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## STUDIES IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL - SOME CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

J. McPOLIN

"To labour in the field of Johannine studies and to work through the plethora of accompanying literature is certainly...a humbling and exacting experience". /1/ The never slackening output of literature on the Fourth Gospel testifies to the accuracy of this observation. The pace, depth and variety of contemporary scholarship in this area are evident even from a cursory glance at the mass of recent works which either list or assess the contemporary writings on the Gospel. /2/

Twenty years ago C.K.Barrett revised W.F.Howard's "The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation". In 1957 scholars spoke about the "new look in the Fourth Gospel" and again in 1974 they spoke of another "new look" in Johannine studies, because in the 1960's and 70's there had been an explosion of studies in the Fourth Gospel. In particular, 1963-73 /3/ mark a stage when important contributions were made towards an advanced understanding of the gospel.

## WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN WORKS

Study of the Fourth Gospel has been progressing at all levels and the variety in approach can be seen from surprising titles like: "Realised Eschatology: A Study of St John - New Insights into the Fourth Gospel". /5/ J.S. Henning makes a good point when he writes: "Gestalt Therapy emphasises the here and now, the awareness of present experience and behaviour...John insisted that judgment was a present reality, the existential moment of decision that every man must make regarding the acceptance or rejection of the light...'He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me, possesses eternal life'. Jesus is resurrection and life here and now.... John was not a Gestalt therapist...His realised eschatology is a development from and a contrast to the ideology of his time. It offers a reflection of current trends towards understanding man's emptiness".

Alongside the supremely scientific approach, which is

providing advanced knowledge of the gospel, of its problems and background, some new pastoral approaches have also been provided. For example, some scholars have published works intended to help those who wish to direct various forms of prayer experiences based on the gospel.<sup>6</sup> Recent studies in the Fourth Gospel must also include unwritten works! The Church of Ireland Notes in the Irish Times, Nov. 10th, 1976, recorded that "the Ballymascanlon working party on 'Church, Scripture and Authority' recommended that all the churches in Ireland should get together in an intensive study of St John's Gospel on an inter-Church basis, and the working party has in fact issued a syllabus for such study which is now in the hands of every clergyman of the Church of Ireland". Thus an inter-Church study of the Fourth Gospel is a basis for christian unity today. In the area of liturgy there are the popular songs of the monks of Weston Priory, America who sing unamended texts straight from the gospel, e.g. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit.." (Jn. 3:5) and "If a man loves me, he will keep my word.." (Jn. 14:23)

## I A DECADE OF PROGRESS: 1963-73

### a) The Composition and Sources of the Gospel

R. Kysar has pinpointed the main preoccupations of Fourth Gospel studies between 1963 and 1973<sup>7</sup>. First, attention has focused on identifying the sources and traditions the evangelist uses and on the process of development in the formation of the gospel. Many have engaged in source analysis and redaction criticism and have put forward theories about various stages in the composition of the gospel. But this enterprise of identifying and isolating the sources and traditions behind the gospel has run into special problems, since this gospel is so different from the Synoptics which may be compared with one another in their respective uses of sources and traditions. The view now prevails that the fourth evangelist does not depend on one or more of the Synoptics nor do they constitute his sources. The question is asked: how can we distinguish with reasonable clarity between the contribution of the evangelist and the traditions or sources on which he draws?

Despite the lack of those conditions which would

render source criticism a fairly foolproof technique when applied to the Fourth Gospel, scholars during this period have come up with various kinds of source proposals. The bases for such proposals, for distinguishing between the editorial work of the evangelist and his sources are a certain unevenness and inconsistency in the gospel text, some sudden breaks in thought sequences, hard connections and unnecessary repetitions. These, it is claimed, reveal traces of editorial work, perhaps even of various editors, on traditions and pre-existing sources. Careful analysis can uncover patchwork or editorial "seams".

Already in 1941 R. Bultmann had argued for various sources (e.g. a "signs" source, discourse-source, passion-resurrection-source and some other miscellaneous sources)<sup>8</sup> but his theory gradually lost ground before the counter-offensive of those scholars who concluded on the basis of style analysis that there was no evidence to support a distinction between sources and redaction in the text<sup>9</sup> In the early seventies, however, the hypothesis of a "signs"-source behind the gospel has gained prominence chiefly through the works of R.T. Fortna<sup>10</sup>, W. Nicol<sup>11</sup>, and H. Teeple<sup>12</sup>. Basing their theories on stylistic or ideological i.e. theological differences or on unevenness and discontinuities in the text, they isolate, identify and reconstruct at least a written "signs"-source (miracle stories) which the evangelist used.

