NICODEMUS AND JESUS: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON MISUNDERSTANDING AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL.[1]

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NICODEMUS appears only three times in the Fourth Gospel, and nowhere else in the New Testament. The first time is in chapter iii, where we are told how he visits Jesus at night, addresses him with what amounts to a confession of faith and is corrected by Jesus in the ensuing dialogue which changes into a monologue (iii. 1-21; cf. verses 31-36). There is no further mention of Nicodemus till he reappears on the scene at the end of chapter vii where we find him in discussion with his fellow-Pharisees, who react in a rather personal and disagreeable manner when he asks for a fair hearing for Jesus according to the Law (vii. 50-52). His last appearance is in xix. 38-42 where he joins Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus and brings a considerable quantity of myrrh and aloes. The second and third occurrences are connected with the first one by means of redactional remarks in vii. 50, "the man who had once visited Jesus",[2] and xix. 39, "the man who had first visited Jesus by night". This shows that at least those responsible for the final edition of the Fourth Gospel wanted to indicate a connection between these three episodes.

The very scantiness of our information concerning Nicodemus might tempt us to supply unknown facts from fancy and to give a picture of a secret disciple, sympathetic, but weak or (alternatively) tenacious and cunning—or of a sympathizing outsider who did not, after all, acquire the true faith and contented himself with paying the last honour to a man whom he revered and whom he considered to have been condemned to death unjustly. No doubt preachers all through the ages have

[1] The Manson Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Manchester on Monday, the 26th of October 1970.

[2] There are many textual variants at this point. There is no need to suppose that ℵ* which omits this phrase altogether represents the original text; in xix. 39 all manuscripts have a similar cross-reference (with some variation).

indulged in such fancies which have no real basis in the Gospel itself, because this was not written to satisfy our curiosity but to prompt and to confirm faith (see xx. 30).

Nicodemus is not pictured as an individual person, but as a representative of a larger group. He belongs to the Pharisees, he is a ruler of the Jews (iii. 1)[1] and as such he pleads Jesus' cause with his colleagues when they turn against him : " Is there a single one of our rulers who has believed in him, or of the Pharisees ? " (vii. 48). Is Nicodemus the one exception among the rulers and the Pharisees ? We are not told so ; his argumentation remains within the limits of Pharisaic discussion of legal matters. But it is clear that Jesus' preaching has caused a split among the Jewish leaders, just as it had caused a σχίσμα among the ordinary people a little earlier (vii. 44).[2] In xix. 39 Nicodemus's rank and affiliation are not mentioned, but it may not be far-fetched to suppose that the Fourth Gospel implies that he was a μαθητὴς [τοῦ] Ἰησοῦ κεκρυμμένος διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων just like Joseph of Arimathea whose companion he has become.

Now there are more instances in the Fourth Gospel of secret discipleship and of schisms among the Jewish leaders. In xii. 42 we hear that even among the ἄρχοντες many believed in Jesus (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν —the same expression is used in vii. 48), but would not confess this openly because of the Pharisees, for fear of being banned from the synagogue. Verse 43 adds : " They valued their reputation with man rather than the honour which comes from God (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ)." This is said in a passage at the end of the first twelve chapters of the Fourth Gospel which intends to give a survey in retrospect of Jesus'

[1] Οἱ ἄρχοντες is a somewhat vague term denoting " the authorities " (see W. Bauer, *s.v.*, 2a). In John perhaps the members of the Sanhedrin are meant. Note that in vii. 48 and xii. 42 the ἄρχοντες are distinguished from the Pharisees, that in xii. 42 secret believers are reported to have been among them, who feared the Pharisees, and that in vii. 26 the crowd supposes that οἱ ἄρχοντες have recognized that Jesus is the Messiah. J. L. Martyn's hypothesis that οἱ ἄρχοντες is used always in the Fourth Gospel for those members of the Sanhedrin who believed secretly, cannot be substantiated—see J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York and Evanston, 1968, pp. 74-76.

[2] A schism among the Jews is also mentioned in ix. 16 (see below) and x. 19.

activity in public.[1] The result is valued as negative. " In spite of the many signs which Jesus had performed in their presence they would not believe in him " (xii. 37). This in contrast to the disciples who saw the signs, came to believe and passed the message on to later generations in order that those might believe and hold their faith (xx. 30-31). Notwithstanding this general refusal to accept Jesus, which had already been announced by Isaiah " who saw his glory and spoke about him " (xii. 38-41), there were many even among the leading classes who believed. The fact, however, that they did not acknowledge Jesus openly proves that their faith was not genuine; xii. 43 refers back to v. 44 where Jesus asks his opponents: " How can you believe if you want to receive honour from another and care nothing for the honour that comes from him who alone is God? "

A difference of opinion among the Pharisees is also recorded in ix. 16 where some of them declare categorically: " This man is not παρὰ θεοῦ, because he does not keep the Sabbath ", but others (probably also belonging to the Pharisees) object: " How could a sinful man perform such signs? " The opinion of the first group prevails and the blind young man who remains loyal to Jesus and, in fact, comes to faith in him, is expelled from the synagogue (ix. 34). His parents, in the meantime, have given an evading answer " because they were afraid of the Jews ", for " the Jews " (i.e. the Jewish leaders[2]) had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as Messiah should be banned from the synagogue " (ix. 22; cf. vii. 13, xvi. 2, xx. 19).

Besides the sympathizers in leading circles we find also believers among the ordinary people in Jerusalem. The first passage which mentions them, ii. 23-25, is rather important to our purpose because it immediately precedes the first Nicodemus-passage in iii. 1 ff. It clearly is intended as a general remark about the situation prevailing in Jerusalem after Jesus' first public appearance there. We hear of many who believed in

[1] See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 379-83.

[2] On the many shades of meaning in the Johannine expression οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, see, e.g. R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannes-evangelium I*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1965, pp. 275 f., and E. Grässer, " Die antijüdische Polemik im Johannesevangelium ", *N.T.St.*, XI, 1964-5, pp. 72-90.

him (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) because they saw the signs he did (verse 23). Jesus' reaction is negative. " He would not trust himself to them, because he knew all men well. He needed no information from other people about a man, for he himself knew what was in a man " (verses 24-25).

