ as a means of obtaining salvation. Prior to 5:45, Moses is introduced again at 1:45 as the author of the scriptures which point to Christ. He reappears again at 3:14 in a reference perhaps intended to show that the earthly actions of Moses are in some way to be considered as a precursor to the cosmic or eschatological events surrounding the career of Jesus. For a definitive assessment of the role of Moses in the Fourth Gospel, see Meeks 1967, *passim*.

<sup>115</sup> So Barrett 1978, p. 258.

<sup>116</sup> For examples of Moses’ intercessory role in Jewish theology, see *Jubilees* 1:20-21 (Wintermute 1985) and *Testament of Moses* 11:17 (Priest 1983). See also Brown 1966(1), p. 229, Harvey 1976, pp. 109-110 and Schnackenburg 1980, pp. 128-129.

<sup>117</sup> So Bernard 1928(1), p. 9.

testimony that Moses gives about Jesus, it is no surprise that they do not believe the things Jesus says.<sup>118</sup> If they were the true followers of Moses that they claim to be, they would believe the things Jesus is saying. There is a clear link here with what has already been said in 5:39 – despite their constant searching through scripture for the key to eternal life, the “Jews” have missed the point.<sup>119</sup> These exchanges in the narrative between Jesus and the Jews perhaps indicate that the Johannine Christians used parts of the Pentateuch as evidence to vindicate their christological claims.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, they may have accused the Synagogues of being unworthy inheritors of the Moses tradition. This verse seems to indicate that the Christian position has become one of now claiming the absolute right to the correct interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, of standing in a correct relationship to the traditions of those scriptures and prophets of which they tell, and denying that anyone else – and particularly “the Jews” – is qualified or competent to do likewise. It is quite possible that such a polemical stance could have been reached by a process of legitimation as worldview maintenance.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> So Lozada 2000, pp. 102-103 and Asiedu-Pepurah 2001, pp. 113-115.

<sup>119</sup> See our comments on 5:39 on pp. 301-302 above.

<sup>120</sup> See p. 222 above for evidence from the *Dialogue with Trypho* that Justin Martyr used the Jewish Scriptures extensively in his apologetic arguments.

<sup>121</sup> See pp. 19-23 above.



## C. Discussion

As we stated in the preamble to this chapter, we have established in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this study that all the requirements of our hypothesis can be found in John 5. This chapter has attempted, by a verse by verse examination, to establish whether or not anything in John 5 militates against our hypothesis or renders John 5 unsuitable for the application of our hypothesis. We shall consider below the results of exegesis in terms of the various approaches we have used as listed on pages 273-274 above.

### Grammatical evidence and Literary Criticism

Our exegesis has found that throughout the text of John 5 there are a number of indicators which can be said to suggest enough of a unity of style to allow us to infer that John 5 is a unified text. This is not to say that putative source documents may not lie behind the text, but it does suggest that the evangelist has redacted his material sufficiently to give the impression of a unified text written in a consistent style by a single author.<sup>122</sup>

The formal critical characteristics of John 5 can be said to be apparent on two levels. Firstly, on a macro-level, there is the division of the chapter into sign and discourse – in this case a healing miracle results in a controversy which leads into Jesus' lengthy monologue.<sup>123</sup> However, examination of these component parts on a micro-level suggests that the sign, the controversy and the discourse have not been crudely patched

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<sup>122</sup> This conclusion is quite consistent with our findings in chapter 4 of this study. It is, however, based on the fact that we have found evidence in verses 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 19, 20, 24, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 43, 45, 46, and 47 of stylistic markers and literary techniques which other commentators have taken to be indicators of the work of the Johannine evangelist.

<sup>123</sup> See Lozada 2000, pp. 68-73 and Asiedu-Peprah 2001, pp. 55-57.



together from whatever source the evangelist found them in. Rather, we have found that the sign and the controversy are woven together to some degree, as are the controversy and the discourse.<sup>124</sup> On this micro-level we have found that the themes of the discourse are sometimes apologetic justifications of the Christian stance, while sometimes they are polemical criticisms of the Jewish position. The *Sitz im Leben* of such apologetic and polemical material seems much more likely to be amongst Johannine Christians than in the life of the historical Jesus.<sup>125</sup> Finally, the apologetic themes of the discourse are the christologies of life-giver and judge, the dependence of the Son upon the Father, witnesses for Jesus and the eschatology of eternal life for Jesus' followers and judgement for his opponents.<sup>126</sup> One of the polemical themes is that the "Jews" will face judgement by Jesus. All of these themes are in some way linked to the sign or the controversy: the healing gives life; those who have judged Jesus will themselves be judged and their witnesses will testify against them; Jesus does not claim equality with God – he is accused of it. Regardless, therefore, of the *Sitz im Leben* of the discourse material and regardless of the sources of the sign and controversy material, we believe that John 5 has been purposefully written by an author who deliberately brought together these themes into one continuous episode. Also, the text of John 5 presents evidence in various places of the craft of an author who wishes to go beyond the simple reporting of fact or opinion and who wishes to engage with his readers in a 'literary' way.<sup>127</sup> This is done by introducing irony into the text in a number of places and by attempts to induce feelings of doubt, fear and suspense in the reader. The text seems to assume that the reader shares the distinctively Johannine

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<sup>124</sup> See pp. 108-109 and pp. 159-161 above where we discuss form critical issues.