In addition to source hypotheses, there have been proposals (sometimes older theories are restated) about stages in the evolution of the gospel and about its relation to the Synoptics. A five-stage development of the gospel, put forward by R.E. Brown in his two-volume commentary and accepted as plausible by many,<sup>13</sup> maintains that (i) there was first a body of traditional material about the works and words of Jesus which (ii) was then shaped during oral transmission and was the work of a 'school' rather than an individual. John, the Son of Zebedee (the Beloved Disciple) was the principal figure in this tradition but a disciple of John played an increasingly important role in this second stage. (iii) In the third stage this disciple organiz-

ed and wrote down this oral tradition in the form of a consecutive gospel. (iv) The fourth stage consists in a second edition (manifest in texts such as 9:22-23) by the same disciple and (v) finally there was a redaction of the document by a friend or pupil of the evangelist (e.g. ch. 21, the prologue, much of the Farewell Discourse along with chs. 11-12 were added). This theory is founded on stylistic variations, breaks and incongruities in the narrative and on the repetitious quality of some passages.

W. Wilckens /14/ proposes a three-stage development: there was a basic "signs" gospel, the work of a "Beloved Disciple" to which was added discourse material and the final editing of the gospel rearranged the existing materials and added more with paschal motifs. Similarly, B. Lindars /15/ proposes various phases: first of all there were unrelated traditions, short collections. Then traditional materials (sayings and narratives) were woven into homilies. Subsequently the first form of the gospel was written and later revised to strengthen faith in a situation of persecution (to include the prologue and chs. 6, 11, 15-17) and finally, there were some post-johannine traditions.

Redaction criticism, which had proved to be an effective technique for understanding the particular contribution of each Synoptic, was also applied to the Fourth Gospel in order to discover how the evangelist shaped and imposed himself on the sources he used and how he was influenced in his editorial work by external circumstances e.g. the community situation. Despite the great difficulties in applying redaction criticism to the Fourth Gospel, some writers claim that certain editorial contributions are evident in the gospel's Christology, soteriology and theology of miracle faith (cf. Jn. 4:48; 7:13). Some of the external influences from within the johannine community suggested as imposing themselves on the editor are: /16/ the struggle with gnostic docetism, the conflict situation between the Jews and christians along with some questions pressed on the community by Jewish opponents, e.g. Who is Jesus? Can one follow Moses and Jesus both? What significance has Jesus' death?

More certain and substantial progress has been made in the question concerning the relationship of the Fourth Gospel to the Synoptics. The movement, mainly initiated by P. Gardner-Smith, /17/ to rebut the theory of John's literary dependence on any one of the Synoptic gospels, gained momentum. On the other hand, contacts were examined and established between the Synoptics and John /18/ on the basis of cross influences between the synoptic and johannine traditions at their pre-literary stage.

Outstanding among several works of quality in this field are those of C.H. Dodd /19/ and A. Dauer. /20/ Dodd scrutinizes the various passages which reveal points of contact in the pre-literary traditions and concludes from these that "John is not dependent on the Synoptic gospels but is transmitting independently a special form of the common oral tradition" /21/. In comparing John's passion account with that of the Synoptics, A. Dauer judges that John does not depend on the written accounts of the Synoptics but in many areas he uses traditions which also influenced the Synoptics. He also recognizes the possibility that synoptic influences may have come to the fourth evangelist in written form though his chief contention is that they reached the johannine tradition while it was still oral. Generally, whereas in the late sixties there was more emphasis on the dissimilarities between John and the Synoptics, in the early seventies scholars became more interested in the similarities and the points of contact in the traditions behind them.

#### b) The Milieu of the Fourth Gospel

Another focus of scholarship during this period is the identity of the evangelist and the milieu and concrete historical situation which shaped the gospel. The complexities of authorship are reflected in the diverse opinions: (i) John, the Son of Zebedee, is directly responsible or (ii) indirectly responsible as the originator of the tradition (i.e. another put it in the form of the present gospel). (iii) John Mark is indirectly responsible as the originator of the tradition embedded in the gospel or (iv) an anonymous author is responsible for the present gospel and the source of

his tradition is equally unknown.