This passage is difficult to reconcile with ii. 11 and iv. 54, which speak about the first and second sign performed by Jesus and seem to disregard the remarks about many signs in ii. 23-25, iii. 2 and iv. 45. Nor does it agree with ii. 18 f., where the Jewish request for a sign which would justify Jesus' action is refused—a problem to which we shall return later. The wording of the passage does, however, correspond to that of iii. 1-2. The word ἄνθρωπος occurs twice in ii. 25 and is used again in the beginning of iii. 1, ἦν δὲ ἄνθρωπος,[1] and this " man " tells Jesus that he and others (οἴδαμεν plural) are convinced that no one would be able to perform the signs which Jesus performs unless God were with him (iii. 2).

Similar remarks about sympathy for, and even belief in, Jesus because of his signs are made in iv. 45, vi. 2, vii. 31, x. 42, xi. 45, 47-48, xii. 11. No negative comments either from Jesus or from the evangelist are added, but it is clear that all these instances occur between the negative opening statement ii. 23-25 and the equally negative final judgement in xii. 37 and xii. 42-43, already mentioned. In this connection also viii. 30-32 should be noted, where Jesus tells the Jews who have come to believe in him (because of his words) that they can only be his disciples if they dwell in his word (cf. v. 38, and, of course, xv. 1-10). It is perhaps not insignificant that these verses are found right in the middle of a long debate between Jesus and the Jews which leads to an entirely negative response from the Jews, culminating in an attempt to stone Jesus (viii. 59).

The result of this investigation of the evangelist's description and appraisal of the believing sympathizers among the ordinary

[1] Though in iii. 1 ἄνθρωπος may be used in the meaning of τις (Bl.-Debr. 301, 2), it may give an extra " human " emphasis; cf. i. 6, iii. 4, 27. The connection between ii. 25 and iii. 1 is a very narrow one; see the use of the simple δέ in iii. 1 and the reference to Jesus by means of the pronoun αὐτόν in iii. 2.

people and the leading classes seems to be clear. These believers stand on the wrong side of the dividing line between the true believers who live in communion with him whom God sent to the world and the unbelieving world. Notwithstanding Nicodemus's opening affirmation "We know that you are a teacher sent by God" (iii. 1), he is not among those for whom Jesus prays in xvii. 6-9: "I have made thy name known to the men whom thou didst give me out of the world . . . they know that all thy gifts have come to me from thee; for I have taught them all that I learned from thee, and they have received it; they know with certainty that I came from thee; they have had faith to believe that thou didst send me. I pray for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, because they belong to thee . . ." (N.E.B.).

Is this negative conclusion justified, and is it borne out by the three passages which mention Nicodemus?[1]

Let us look at xix. 38-42 somewhat more closely. As has often been noticed, this pericope, to which there are synoptic parallels, shows some duplication with the previous one, verses 31-37, in which there are very few connections with the synoptic narratives. Both the Jews and Joseph of Arimathea ask Pilate for permission to remove the body of Jesus (verses 31, 38). It is not expressly stated that Pilate granted the request of the Jews; it is said that Pilate gave the permission to Joseph and that Joseph, together with Nicodemus, in fact removed the body and buried Jesus.[2] In the case of the Jews we are only told that the soldiers (evidently called in by the Jews) did not break Jesus' bones: one of the soldiers, however, stabbed his side with a lance, and at once there was a flow of blood and water (verses 33-34). To this description of what happened is added a

[1] I disagree here with R. Schnackenburg, who in his introduction to the exegesis of chapter iii (op. cit. p. 379) remarks: "Die Gestalt des Nikodemus bleibt nicht völlig im Dunkeln und Ungewissen, da er noch zweimal im Ev. genannt wird (7, 50 f.; 19, 39) und zwar in einer Weise die auf seine spätere Zuwendung zur christlichen Gemeinde schliessen lässt."

[2] We should notice the variants ἦλθον and ἦραν at the end of verse 38 in some important textual witnesses. Do they represent the more difficult, and therefore original, reading? In that case Joseph is pictured as being helped by others. Or is the plural due to harmonization with verse 40 (or verses 31-32)?

declaration concerning the trustworthiness of the one who saw this and gave his witness concerning it in verse 35, a verse to be connected with xxi. 24 (and xx. 30-31), which refers to " the disciple whom Jesus loved " in a similar way. This first pericope ends with a reference to the fulfilment of Scripture (verses 36-37) and is conveniently connected with verses 38-42 through the redactional phrase *μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα* at the beginning of verse 38.

This second pericope, which concerns us most, clearly wants to emphasize that Jesus' burial was carried out at great expense (verse 39), according to Jewish custom (verse 40). Appropriately an entirely new grave was used (verse 41) and Jewish sabbath-laws were observed (verse 42). This passage also makes clear, in contrast to suggestions to the contrary found in Mark xv. 47, xvi. 1 and Luke xxiii. 55 f., xxiv. 1, that this burial was meant to be definitive.[1]

R. E. Brown, in his very full and illuminating comment on these verses, says about Joseph of Arimathea: " Clandestine disciples were judged harshly and with contempt in xii. 42, but evidently Joseph's coming forward to ask for Jesus' body has won the Johannine writer's esteem."[2] This may be so but this does not mean that the evangelist's opinion concerning Joseph's and Nicodemus's faith has changed. In a recent article[3] B. Hemelsoet has tried to argue that Joseph and Nicodemus who *ἔλαβον . . . τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ* are regarded as true believers. They have accepted the Word (see the *ἔλαβον αὐτόν* in i. 12) while accepting the body of Jesus as that of the new paschal lamb. Hemelsoet sets great store by the fact that *λαμβάνειν* (with the meanings of " take " and " accept ") is used only in connection with Joseph and Nicodemus, not with the Jews and the soldiers. He does not, however, pay attention to the contrast

[1] Matthew does not mention the women's intention to anoint the body, but he does not compensate this with a story of an anointing by Joseph of Arimathea.

[2] *The Gospel according to St. John II*, New York, 1970, p. 939. He goes on, however, with the words: " Or else, more simply, John mentions the detail only to explain why Pilate granted the request: the Roman prefect would scarcely have granted favors to an acknowledged follower of a man executed as a revolutionary."