<sup>125</sup> This accords with our findings in chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>126</sup> The christological and eschatological themes of John 5 are discussed in chapter 1 above, while we attempt to relate these themes to a *Sitz im Leben* in the Johannine community in chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>127</sup> See note 122 above.

ethos of the author. Once again we believe that these factors help to establish that John 5 is a unified text from the hand of a single author.

### **Theology**

From a theological standpoint the main interests of John 5 are christology and eschatology. Christologically, our hypothesis requires that the text of John 5 reveals a Johannine Christ who is empowered to give life and exempt his followers from eschatological judgement and is also the agent of divine judgement at the parousia-eschaton where the rest of humanity will face judgement. Furthermore, the hypothesis proposes that text reveals a belief in a dual eschatology – an eschatology with two compartments, one for Christians and one for the un-Christian portion of humanity – a unified bicameral eschatology in which the privileged followers of Christ are in receipt of eternal life and are exempted from any divine judgement process, but in which those who have rejected Christ are to be subjected to divine judgement at the parousia-eschaton. Our exegesis specifically reveals both the necessary christology and eschatology<sup>128</sup> to allow us to conclude that our hypothesis can be applied to John 5 and that the chapter's puzzling theology of judgement is thereby resolved. Conversely, we have failed to detect any christological or eschatological material in John 5 which might preclude to the application of the hypothesis.

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<sup>128</sup> See the exegetical notes for verses 6, 8, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 36, 37, 39, 43 and 45.



## **Worldview and ethos**

In the course of this study we have uncovered what we believe to be a distinctively Johannine worldview and ethos.<sup>129</sup> Our exegesis has found many allusions to these<sup>130</sup> which confirm us in our view that we are correct in proposing a Johannine worldview in which the parousia-eschaton has receded into the distant future and in which the gift of eternal life with God in heaven as a salvific benefit is obtainable directly to (and only to) those who profess their allegiance to Jesus Christ. For those who fail to profess this allegiance, the provision or denial of salvation must await the parousia-eschaton. Similarly, the text of John 5 confirms our belief in a distinctively Johannine ethos which confirms and complements the worldview behind the Gospel. The Johannine ethos is an elitist sectarian one which believes itself to be uniquely privileged in terms of its relationship to God and in its guardianship of the religious heritage of the Scriptures and prophets of Judaism. The Johannine ethos tends to be judgemental towards the rest of humanity and particularly towards Synagogue Jews. At the same time, we have been unable to detect any statements in John 5 which might be indicative of an alternative worldview and ethos or that might suggest a more tolerant attitude towards those not sharing the evangelist's views.

## **The Johannine Community**

Establishing whether the Johannine ethos can be shown to have belonged to a single Church, or to a group of Churches, or whether it may have been a common or even prevalent attitude amongst Christian communities around the Mediterranean at the time the Gospel was written is not crucial to this study.<sup>131</sup> However, what is germane is that

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<sup>129</sup> See chapter 6 above.

<sup>130</sup> For indications of a distinctively Johannine worldview and ethos, see the exegetical notes on verses 1, 3, 6, 12, 16, 17, 23, 24, 28, 29, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 47.

<sup>131</sup> See pp. 205-209 above, where we discuss Gospel communities and Gospel audiences.



the Church or Churches, community or communities of which the Fourth Gospel is representative were involved in dialogue with the Synagogue.<sup>132</sup> We are satisfied that at least some of this dialogue had become acrimonious and our exegesis of the text of John 5 has shown that some of the arguments used by Christians in their arguments with the Synagogue have found their way into the speeches of the Fourth Gospel's Jesus. John 5 puts into the mouth of the Johannine Christ a number of the arguments used by Christian apologists specifically against Synagogue Jews who denied the christological claims of the Church at that time. Thus we find in John 5 specific denials that Jesus makes himself equal to God. We also find arguments attempting to justify christological claims by producing testimony on Christ's behalf. Similarly, there are arguments denigrating the Synagogue Jews by pointing out their unworthiness for the traditions which they have inherited. We believe that these arguments are unlikely to have been appropriate to the time of Jesus' ministry and are, in fact, indicative of the acrimonious exchanges between Church and Synagogue at the time the Gospel was written.<sup>133</sup> However, our exegesis has been unable to detect any evidence in John 5 which is suggestive of a community which includes either non-Christians or Jews, nor of attitudes which could be interpreted as being sympathetic towards these groups.