The second and fourth solutions won more acceptance and it is significant that since 1974 some leading Roman Catholic scholars have changed their allegiance. For example, R. Schnackenburg in the first volume of his commentary favoured the second opinion (1966) but in his third volume he adopts the fourth one (1976) /22/. Similarly, R. Brown in his most recent work /23/ has changed his view: "I am inclined to change my mind.. from the position that I took in the first volume of my Anchor Bible Commentary identifying the Beloved Disciple as one of the Twelve viz. John, Son of Zebedee. I insisted there on the combination of external evidence which made this the strongest hypothesis. I now recognize that the external and internal evidence are probably not to be harmonized..Second-century information about the origins of the gospels (often reflecting scholarly guesses of that period) has not held up well in modern scholarship..There is a set tendency in the second-century information to oversimplify the directness of the connection between the evangelists and the eyewitness". According to this view, which is gaining more and more support, the Beloved Disciple, whose authority lies behind the gospel, cannot be identified with John the Apostle.

Limitless energy has been expended on the intellectual and religious milieu of the gospel. In the fifties Dodd won much support with his stress on hellenistic influence in the shape of a syncretism of Platonic and Stoic philosophy. Later there was a widespread shift towards a Jewish Palestinian background when the stone thrown by an Arab shepherd at Qumran created a clatter which generated loud echoes even in johannine scholarship. In the first rapture of discovery some probably overstated Qumran influence but a publication of essays "John and Qumran" (ed. J.H.Charlesworth) in 1972 /24/ shows a more calm and sober assessment of the evidence.

In addition, scholarship, particularly in Germany, focused sharply on the relationship between gnosticism and the gospel. Back in 1925 and 1941 /25/ Bultmann claimed that gnostic sources such as Mandaean literature strongly influenced the gospel. However, A.M.Hunter

writes in 1968 that "the Mandaean fever may now be said to have spent itself" /26/. But this was not altogether true if one seriously reckons with research in Germany and to a lesser degree in America which linked the gospel not only with Mandaean and Manichean gnostic sources but also with some gnostic documents discovered in Nag Hammadi in Egypt (1945-46), particularly with the Gospel of Truth. /27/.

Gradually there was a shift from the simple option in the quest for the religious and intellectual milieu of the gospel: hellenism or Judaism or gnosticism. A more rounded and complex consensus was taking shape: the gospel would have been intended for a milieu influenced by Jewish, hellenistic and syncretistic elements. /28/.

More wholehearted attempts were made in this decade than previously to re-create the concrete community situation which influenced the evangelist. The range of views is considerable but the main trends in this research have been: the gospel was directed to a community of christian believers during a state of conflict with the synagogue (Martyn) /29/; it presents an anti-docetic polemic (Dunn, Richter) /30/; some, with varying emphases, have pointed to the influence of Samaritan beliefs in the shaping of the gospel even to the extent that it has a Samaritan setting or origin (Buchanan, Freed, Meeks) /31/; others emphasise that the gospel has a universal appeal to a widely dispersed and heterogeneous audience of christian believers. /32/

### c) The Theology of the Fourth Gospel

Perhaps the most interesting studies on the Fourth Gospel during this period are those which research in greater depth the richness of John's theological thought and certain themes, particularly in the following areas: Christology, eschatology, witness, signs, faith, the Holy-Spirit-Paraclete, the sacraments and ecclesiology. The theme of the Christ of history and the johannine Christ of faith has been the subject of various but inconclusive discussions. /33/ E. Käsemann, stressing the glory and transcendent aspect of Jesus, maintains that the central viewpoint of the gospel, namely, the unity of the Son with his Father, inclines towards a docetic Christology. /34/



Similarly, S. Schulz /35/ minimizes the gospel's interest in the humanity of Jesus.

A more intermediate and significant approach highlights for the first time John's theology of mission, with emphasis on the mission of the Incarnate Jesus to the world. /36/ This mission theology insists on the reality of the flesh, on Jesus' earthly mission as well as the reality of glory in the person of Jesus sent in time to the world by the Father. S. Sabugal examines the use of the title "Christ" in the gospel and epistles of John and concludes that it underlines the "horizontal" aspect of Jesus' mission ("Son of God" points to his transcendence). /37/ F.M. Braun continues the trend to integrate both aspects of John's Christology in "an indivisible Christ" /38/ while A. Feuillet stresses the trinitarian dimension and its relationship to his theology of divine love. /39/ Others distinguish between function and person in johannine Christology. /40/