[3] See B. Hemelsoet, " L'Ensevelissement selon Saint Jean ", *Studies in John* presented to Professor J. N. Sevenster (*Suppl. to Nov. Test.*, XXIV), Leiden, 1970, pp. 47-65.

between the eyewitness mentioned in verse 35 and the two Jewish sympathizers mentioned later. It is quite clear that the eyewitnesses play a very important role in Johannine theology, because the later living Christians are dependent on their testimony (see xx. 21-23, 29, 30-31 ; xxi. 24-25 ; 1 John i. 1-4,[1] and xvii. 20-21 ; cf. xvii. 6-9 already quoted). And it is equally clear, that in the present Gospel Joseph and Nicodemus are pictured as having come to a dead end ; they regard the burial as definitive. Jesus' work which, under a certain aspect, may be regarded as accomplished (xix. 28, 30) is continued by his disciples, especially by the disciple " whom Jesus loved " (xix. 25-27, 35 ; xx. 2-10 and the passages just mentioned). A new era in God's dealings with mankind through Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God, has begun ; Joseph and Nicodemus have not been able to look further than the tomb in the garden near the place where Jesus was crucified.

Turning now to vii. 50-52, we should first of all remark that this passage belongs to a series of " discussions " between Jesus and the Jews in Jerusalem (vii. 16-24, 28-30, 33-36), introduced by debates among the crowds themselves (vii. 11-13, 14-15, 25-27, 31-32). They are followed by a solemn proclamation by Jesus (vii. 37-38), after which Jesus no longer interferes in the controversies among the Jews concerning him.[2] It is clear that this chapter has been composed as a series of comments upon prevailing[3] Jewish conceptions about the Messiah and refutations of Jewish objections against Jesus (see verses 27, 31, 42 and cf. xii. 34). We may compare here the section verses 35-51 where a number of " messianic titles " are connected with Jesus in order to show that Jewish expectations have found their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.[4]

On closer investigation it becomes clear that we cannot really speak of discussions between Jesus and the Jews (whether with the unbelievers or with the believers among them). We hear

[1] See the present author's *De Brieven van Johannes*, Nijkerk, 1968, pp. 34-36.

[2] In viii. 12 another " Offenbarungswort " of Jesus introduces a new series of discussions.

[3] I.e. prevailing in the time of the Fourth Gospel.

[4] See Exkurs 3 in R. Schnackenburg's commentary mentioned in n. 2, p. 339, entitled : " Die Würdenamen Jesu in Joh. 1 " (pp. 321-8).

of controversies among the Jews ; no direct questions are put to Jesus and no direct answers are given. Jesus only takes up a certain theme suggested by the preceding Jewish discussion and develops it in his own way ; see verse 16, " The teaching that I give is not my own ; it is the teaching of him who sent me ", and verse 28b, " Yet I have not come of my own accord ; I was sent by the one who truly is." In verses 33-36 Jesus announces his going away to the One who sent him, introducing a subject which will later in the Gospel be treated repeatedly and at greater length,[1] and this announcement is misunderstood (in a typically Johannine way) by the Jews who think that he is to depart for the " dispersion among the Greeks ". After Jesus' proclamation in verses 37-38 the debates are continued between the two parties among the Jews themselves, first among the crowds in verses 40-44 and later among the rulers of the people, who react negatively with the sole exception of Nicodemus, who advocates precision in legal procedure in dealing with Jesus. This outcome is not astonishing. Chapter vii begins with the statement that Jesus wished to avoid Judea because the Jews were looking for a chance to kill him (verse 1), and all through the chapter remarks concerning the enmity of the Jews towards Jesus are found (verses 13, 19, 25, 30, 44 ; cf. viii. 37, 40, 59). Servants were, in fact, sent by the high priests and Pharisees with the explicit instruction to arrest Jesus (verse 32).[2]

This analysis of chapter vii is directly relevant to the question concerning the attitude of the Fourth Gospel towards Nicodemus. He takes part in an inner-Jewish discussion and does not take up one of the themes which were developed by Jesus in his own way in the course of this chapter—nor does any of the sympathizers mentioned before. Moreover, Nicodemus's remark does not deal with Jesus' teaching and acts as such ; he only emphasizes

[1] See viii. 21-24, xiii. 33-36, xiv. 19, xvi. 16-19.

[2] R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen, 1952, *ad loc.*, rearranges this chapter and the following one rather drastically. One of his principal difficulties is the inexplicable lapse of time between the sending of the servants by the Pharisees (verse 32) and their report (verses 45 f., after verse 37). As D. M. Smith, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel*, New Haven and London, 1965, pp. 152-5 has remarked, the question how and why the present arrangement replaced the supposed " original " one, is not answered.

the legal requirement that the accused should be granted a proper hearing (cf. Deut. i. 16, xiii. 14, xvii. 4, xix. 18).[1] In doing so he unmasks the hypocrisy of his fellow-Pharisees who scoff at " this rabble which cares nothing for the Law " (verse 49) and evidently have no regard for the Law themselves if that is more convenient to them. I do not think that the Gospel wants to suggest that Nicodemus in fact has come to believe in Jesus and is, as such, an exception to the general rule laid down by his fellow-Pharisees in verse 48. After all it refers the reader to chapter iii and there is no indication of a development in Nicodemus's attitude since this rather unsatisfactory discussion with Jesus. Nicodemus is, and obviously remains, *εἷς . . . ἐξ αὐτῶν* (verse 50).

A few words will have to be added about verse 52. It reflects the controversy between Galilee and Judea which is so prominent in the Fourth Gospel.[2] Scornfully the Pharisees ask Nicodemus " Are you a Galilean too ? " and they advise him to search the Scriptures in order to see *ὅτι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας προφήτης* (or : *ὁ προφήτης*, pap 66 and 75) *οὐκ ἐγείρεται*. There is some uncertainty as to whether the article before *προφήτης* is original or not. Modern scholars[3] prefer *ὁ προφήτης* as *lectio difficilior*. The prophet, already mentioned in i. 21, 25, vi. 14 and vii. 40, to be identified as the Prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy xviii. 15, 18, will not come from Galilee, at least according to these Jerusalem-centred *Ἰουδαῖοι*.[4] If we read *προφήτης*, implying that no single prophet ever came from

[1] For rabbinic and other parallels see J. Blank, *Krisis, Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie*, Freiburg, 1964, pp. 49-52.

[2] See W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King. Moses traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Leiden, 1967, pp. 35-41, 313-18. His theory that the emphasis on Jesus' heavenly origin in the Fourth Gospel is the "spiritualization of an already existing tradition of Galilean origin of a saviour figure " (p. 41) seems to me not evident ; vii. 37-52 adduced by Meeks in support of his thesis shows the Judea-Galilee-controversy, but only to illustrate the absolute lack of understanding of *all* people involved. The *χριστός*, *ὁ προφήτης* does not come from Judea or Galilee, but from heaven.