### **Legitimation**

Our hypothesis proposes that legitimation – in the sense of a process of worldview maintenance – has played a significant role in John 5 in the evolution of not only the christology and eschatology, but also in the formulation of the apologetic arguments used by the evangelist in the speech of Jesus. We have examined above in chapter 6 the

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<sup>132</sup> This argument is developed at some length in chapters 3, 5 and 6 above.

<sup>133</sup> See the exegetical notes on verses 1, 3, 10, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 47 for descriptions of how the text of John 5 indicates the particular sectarian awareness of the Johannine community.

probable function of legitimation in the development of the theology of John 5. In this exegesis we have suggested in a number of places how legitimation may have functioned to produce the arguments that are put forward<sup>134</sup> – particularly in relation to the Christian view of the Synagogue Jews as unworthy inheritors of the traditions of Judaism. We believe the detectable presence of legitimating processes helps to confirm that our hypothesis can be appropriately applied to John 5.

This chapter has attempted to show that John 5 in its entirety is compatible with our hypothesis. Insofar as John 5 contains no material which precludes the application of the hypothesis and, as we have already shown in chapters 4, 5 and 6 above, that all the elements of the hypothesis are detectable in John 5, we believe our hypothesis presents a credible solution to the problem of the theology of judgement as it is presented in John 5.

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<sup>134</sup> In chapter 6 we examined the probable role of legitimation in the formation of the specific theological propositions in John 5:21-30 – see pp. 247-269 above. However, our exegesis suggests that legitimation may have played a similar role in the formulation of the arguments of John 5:31-47.

## Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to substantiate a hypothesis. In our introductory chapter we outlined some puzzling features of the Fourth Gospel's theology of judgement and we suggested that both the puzzle and its resolution should be addressed by a close study of John 5. Given that the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus both as judging and as not judging, and that it seems to propose eschatological scenarios where judgement takes place and where judgement does not take place, we went on to propose a hypothesis which we hope will resolve this apparently confusing mixture of eschatological theologies. In essence our hypothesis proposed that John 5 presents a unified but compartmentalized (bicameral) eschatology in which Christian believers have obtained the salvific benefit of eternal life with God and are exempted from judgement at the parousia-eschaton. In the other compartment of the unified bicameral eschatology, John 5 proposes that those who reject Christ and those who have not had the chance to hear and accept his message will face judgement at the parousia-eschaton. Our study has been an attempt to show that not only can the unified bicameral eschatology be found in John 5, but also that the Fourth Gospel's christology has specifically developed to allow this eschatology to function in terms of Christ's role in the fate of both believers and non-believers. Furthermore, we hope that our study has been able to show that our hypothesis is supported by our investigations into the unity of the text of John 5, the controversies in which the evangelist's community was involved, the worldview and ethos of that community, and the possible reasons why and mechanisms by which its christology and eschatology developed in their own peculiarly distinctive directions.



Chapter 1 of our study has shown that the distinctive elements of Johannine judgemental eschatology which our hypothesis addresses are to be found in John 5 and elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel along with a christology which allows the unified bicameral eschatology to apply to both believers and non-believers. The judgement eschatology is therefore, firmly based on a christology in which the Johannine Jesus is the bringer of life to those who accept him and the deliverer of judgement to those who do not. In chapters 2 and 3 we went on to examine how previous Johannine scholarship had addressed the issue of judgement in John 5 and we found that while almost all scholars had noticed the problem, the solutions which had been proposed suffered from a variety of weaknesses which allowed us to conclude that they did not pose a substantive challenge to our hypothesis.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 of our study we addressed those issues which we hoped would help to substantiate the applicability of our hypothesis. We began, in chapter 4, with an examination of arguments for and against the unity of the text of John 5. The importance of this issue lay in our hypothesis requiring John 5 to be a unified text without redactional insertions – particularly in relation to verses 28 and 29 which some scholars believe to have been added to the text by a secondary editor. Our investigation concluded that the text of John 5 is probably a unity and that any redactional activity is likely to be the work of the evangelist himself in his shaping of the chapter into his own fusion of sign, controversy and discourse. Thus we were able to conclude that in terms of textual unity our hypothesis was applicable to John 5.

In chapter 5 we investigated the possibility that the text of the Fourth Gospel allows us to infer the existence of a distinctively Johannine community in which the Gospel was

produced. Without needing to be specific in terms of the location or spread of such a community, we were able to conclude that it is possible to propose a Johannine community with a distinctively sectarian ethos which was involved in an acrimonious dialogue with Synagogue Jews. Furthermore, we were able to infer from the text of John 5 (with supporting evidence from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*) some specific arguments used by the Johannine Christians in this dialogue and we found that these arguments fitted well not only with a sectarian consciousness, but also with a belief in a unified bicameral eschatology of the kind our hypothesis proposes. Thus we were able to conclude that our examination of aspects of the Johannine community helped to support our hypothesis.