The "I am" sayings, so central to this Christology, had been the subject of special attention, especially since the work of E. Schweizer /41/, but more recent works, particularly that of P. Harner /42/ have shed added light on their meaning and Old Testament background. In this context, too, the thorough monographs of R. Borig /43/ and A.J. Simonis /43/ are to be singled out. Johannine eschatology had also been a storm centre of scholarship particularly since Bultmann proposed that the evangelist maintains a realized eschatology and that a futuristic eschatology was an addition of an ecclesiastical redactor /44/. A more balanced and thorough analysis of johannine eschatology by J. Blank /45/ and P. Ricca /46/ has shown that both aspects are compatible for the evangelist, and that eschatology in the gospel is very Christ-centred. Besides, they have clarified the meaning of "judgment" in the gospel as a self-imposed consequence of a personal decision in response to revelation. Numerous writings have researched the theme of faith in the gospel and have underscored its Christological orientation and its relationship to "seeing" and "knowing" and to other themes such as "signs" and "witness" /47/ The background, meaning and vocabulary of these two themes, "witness" and "signs" have also received extensive treat-

ment. /48/

Contemporary interest in the life of the Spirit is reflected also in the number and quality of writings which examine the background of the concept Spirit-Paraclete, the mission of the Spirit, and his relationship to Christ and his role as Spirit of truth. The Old Testament, Jewish forensic thought, Jewish angelology as reflected in Qumran and gnosticism have all been suggested as the background of John's pneumatology. /49/ There is a general tendency to describe the function of the Spirit-Paraclete as twofold: he interprets the revelation of Christ to the disciple; he provides for the personal appropriation of this revelation of Christ. /50/

"No specifically ecclesiological interest can be detected" /51/ - this challenging claim of Bultmann about the gospel was one factor which aroused scholars to probe further the ecclesiology of John. Some have emphasised the opposition between Church and the "world" /52/ or have seen an ecclesial motif behind the themes of mission (of the disciples) and unity in the gospel. /53/ Chapters 10 and 15, according to P. Le Fort, /54/ portray the Church as a community of faith resisting false doctrine and Church order and ecclesial emphases are reflected particularly in ch. 21. /55/ H. van den Bussche shows that the chief interest of the Fourth Gospel is Christology and that it is not a treatise on the Church yet for the evangelist the idea of Church is deeply rooted in the gospel, for example in concepts such as "children of God", in the theology of the word received in faith by the community of believers, in the stress on the break with Judaism, in the universal mission of the community, in images such as the vine and the shepherd and, finally, in the references to sacraments. /56/

As regards the sacraments, there has been a letup in the controversy represented by two extreme positions, namely between those who see a minimal sacramental interest (e.g. Bultmann /57/ ) and those who see numerous references in the gospel to sacraments (e.g. Cullmann /58/ ) with the result that a more balanced viewpoint has emerged. /59/ Criteria for detecting references, direct or indirect, to sacraments have been proposed:

sacramental implications of John's symbols have to be drawn from the text of John, from his own explanations, from the whole gospel or New Testament context, even from Old Testament references and images. Besides, John's centre of attention is never the sacraments themselves or the cultic life of the community but the mission and self-revelation of Jesus on earth. John's vision of Jesus' work extends beyond his death and resurrection. All the activity of the johannine Christ takes place in the awareness that his mission on earth, his self-revelation and his communication of life are only fulfilled through his return to the Father, through the sending of the Spirit and, within the life of the Church, through the word and sacramental action of Jesus. The possibility is commonly recognised that some sacramental sections in John (3:5;6:51-58) are editorial additions at a later stage of the composition of the gospel.

#### d) Structures and Style

Studies on the literary techniques and structures of the gospel have contributed to a more precise understanding of the text, despite the scepticism or silence of some modern scholars about their value. "In the Fourth Gospel theology and aesthetics are mutually complementary", says C.H. Talbert in an article /60/ which presents the dramatic development of the gospel in terms of structure. Besides, an analysis of structures and literary devices (e.g. announcement of a theme, connecting words, repetition of key words and phrases, parallelisms, the various ways a dialogue or discourse develops) illustrates how the gospel forms an organic whole and such analysis often holds the key to the interpretation of a word or phrase. For example, numerous writings /61/ on various sections of the gospel, e.g. on chs 3,6,17 and in particular on the prologue show the value of this type of analysis. Due to lack of space it is not possible to deal with the extensive body of literature on the prologue, its structure and its relationship to the rest of the gospel. A striking article of A. Feuillet /62/ proposes and develops the similarity of structure between the gospel and First