[3] See, e.g. W. A. Meeks, op. cit. p. 24 ; J. L. Martyn, op. cit. p. 105 ; R. E. Brown in his commentary *ad loc.*

[4] J. L. Martyn's conclusion " The Mosaic Prophet is to come, of course, not from Galilee, but from the wilderness " (op. cit. p. 105, n. 165) seems to me to disregard the context.

Galilee, we must suppose that the evangelist wants to give another instance of a lack of regard for the Scriptures among the Pharisees. According to 2 Kings xiv. 25 Jonah ben Amittai came from Gath-hepher, a town in Galilee (Josh. xix. 13).[1] The former solution seems to be preferable.

The first passage which mentions Nicodemus, in chapter iii, presents us with many difficulties. It has a clear beginning in iii. 1, but no obvious ending. We do not hear Nicodemus's final words nor are we told when he departed; the dialogue is continued as a monologue. Are we really allowed to call the first part of this chapter a dialogue, or do we have to conclude that Jesus and Nicodemus speak on entirely different wave-lengths, if not about completely different subjects? Some years ago S. Mendner, unable to find any meaning in the dialogue as it stands, cut it down to verses 2, 3a, 7b, 9, 10, 12b and 13a and put it after vii. 45-52a.[2] Apart from the fact that this "solution" requires the theory of a thorough rewriting of the original Fourth Gospel some time during the second century (a theory advocated by Mendner), it is clear that it does not contribute towards the explanation of the text as we have it before us. Does this text really make no sense?

I do not think that it is useful or even possible to indicate where the dialogue with Nicodemus ends and Jesus' monologue begins. The Nicodemus episode is the starting-point for a typical Johannine discourse of Jesus,[3] to which not only the

[1] See also Str.-Bill. II, p. 519.

[2] S. Mendner, "Nikodemus", *J.B.L.*, LXXVII, 1958, pp. 293-323. I. de la Potterie's instructive article "Naître de l'eau et naître de l' Esprit", *Sc. Eccl.*, XIV, 1962, pp. 417-443, did not come into my hands until after the present text had been sent to the printers. On pp. 425-435 the author gives a very detailed and interesting literary analysis of John ii. 25-iii. 21 which agrees with the analysis given above. De la Potterie shows that there is "une correspondance antithétique entre l'introduction et la troisième discours; tous les deux ont pour thème principale *la foi*: la foi encore très imparfaite des Juifs dans 2, 23-3, 2, la foi chrétienne véritable et ses fruits de salut dans 3, 11-21" (p. 431). Consequently vv. 3-10 have to be considered as a "section intermédiaire": "La nouvelle naissance, dans les vv. 3-8, est donc présentée comme ce qui est absolument indispensable pour accéder à la vie de foi foi véritable et pour obtenir la vie éternelle" (p. 433).

[3] So also Bultmann in his commentary, p. 93: "Das Kap. beginnt mit einer konkreten Szene, die jedoch keinen Abschluss hat; der in ihr anhebende Dialog

verses up to and including verse 21, but also verses 31-36 belong (though it is not easy to define exactly the relationship between the latter verses and verses 11-21).[1] If we agree to this we should see clearly that Nicodemus does not come to Jesus with a question, but with a declaration, a declaration which is, in fact, a confession of faith—the faith of the many who believed in his name (mentioned in ii. 23), deepened by Nicodemus's insight into the predictions found in Scripture : after all Jesus calls him ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (verse 10).[2] His confession of faith concerns Jesus' mission on earth, indicated by the words ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐλήλυθας, διδάσκαλος, σημεῖα ποιεῖν and ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ. This theme is taken up again in verses 11-13 and elaborated upon in the rest of the discourse. Over against Nicodemus's οἴδαμεν stands Jesus' οἴδαμεν. The ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐλήλυθας has to be interpreted as ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς (verse 13), ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (verse 31). Though it is said elsewhere that Jesus teaches[3] and may be called a διδάσκαλος[4] sent by God, the rest of the present discourse prefers the titles " the Son of Man ", " the Son " and " the only Son "—see especially verse 17 . . . ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱόν . . . ; verse 33 . . . ὃν γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ λαλεῖ.

Now, if chapter iii intends to give a deepening and correction of Nicodemus's christology in verse 2, verses 3-10 are no more than an intermezzo, though a very appropriate and necessary one. They show the essential difference between the οἴδαμεν of

zwischen Jesus und Nikodemus läuft in eine Rede Jesu über, die im Grunde situationslos ist und vom V. 13 ab im 3 Pers. vom Offenbarer spricht. Die *Rede* ist sachlich das primäre Element der Komposition."

[1] For a survey of the problems concerning the relationship between verses 1-21 and verses 31-36 see D. M. Smith, op. cit. pp. 125-7.

[2] One should note the plural οἴδαμεν with following ὅτι in verse 2, also used by the (believing) Samaritans in iv. 42, the (unbelieving) Jewish leaders in ix. 24, 29, the blind young man in ix. 31, the disciples in xvi. 30 and the editors of the Gospel in xxi. 24. In all these cases a group or an individual in the name of a group makes a definite statement in a matter of faith. One should compare the singular οἶδα with ὅτι in iv. 25, xi. 22, 24 used by believers in a similar way. It is impossible to delineate the group indicated by the " we " in John iii more precisely ; it stands over against another " we " in verse 11a (see also the plural " you " in verses 7, 11b).

[3] vi. 59, vii. 14, 28, 35, viii. 20, xviii. 20.

[4] i. 38, xi. 28, xiii. 13, 14, xx. 16.

Jesus, and of the Christian Church living in communion with him, and the οἴδαμεν of Nicodemus and the other Jews, unbelieving *and believing* (strangely enough). The οἴδαμεν of Christ and the Christians[1] is that of ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (verse 31), i.e. ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος who bears winess to ὃ ἑώρακεν καὶ ἤκουσεν (verse 32). The result is negative: καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτοῦ οὐδεὶς λαμβάνει (verses 32, 11), and this applies also to the sympathizers and believers represented by Nicodemus, who do not really understand (verse 10).