In chapter 6 we continued our examination of the community consciousness behind the Fourth Gospel in an attempt to describe a specifically Johannine ethos and worldview. In particular we wished to establish the cosmology within the worldview with respect to Johannine beliefs about the relationship between this world and the heavenly realm and the eschatological fate (or fates) of humanity in the light of our belief that the theology of John is heavily influenced by an abandonment of a belief in the imminence of the parousia. We were able to conclude that the Johannine cosmology, or 'model of reality, was one in which the earthly world and the heavenly world make up two parts of a dualistic universe and that the Johannine Jesus is very much a "Man from Heaven" who has been sent into the earthly world as a divine revelation from the heavenly realm. Furthermore, we found that it is likely that the Johannine Christians had abandoned any belief in what they now saw as the distant event of the parousia-eschaton having a role in their own salvation. This event in the indeterminate future was, to them, of relevance only to the salvific fates of that portion of humanity which had not accepted the



Johannine Christ. Their own salvation, however, lay in their acceptance as Christians of the person and word of Christ as the authorised representative of God, through whom they had already obtained eternal life and with whom they would spend eternity in the heavenly realm. Thus we were able to conclude that the Johannine cosmology which we were able to describe was supportive of the christology and eschatology required by our hypothesis.

However, with the Johannine worldview and its cosmology goes the Johannine ethos – the ‘model for’ reality – by which the evangelist’s community lived its life and faced the world about it in a manner which confirms the reality of their worldview to them. We found that the Johannine ethos was one in which they viewed themselves as being uniquely privileged in comparison to the rest of humanity. They believed that they and they alone had obtained the means (through Christ) of entering the heavenly realm of God without having to endure the judgement of the parousia-eschaton and they believed that they had already commenced the eternal life such a privilege entailed. Furthermore, we found that this sense of privilege had engendered a judgementalism, an elitism, through which they could afford to be scathing towards those who did not share their views. Yet, we found no evidence to suggest their community of faith was closed to converts wishing to come in and, indeed, we noted that such an ethos seems to mark a profound shift towards a remarkably easy way of obtaining salvation – accept Christ and become a Johannine Christian. Thus we were able to conclude that our description of the Johannine ethos is also supportive of our hypothesis in that it divides the human race into two parts just as the hypothesis allows for two eschatological fates for those two parts.



In the final part of chapter 6 we examined the possibilities for the development of christology, eschatology and apologetic arguments in John 5 by means of a process of legitimation in the face of the two challenges of criticism from the Synagogue and the realization that the parousia-eschaton was not imminent. We were able to conclude that these two challenges to a probable earlier Christian worldview had, by a process of legitimation as worldview maintenance, led to the formulation of the Johannine worldview with its distinctively developed christological formulations and its unified bicameral eschatology supported by new apologetic arguments. Thus we found not only that our hypothesis helped to explain the theology of judgement in John 5, we were also able to explain how such a theology may have developed. This we believe amounts to a convincing and interlocking case which supports our hypothesis.

In our exegesis of John 5 we have attempted to establish whether or not the hypothesis we have proposed for the resolution of the puzzle of the Johannine judgement theology can be applied to chapter as a whole. In other words, is our hypothesis appropriate to the whole of John 5? Or, does the text of John 5 present any obstacles which stand in the way of the application of our hypothesis? Answering these questions has necessitated a thorough examination of the text at the various levels of chapter, verse, sentence, word and grammar and we have found that John 5 presents no obstacles which in our opinion would prevent us from applying our hypothesis to John 5 or would cast serious doubt on the appropriateness of our hypothesis for application to John 5. At the same time we found that our exegesis of John 5 has produced a considerable amount of evidence which supports our hypothesis.

While we believe that our proposal of a unified bicameral eschatology resolves the puzzle of the theology of judgement in John 5 and seems also to be applicable to the judgement theology of the Fourth Gospel as a whole, there remain areas of John's eschatology that are not resolved by our hypothesis. In particular we discussed in chapter 1 the eschatological references in John 6 which, although making no mention of judgement, do refer to the raising up of the believer on the last day (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54) as well as confirming a belief in the present attainment of eternal life (John 6: 47, 50, 51, 58).<sup>1</sup> We also discussed the apparent promise of Jesus to his disciples that he would come again in John 14:3, 18-20, 28. Clearly the eschatological puzzle posed by these passages is not resolved by our hypothesis and, although the eschatology of John 6 and 14 lies outwith the Gospel's theology of judgement, we have suggested in which directions we believe the resolution to these questions will be found.

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<sup>1</sup> See above pp. 60-61, and particularly notes 64 and 65 on p. 61.

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