Letter of John and D.W. Wead renders a valuable service by assembling and explaining many literary devices found in the gospel. /63/

#### e) Accomplishments of a Decade

This decade also saw the publication of many commentaries in different languages, the most complete and extensive among these being the two volumes of R. Brown (1965, 1970) /64/ and the three volumes of R. Schnackenburg (1965, 1971, 1976) /65/. These cover all areas of scholarship concerning the gospel and they are mutually complementary since Schnackenburg's work (his third volume is less diffuse and is a work of outstanding merit) places more emphasis on literary criticism, on the analysis of sources and various "strata" in the text.

The main advances of this period have been in the study of the literary, historical and theological aspects of the gospel. Studies have clarified that behind the gospel there was a body of traditional material. The gospel is a collection of narrative and discourse which have been brought together over a number of stages and periods. Thus the composition of this gospel was a process involving a number of persons and historical situations; it is also a work of a community of faith because its contents are the result in large part of the conditions of a community of persons. However, it remains unclear how these traditional materials reached the evangelist, a creative redactor. A degree of consensus has not been reached as regards what is traditional and what is redactional in the gospel.

Scholarship has also strengthened the case for a very pervasive Jewish milieu which, however, was also penetrated by hellenistic and other syncretistic influences so that "the fourth evangelist was a child of a multiformed, syncretistic Judaism" /66/. Whether these influences include gnostic elements remains unclear in spite of great efforts from some scholars to push gnosticism. Impressive studies also demonstrated that tension between the synagogue and christian communities is an integral part of the gospel's setting and that the gospel as a whole must be read as a document strengthening and nurturing faith within this framework of the

Jewish-Christian struggle. Also research gradually moved away from any sort of effort to link the evangelist with the apostle, John.

Studies in the theology and themes of the gospel pointed to three main conclusions: the Christological concentration of the gospel; the interrelatedness of themes in the gospel, that is, the study of one theme is linked with others and especially with the Christology of the gospel. Thirdly, when one compares the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptics it becomes ever clearer how distinctive is Johannine Christianity and theology and how different it is from other forms of Christianity known to us through other New Testament literature.

## II PROGRESS SINCE 1974

Recent scholarship has followed up previous efforts in the four areas outlined in the first part of this article. Probably the most notable achievement has been a more concentrated study of individual themes, areas or texts of the gospel. This survey, like the previous section, is selective and therefore the works explicitly mentioned are chosen in order to illustrate the general directions of contemporary Fourth Gospel studies, for they are a mere cross-section of the never slackening output of literature on the gospel.

### a) The Composition and Sources of the Gospel

Despite the inherent difficulties of the enterprise, the value of source criticism of the gospel has been acknowledged by many and a consensus seems to be developing among scholars that the evangelist used sources, especially a narrative source which includes "signs" (miracle stories). /67/ However, the task of delineating these sources remain tentative in spite of the particularly thorough effort by M.E. Boismard who also attempts to reconstruct four literary stages of composition /68/. S. Temple seeks to identify the "core" of the Fourth Gospel - a narrative-discourse source on the basis of which the gospel was composed; but neither his arguments nor his method are convincing. /69/

Redaction criticism is still exploring the relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics and con-

firms the dependence of both John and the Synoptics on common sources or traditions. /70/ The focus remains on the similarities and points of contact between John and the Synoptics. C.K. Barrett, for example, claims that John and Mark are close together not merely in the passion account but elsewhere, too: the sequence of the feeding of the multitude and the walking on the water is common to both. In Mark there are stories which John repeats, sometimes, at least, in substantially the same order, sometimes with similar or identical words. /70/ Barrett has touched on an area which merits further research.