The οὐ λαμβάνετε in verse 11, and the οὐδεὶς λαμβάνει in verse 32 refer back to the prologue (verses 5, 10, 11). There, by way of contrast, are mentioned those who accepted the Logos, were allowed to become τέκνα θεοῦ, and of whom it is said that they ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. This theme is further developed in verses 3-10 of the present chapter. Γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (i.e. from above, misunderstood[2] by Nicodemus as δεύτερον, "again", verse 4) or γεννηθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος (verses 6, 8) or even ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος (verse 5) is the necessary prerequisite for a true understanding of Jesus' mission and for the true faith. In order to recognize and to accept fully "the one who comes from above" one has to be "born from above" oneself. The second conditions the first, just as, in the prologue, the first conditions the second. God's working in and through Jesus is directly related to his dealing with the believers. This is brought out very clearly in vi. 37, 39, 44, 65, especially in the last verse: "... no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by the Father."

If we relegate the "birth from above" theme to a secondary place within the whole discourse in chapter iii and put the

[1] Much has been written on the οἴδαμεν of verse 11; see, e.g. the surveys of previous opinion in the commentaries of Bultmann and Schnackenburg. This "we" could be the *pluralis ecclesiasticus* which occurs frequently in the Johannine writings, but it is difficult to understand how Jesus could be included. Schnackenburg points to iii. 32, which makes clear that Jesus' testimony is the basic one, and to ix. 4, which he interprets as referring to the work of Jesus and of the disciples connected with him.

[2] See on this case of misunderstanding and all other instances in the Fourth Gospel, H. Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis: Ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums*, Bonn, 1968, esp. pp. 124-36.

christological discussion in the centre,[1] Nicodemus's declaration in verse 2 receives its full weight and need not be regarded as a *captatio benevolentiae* cut short by Jesus' remarks about " birth from above ",[2] often supposed to answer Nicodemus's as yet unasked question about the possibilities of " entering the kingdom of God ".[3] The evangelist wants to make clear in what respects the faith of the group represented by Nicodemus fell short of the true Christian faith and why their understanding was in fact misunderstanding, putting them outside the community of the true believers of Jesus Christ.

It is necessary to dwell on this a little further and to ask how the Fourth Gospel describes Nicodemus's Jewish faith. If we confine ourselves to Johannine parallels we find that in ix. 16 (a text mentioned already) the Pharisees deny that *ἔστιν οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος* (=Jesus), *ὅτι τὸ σάββατον οὐ τηρεῖ* whereas other Pharisees object that a sinful man could not possibly perform such signs (*τοιαῦτα σημεῖα ποιεῖν*) as Jesus performs. Here we find a clear parallel to iii. 2, in a context which is to be understood against the background of a discussion of the problem whether Jesus is a true prophet or a false one (Deut. xviii. 18-22 and xiii. 1-6).[4] We should also compare ix. 27-34, the final debate between the blind young man and the Pharisees, ending with the former's expulsion from the synagogue. The Pharisees call themselves " disciples of Moses ", for " we know (*οἴδαμεν*!) that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from " (verses 28-29). The reply is to the point: It is strange that you do not know where he comes from—i.e. that you wish to deny that he comes from God

[1] Against Bultmann, on p. 93 of his commentary, who describes the contents of iii. 1-8 as " die Begründung des Kommens des Offenbarers in der Notwendigkeit der Wiedergeburt ". Rather the necessity of " birth-from-above " follows from the " coming from above " of the Revealer.

[2] Cf. Matt. xxii. 16 par. and Pap. Egerton 2, fol.2^r (given in Aland's *Synopsis* at Matt. xxii. 15-22). The latter text combines elements from John iii. 2 with elements of the pericope on paying the tribute money: *διδάσκαλε Ἰησοῦ, οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐλήλυθας; ἃ γὰρ ποιεῖς μαρτυρεῖ ὑπὲρ τοὺς προφήτας πάντας.*

[3] Cf. Mark x. 17-31 par., with the connection between *ζωὴ αἰώνιος* (verse 17) and *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* (verse 23). So also John iii. 3 and 16, 36.

[4] See W. A. Meeks, op. cit. pp. 42-61, 294-6.

—yet he has opened my eyes (verse 30). These parallels show that the terminology used in iii. 2 is elsewhere connected with a prophet, especially a prophet like Moses, and Moses himself.[1] As to the expression *ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ* we may point to Jesus' own use of parallel terms in viii. 29, *ὁ πέμψας με μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστιν*, and xvi. 32, *ὁ πατὴρ μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστιν* and (outside John) to various O.T. texts which speak of God's being with the patriarchs, Joshua, Judges, prophets[2] and Moses. Especially Exodus iii. 12 is illuminating here, where " I shall be with you " occurs together with " I send you " or parallel expressions (verses 10, 12, 13, 14, 15), repeated five times.

Also at other places in the Fourth Gospel is Jesus called *διδάσκαλος*, though this title does not occur very often and is not in other ways prominent.[3] A useful parallel is found in vii. 16 f., where Jesus, in the first discussion with the Jews, speaks of his *διδαχή* and emphasizes that it is not his own, but that of " him who sent him ". Besides the expression *τοῦ πέμψαντός με* also *ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ* is used as qualification of this *διδαχή* ; this as opposed to a teaching *ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ*.[4] This same expression is used again in the second discussion (vii. 28-29) where Jesus states emphatically : *ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλήλυθα*, because the One who truly is sent me . . . I come from him (*παρ' αὐτοῦ εἰμι*) and he sent me " (*ἀπέστειλεν*). Ch. viii. 42 is also interesting, where Jesus says : *ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἥκω, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνός με ἀπέστειλεν.*

These parallels show that the terminology used by Nicodemus is not wrong in itself : Jesus has come from God, he is a teacher, he could not do the signs he performs unless God were with him. All these expressions, or at least very similar ones, occur in the words of the Johannine Jesus himself, but then they are used within the framework indicated in iii. 11-21 and 31-36. In Johannine christology a number of elements are very important, or even essential : the contrast between heaven and earth,

[1] See also Pap. Egerton 2, fol. 2[r] quoted in n. 2, p. 349 : *ὑπὲρ τοὺς προφήτας πάντας.*

[2] Like Jeremiah (Jer. i. 19) ; further instances are mentioned by Schnackenburg in his commentary, p. 380, n. 4.

[3] See n. 4, p. 347.