#### b) The Milieu of the Fourth Gospel

While writers acknowledge the importance of the Beloved Disciple in the life of the community for which the gospel is written, they have become less inclined to identify him with John, the apostle or with the evangelist. /72/

There is also a strong tendency to emphasise the Jewish background, in particular by pointing to the influence of the Old Testament, even of the targumim on the gospel, since the author would have been formed in the liturgy of the synagogue. /73/ Besides, ecumenism has brought into the limelight the question of the evangelist's attitude to the Jews: is the gospel anti-semitic? /74/

More important is the trend to investigate more thoroughly the Church life of the community for which the gospel was written. J.L. Martyn distinguishes three stages in the history of the johannine community which are reflected in the gospel, /75/ while G. Richter traces within the gospel theological views of four different communities /76/ and W. Langbrandtner indicates three community stages: the first phase was influenced by a gnostic, dualistic outlook and this 'Grundschrift' (basic document) was reinterpreted in an anti-gnostic, anti-docetic way with emphasis on the fleshly existence and bodily resurrection of Jesus, on ethics, sacraments and future eschatology. The epistles reflect a further stage in the life of the community. /77/

R. Brown assesses these positions and puts forward

his own view while at the same time he is aware of the perils and hypothetical nature of reconstructing the life situation of the community for which the gospel was written. But such a task is not impossible since the gospels tell us primarily about the Church situation in which they were written and, therefore, through some "detective work", especially by literary analysis, one can gain an insight into the life of the community at the time when the gospel was composed. Even though this reconstruction work has snags and lacks adequate sources outside the gospel and epistles of John, Brown by means of a cautious and rigorous methodology, adduces evidence for four phases. The first is the pre-gospel era, the time of controversies between johannine christians and the synagogue leaders when some gentiles had already joined the community. Various groupings and Christologies were emerging (c. 50-80 A.D.). The second phase is that of the life situation of the johannine community at the time the gospel was written (c. 90 A.D.), when persecution continues and when the relationship of the community to outsiders, whether non-believers (the "world", Jews) or other christian groups (whose faith in Jesus is inadequate e.g. followers of John the Baptist) becomes prominent. The third phase involves the life situation in the now divided johannine communities at the time the epistles were written (c. 100 A.D.). There is a struggle between two groups who are interpreting the gospel in opposite ways, both as regards Christology, ethics, eschatology and pneumatology. Both parties know the proclamation of christianity available through the Fourth Gospel but they interpreted it differently. Phase four saw dissolution of the two johannine groups after the epistles were written. "The secessionists, no longer in communion with the more conservative side of the johannine community, probably moved rapidly in the second century toward docetism, gnosticism, Cerinthianism and Montanism". /78/

### c) The Theology of the Fourth Gospel

In the area of johannine theology some new avenues in Christology and ecclesiology continue to be explored. For example, examining the development of Christology in the gospel in the light of source criticism, R.T. Fortna

maintains that John aims at refuting the charge of dith-eism (i.e. two Gods, the Father and Son) and that he heightens some docetic elements in his presentation of Jesus. /79/ Christology continues to be viewed in terms of mission and the aspect of Jesus' mission underlined by M. Veloso is its origin and Jesus' relationship to the Father in mission. /80/ One of the most important contributions to the Christology of the gospel is the first full-scale monograph on the use of the title "Son of Man" in the gospel by F.J. Moloney. His main point is: whereas the title "Son (of God)" speaks of the basis of Jesus' existence and purpose before, during and after the Incarnation, the title "Son of Man" for John is entirely dependent on the Incarnation: Jesus, the Son of Man, is God's revelation among men, bringing judgment in his presence in history. All the Son of Man sayings point ultimately to the cross. /81/

The controversy as to whether the Church is present or absent in the gospel has been surveyed and somewhat defused by the balanced view that, while the gospel is basically Christological and truly individualistic in that it emphasises the need for the individual believer to respond in faith to Christ, there are also signs of the Church in the gospel. /82/ A further step in bringing together divergent positions about the sacramental theology of John is made by B. Lindars who highlights the link in the gospel between faith and sacrament (baptism) and between word and sacrament. /83/

Contemporary scholarship has also proven how a comprehensive monograph on some single area of johannine theology can at times be more penetrating and more valuable for understanding John than any commentary, however voluminous. Such works also show that each theme in the gospel is linked with all other themes. To take two outstanding examples: firstly the two volumes of I. de la Potterie on the theme of truth in the gospel and epistles of John combines linguistic and structural analysis, exceptional familiarity with the language of John along with precise interpretation of texts and their background. He proposes that the background of "truth" in John is to be found in Qumran texts, in later apocalyptic and wisdom literature in which it is related to mystery, revelation and the revealing word. /84/