[4] An illuminating excursus on *ἀφ ἑαυτοῦ* and comparable expressions in the Fourth Gospel is given by Blank, op. cit. pp. 112 f.

spirit and flesh, consequently the coming from the Father as coming down and the returning to the Father as ascending ; and the unique relationship between Father and Son, implying that the works of the Son are those of the Father and that the words of the Father are the words of the Son.

In our chapter all emphasis is laid on ὃ ἑωράκαμεν μαρτυροῦμεν (verse 11), and this consists in a speaking about τὰ ἐπουράνια (verse 12). This presupposes the descending to earth of the Son of Man (verse 13), for only ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (verse 31), who is sent by God himself (verse 34), is able to speak God's words (verse 34) and to act in God's name (verse 35). The essential thing is to believe in the Son sent by the Father (verses 16-18, 36) and to obey him (verse 36). Using a two-level scheme is, for the Fourth Gospel at any rate, not simply a mythological way of thinking. It serves to accentuate the unique connection made between God's heaven and man's earth in and through the sending of Jesus Christ, the only Son. In order to indicate the nature of Jesus' work and teaching several terms may be used, also those connected with prophecy, with kingship, with Moses as the one great mediator between God and Israel in the past, with Jewish conceptions of agency,[1] but if one fails to use them within the right framework one fails to understand the essence of Jesus' appearance and of God's dealings with the world[2]—even if one belongs to the Jews " who believed in him ".

Jesus is ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος, He is ἀπὸ θεοῦ (iii. 2, xiii. 3) and παρὰ [τοῦ] θεοῦ (ix. 16, 33 ; xvi. 27 ; cf. viii. 40, i. 6), he is also ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (iii. 13, 31 ; vi. 31-58 *passim*) and above all he is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (viii. 42 ; cf. xvi. 28). Therefore his teaching is ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (vii. 17) and it can only be understood by those who are ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (viii. 47, adding : διὰ τοῦτο ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἀκούετε, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστέ, directed against Jesus' Jewish opponents).[3] Only the children of God, of whom it may

[1] See especially W. A. Meeks, op. cit., P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Leiden, 1965, and P. Borgen, " God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel ", in *Religions in Antiquity*, Essays in memory of E. R. Goodenough, ed. J. Neusner, Leiden, 1968, pp. 137-48.

[2] For J. L. Martyn's (see p. 338, n. 1) interesting views on this subject see pp. 357-8 below.

[3] On the typical Johannine ἐκ, denoting the origin which determines the nature of a person, thought or action, see R. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe*,

be said that they were born from God (ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν, i. 12, 13; 1 John iii. 1, 2, 10; v. 2) are able to understand and to follow the unique Son of God. And this is made clear in iii. 3-9, a passage in which Nicodemus is portrayed as having nothing to say. He plays the typically Johannine part of the interlocutor who understands Jesus wrongly (verse 4) and asks: "How is this possible?" (verse 9). In fact, he reacts as an outsider; he does not belong to the children of God.

Every passage in the Fourth Gospel, or group of closely connected passages like those dealing with Nicodemus, can only be analysed fully if the whole Gospel is taken into account. Every feature of Johannine theology forms an inseparable part of that theology. Therefore every study of an aspect of the Fourth Gospel necessarily remains a torso; still, at the same time, the student of that aspect is confronted with the very centre of Johannine theology, the christology outlined above.

We should see clearly, however, that a thorough analysis of Johannine christology requires an investigation into the religious background of the Fourth Gospel. Much has been written on that subject in the past[1] and yet much remains to be done, especially with regard to Jewish thinking in the first century A.D. in its various aspects. I should like to mention here the stimulating analysis of Moses traditions and their possible influence on Johannine christology by W. A. Meeks[2] (which could and should be carried further), and to Peder Borgen who analysed the Philonic and midrashic background of John vi, and is still working along the same lines, as later publications show.[3]

To illustrate the importance of "traditionsgeschichtliche"

Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1963, p. 131, and J. Blank, op. cit. pp. 194-6. Blank emphasizes: "Das scheinbar vorherrschende räumliche Schema 'oben-unten' ist hier wirklich nur Bild, in Wahrheit ist es aber einem personal-geschichtlichen Denken ein- und untergeordnet ... Damit ist offenbar, dass das räumliche Schema nichts anderes ist als eine bildhafte Wendung, die von ihrem sachlichen Hintergrund her verstanden werden muss." This is true, but it should not be forgotten that "die Sache" itself, for the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel, called for this two-level scheme of thought.

[1] See, e.g. Feine-Behm-Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Heidelberg, 1963, pp. 149-57.

[2] See n. 2, p. 345.

[3] See n. 1, p. 351, and P. Borgen, "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John", *N.T.St.*, XVI, 1969-70, pp. 288-95.

and " formgeschichtliche " research on John one example may be given. Much has been written on the difficult verse iii. 13 : " No one ever went up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man."[1] Is the ascent and descent of the Son of Man the contents of the ἐπουράνια mentioned in verse 12? But why, then, the perfect ἀναβέβηκεν? Is this a retrospective statement by the Christian community concerning Jesus' ascent into heaven? Or is it a fundamental denial of the possibility of any knowledge of the ἐπουράνια by means of ascent to heaven by any other person but Jesus who came down from God? In that case the formulation is not quite clear, because the actual idea of revelation is not expressed. Yet an exegesis along the third line seems to be the most likely one. No one has ever really ascended to heaven, except the one who descended from heaven ; he will ascend when he will be lifted up, so that everyone who has faith in him may in him possess eternal life (verse 14 f.).

J. Blank, whose exegesis we have followed,[2] reads here a polemic against ecstatic and visionary experiences in apocalyptic and gnosis. W. A. Meeks who, on the one hand, finds a polemic against a Moses-centred piety in the Fourth Gospel, and says that " the statement ' No one ascended to heaven ' would in this context carry the pointed implication ' not even Moses ' "[3] declares, on the other hand : " this pattern of descent/ascent of a heavenly messenger has no direct parallel in the Moses traditions (except for an isolated statement by Philo); it has been and remains the strongest support for the hypothesis that the Johannine christology is connected with gnostic mythology ".[4] Now

[1] A considerable number of MSS., followed (among others) by Tischendorf and N.E.B., add ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. For full information see *The Greek New Testament*, ad loc.

[2] See op. cit. pp. 76-86. Blank emphasizes strongly the difference between the descent in gnostic literature and that in John. The descent in John is out of free initiative. See on the subject of descent also E. M. Sidebottom, *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel in the light of first-century thought*, London, 1961, pp. 112-36 (on iii. 11 see pp. 118-24).

[3] Op. cit. p. 301.

[4] Op. cit. p. 297. Of course it is typical for the Fourth Gospel that Jesus' ascent is connected directly with his cross ; see the Johannine use of ὑψωθῆναι and δοξασθῆναι.

the passage from Philo which Meeks mentions as an exception, *De sacr. Ab. et Cain*, §§ 8-10, is indeed not very convincing, but *Quaest. in Exod. II* § 46, recently put forward by P. Borgen,[1] is illuminating. Here Philo says that when Moses, at the theophany at Sinai, was called above on the seventh day (Exod. xxiv. 16), he was changed from earthly man into heavenly man. The corresponding Greek fragment speaks of ἡ ἀνάκλησις τοῦ προφήτου (*sic!*) and calls it δευτέρα γένεσις . . . τῆς προτέρας ἀμείνων,[2] On the basis of this and other examples Borgen states that the Jewish background reflected in John should be characterized as early stages of Merkabah mysticism, which influenced Philo too. These Jewish Merkabah traditions later influenced gnostic (and Mandean) mythology.[3] Whether Borgen is right or not cannot be decided here. The example given may suffice as proof for the contention that the Johannine christology can only be analysed properly against the background of contemporaneous Jewish and Hellenistic thought.

Our next question is concerned with the relevance of source criticism of the Fourth Gospel for the interpretation of the Nicodemus passages. Recently a number of studies have appeared which try to prove the existence of a " signs-source ". J. Becker has revived Bultmann's theory[4] and has given an outline of the theology of that source.[5] R. T. Fortna has tried to reconstruct a narrative source of which the " signs-stories " form the central part, and he has also given an outline of its theology.[6] W. Wilkens has published a book under the title

[1] In " God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel " (see n. 1, p. 351), p. 146. See also R. Bultmann, *Th. W.*, II, p. 862, n. 240 and the literature mentioned there.

[2] See R. Marcus, *Philo Supplement II, Questions and Answers on Exodus*, Cambridge-London, 1961, pp. 91 and 251. A little further we read of the " calling above " as " divine birth ", and of Adam (who is contrasted with Moses) it is said : ὅτι ἐκεῖνος μὲν ἐκ γῆι καὶ μετὰ σώματος συνίστατο.

[3] P. Borgen acknowledges his debt to previous studies by E. R. Goodenough, G. Scholem, H. Odeberg, G. Quispel and N. A. Dahl.

[4] For a good survey of Bultmann's dispersed remarks on the " Semeia-Quelle " see D. M. Smith, op. cit. pp. 34-43 ; see also his criticism on pp. 110-15.

[5] In his article " Wunder und Christologie ", *N. T. St.*, XVI, 1969-70, pp. 130-48.

[6] R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs. A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source underlying the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1970.

Signs and Works[1] in which he tries to give new arguments for the thesis he has previously defended : The original gospel must have been a missionary " signs-gospel " intended for the Hellenistic-Jewish communities existing in the area of the Johannine church. This was later taken up (by the same author) into the present gospel which may be characterized as an " esoteric " gospel, written with the intention to correct docetic errors within the Johannine congregations and to fortify and deepen the Christian faith.

It is, of course, impossible to discuss the complex problem of Johannine sources in the present lecture. I should like to point out that, although iii. 2 characterizes Nicodemus's conviction as being based on the signs which Jesus performs, this first Nicodemus passage is not regarded as belonging to the " signs-source ". The reason is, no doubt, the narrow connection with ii. 23-25, a summary belonging to one of the later stages in the composition of the gospel. A passage, moreover, which in the eyes of the source-critics cannot be reconciled with ii. 11 and iv. 54, verses belonging to the " signs-source ".

Now Becker has remarked rightly[2] that Nicodemus's christology in iii. 2 is entirely in keeping with the christology of the " signs-source " as he has reconstructed it, a christology for which xx. 30 f. (which formed originally the end of the " signs-source ") is typical.[3] The evangelist must have introduced Nicodemus as a typical example of a man who bases his faith on signs, with the purpose of making clear that such faith is utterly inadequate and does not lead to the true life. How the evangelist could take over xx. 30 f. at an important place in his own Gospel and yet, in chapter iii, give a fundamental criticism of the idea expressed by these verses, Becker does not tell us. The inner tensions in the Fourth Gospel cannot be denied ; it remains to be seen, however, whether these are really explained by the hypothesis of a source with its own theology and subsequent

[1] W. Wilkens, *Zeichen und Werke : Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des 4. Evangeliums in Erzählungs- und Redestoff*, Zürich, 1969 ; cf. his *Die Entstehungsgeschichte des vierten Evangeliums*, Zollikon, 1958. [2] Op. cit. pp. 145 f.

[3] The same would apply to Fortna's reconstruction of the christology of his narrative-source, given on pp. 228-34 of his book.

redaction by an evangelist who had a different theology. It is also not certain that a theory like that of Wilkens, which presupposes two different stages in the composition of the Gospel and assigns them to the same author, is really necessary or even capable of proof. Whatever the final solution of this problem may be, it is clear that the Nicodemus passages should be interpreted as forming part of the present Gospel and belonging to the later stages in its composition.[1]

Another interesting question remains: Do the Nicodemus passages help us to define the circumstances under which the Fourth Gospel came into being and do they tell us anything about its purpose? W. Wilkens's theory of a missionary "signs-gospel" directed towards possible Hellenistic-Jewish converts,[2] which became part of the present Fourth Gospel intended for inner-Church use, tries to combine the two different views which have been defended with regard to the whole Gospel by W. C. van Unnik,[3] seconded by J. A. T. Robinson[4] and R. Schnackenburg.[5] Van Unnik tried to prove that the Gospel was written in order to convert diaspora-Jews and his most important argu-

[1] On the hypothesis of a "Quelle von Offenbarungsreden" and verses to be assigned to that source see Smith's survey of Bultmann's theory on pp. 15-34 of his book (and especially p. 24) and also H. Becker, *Die Reden des Johannesevangeliums und der Stil der gnostischen Offenbarungsrede*, Göttingen, 1956, esp. pp. 94-96, 129.

It should be added that Fortna, op. cit. pp. 131 f., assigns xix. 38-42 to the narrative-source. He is not quite certain about verse 39; after some hesitation he assigns it to the source and mentions as a possibility that originally iii. 1 preceded xix. 39. This is very far-fetched. Fortna's objections to his own theory are far more convincing. The appearance of Nicodemus is redundant and may simply be John's invention. If the plural verbs at the end of verse 38 are original (see n. 2, p. 341), verse 39 comes all the more unexpectedly.

[2] Cf. R. T. Fortna, who calls his narrative-source "a textbook for potential Jewish converts" (op. cit. p. 234).

[3] In "The purpose of St. John's Gospel", *Studia Evangelica, T.U.* 73, Berlin, 1959, pp. 382-411.

[4] In "The Destination and Purpose of St. John's Gospel", *N. T. St.*, VI, 1959-60, pp. 117-31.

[5] In "Die Messiasfrage im Johannesevangelium", in *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze* (Festschrift J. Schmid), Regensburg, 1963, pp. 240–64. See also M. de Jonge, "The use of the word *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ* in the Johannine Epistles", in *Studies in John*, presented to Professor Dr. J. N. Sevenster, Leiden, 1970, pp. 66-74 and H. Riesenfeld, "Zu den johanneischen *ἵνα* -Sätzen", *Studia Theologica*, xix, 1965, pp. 213-20.

ment was the way in which ὁ χριστός is used in this Gospel. On the basis of the same material Schnackenburg advocated the theory that the Fourth Gospel was written for people who already believed in Jesus as Saviour. Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews expected but he was far more, and this " more " can only be fully understood within the Christian Church led by God's Spirit (ch. xiii-xvii). Of course this Church has a missionary task, it has to defend itself against attacks from contemporary Jewry and it should also convince those Jews who are willing to listen, that Jesus is the one they expect ; however, the Gospel's primary aim is not missionary or apologetical, but edifying—in the original, very positive sense of that word.

Schnackenburg's view is, I think, borne out by our analysis of the Nicodemus passages. The sympathetic, even believing Jews like Nicodemus are on their way to Jesus. But they should know, and Christians who speak with them should know, that a far more incisive decision will have to be made before they really understand who Jesus is and what salvation he brings. Conversion from Judaism to Christianity (as the Fourth Gospel understands it) requires a complete rethinking, a rebirth which is a birth-from-above. And the Church which is confronted with Judaism should not only realize that Jewish expectations have been fulfilled in Jesus, but also emphasize that these have to be reinterpreted fundamentally, because the new revelation is radically different from the old. The central question is the christological one and in christology the use of the title χριστός itself is not the decisive point.

The Fourth Gospel presupposes the existence of Christian and Jewish communities side by side, definitely different, often not on speaking but on debating terms. In his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*[1] J. L. Martyn has given a very clear and vivid picture of the situation. In his part I he describes " a Synagogue-Church Drama : Erecting the Wall of Separation " ; in part II " The Drama continues " after the wall is erected and " Yet the conversation continues ", as the last chapter of that section assures us. Therefore part III investigates the " Major Theological Terms of the Conversation ".

[1] See above n. 1, p. 338, nn. 3 and 4, p. 345 and n. 2, p. 351.

They are the expectation of the Prophet-Messiah like Moses, and the presence of the Son of Man.

Of course Martyn in his stimulating book also comes to speak about the secret believers (iii. 2, vii. 52, xii. 42) whom he believes to have been actually present in the synagogues which in majority opposed the Christian groups for which John wrote his Gospel. These secret believers try to convince their fellow-members of the synagogue by way of midrashic exegesis, and to a certain extent the author of the original " signs-gospel " made an attempt to meet their needs.[1] The author of the Fourth Gospel, however, takes a different view: the transitions in chapter iii indicate clearly the limitations of midrashic discussions. These discussions remain within the realm of human possibilities and can never in themselves lead beyond that realm. The Johannine Jesus makes clear, in this and other chapters, that the criterion of midrashic accuracy is wholly inapplicable to his teaching.[2] " John never allows the identification of Jesus as Mosaic Prophet-Messiah to occupy center stage without causing it shortly thereafter to be replaced by another motif. Furthermore this other motif always has to do with the Son of Man, and it usually consists of a direct presentation of Jesus as the Son of Man. Beyond the negative point of John's categorical denial that the messianic issue is midrashic lies his positive concern to lead his reader to a direct confrontation with Jesus as the Son of Man ".[3]

I have quoted rather extensively from Martyn's book because I think he has seen a number of important things and has written about them quite convincingly—though we may ask whether his theory that people like Nicodemus were actually present in the synagogues of John's time is really capable of proof and whether the prominence he gives to the Son of Man-title is really justified.[4]

[1] Op. cit. pp. 105-7.

[2] Op. cit. pp. 110-12.

[3] Op. cit. p. 125. See also W. Wilkens, *Zeichen und Werke*, pp. 55-59, esp. p. 57: " Jesus zieht die Menschen in einen Werdegang des Glaubens bis zu seinem vollen Durchbruch. Die Offenbarung aber wird auch dem Glaubenden niemals verfügbar."

[4] Cf. also H. Leroy, op. cit. pp. 135-6, 172-8, who wants to differentiate geographically and temporally: " Dann konnte das Verhältnis der einzelnen

From the circumstances under which the Fourth Gospel was written to the present world in which the message concerning Jesus Christ has to be interpreted anew by the Christian Church, is a considerable step. Yet in no group within early Christianity was the problem of the communication of the Gospel (what we are now accustomed to call the hermeneutical problem) seen so clearly and formulated so precisely as in Johannine circles. Our analysis of the Nicodemus passages has shown that the Fourth Gospel goes to the root of the problem. Misunderstanding is not a matter of understanding incompletely or inaccurately, it reveals a fundamental lack of understanding. And true understanding is a matter of grace, a gift to be granted by God himself, an inward change under the impulse of the Spirit. At the outside it may seem that John simplifies a very complex and very difficult issue, but anyone who tries to follow the intricate and at the same time very subtle patterns of thought in the Fourth Gospel will realize that he is confronted with a deliberate effort to define the essential in ever-changing terms: God's self-revelation in the Man Jesus.

Gemeinden zur ortsansässigen Judenschaft nuanciert gewesen sein, wenn auch die prinzipielle Haltung des johanneischen Kreises auf eine Trennung hinauslief, die sich bei aller nuancierten Darstellung des jüdischen Gesprächspartners ja auch immer im jüdischen Missvertstehen kundtut " (p. 177).