Secondly, F. Porsch has contributed the most satisfactory work to date on the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in the gospel since he provides not only a thorough examination of the relevant texts and their background but he also deals in masterly fashion with some of the problems that have been raised over the years about John's pneumatology: has the gospel a unified theology of the Spirit? Is the Paraclete for John identical with the Christ who returns and is present in the community? When Jesus gives the Spirit to disciples (20:21) is this event the fulfilment of the Paraclete promises? Porsch demonstrates that John's pneumatology is first and foremost Christological and he clarifies the relationship in the gospel between word, sacrament and the Holy Spirit. /85/

Other monographs have made further inroads into some johannine themes. The theme of oneness or unity (between Father and Son, between Jesus and disciples), according to M. Appold, reflects the content and direction of the whole gospel. The oneness motif is a pivotal point of John's Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology while the centre and cause of unity of disciples with Jesus and with one another is the oneness of Father and Son. /86/

Furthermore, a problem area of johannine theology, the connection between soteriology and revelation, is tackled by J.T. Forestell. /87/ According to Bultmann /88/ Jesus is first and foremost a revealer and the death of Jesus has no objective, saving meaning. Th. Müller, /89/ taking up the cudgels against Bultmann, insists that in the gospel Jesus' death is an integral part of his mission as saviour and revealer and that his death is viewed by John as an expiatory and vicarious sacrifice for sin. Forestell steers a course between these opposites: the theme of revelation dominates and yet the death of Jesus is a distinct, integral and essential part of his revelatory and saving work. But Forestell's efforts to minimize or explain as peripheral any victim motif (e.g. Jn. 6: 51; 1: 29, 36; 1 Jn. 1:7, 9 etc.) need further refinement. A more feasible explanation could be that John combines a variety of perspectives among which one must also include that of the cross as removing sin, even if this is not as dominant as the revelatory aspect of Jesus' death.

Some other lacunae have been filled by more concentrated studies on Jesus' relation to the law and on the adoptive sonship of christians. S. Pancaro demonstrates effectively how the relationship between Jesus and the law is a basic question in the gospel /90/ and M. Vellanickal's work is the most thorough-going treatment of the divine sonship of christians, also an important theme in the johannine writings. /91/ A monograph on the use of onoma (name) with reference to the Father and Son in the gospel shows how the name of the Father and the name of the Son express aspects of the revelation of the Father through the Son and the unity of Father and Son. This "name" concept of John, the background of which is investigated with reference to the Old Testament, the Gospel of Truth and the Odes of Solomon, is theologically unique. /92/ Finally, some other themes treated comprehensively in monographs are: the "hour" /93/ and the will of God and the will of man /94/.

Very specialized scholarship has focused, too, on particular words of verses and a particularly fine example of this precision work is A. Vanhoye's article on a crux interpretum, Jn. 2:4. /95/ Recently the case for the singular reading of the verb rather than the plural (in Jn. 1:13) ("who was born not out of human stock..." cf. Jerusalem Bible) has been espoused by some scholars. /96/

#### d) Structures and Style

Scholarship continues to show how structural and literary techniques are a key to gospel interpretation. In particular B. Olsson /97/ demonstrates this by emphasising the semantic structure of the text, its linguistic and literary character and also the connection between the structure and the message. /98/

### CONCLUSION

In the past five years certain theological themes of the gospel have been explored more successfully and many have come to recognise source-criticism and redaction criticism as valid methods of study even with regard to this gospel. More thorough-going efforts have been made to identify the community for which the

gospel was written and the intellectual and religious milieu out of which it was born.

Still, certain areas beckon scholars to probe further. For example, source criticism presents difficulties since writers vary so much in their conclusions about the number and type of sources. The task still remains to reach some greater degree of consensus between what is traditional and what is redactional in the gospel. In addition, during the past decade or more, scholarship, particularly in Germany, has focused on gnosis as a possible element in the background of the gospel. It has not yet been clearly shown whether such preoccupation with gnosis has been worthwhile. However, the suggested background of an eclectic Jewish milieu with hellenistic and syncretistic influences needs to be further determined. Besides, in spite of recent concentration on the nature of the johannine community, conclusions are still tentative. Admittedly, they may have to remain so because of the limited evidence at hand.

In many cases recent works on the language, structure and literary techniques of the gospel have led to a more precise understanding of the text. Yet one wonders whether johannine scholars in these years have equalled Westcott or Bultmann in their exceptional familiarity with and sense of the language of John, of its nuances and niceties. It is perhaps significant that no scholar in recent times has undertaken to revise E.A. Abbott's works /99/ of the first decade of this century on the vocabulary and language of John or to produce something similar in the light of contemporary scholarship.

Finally, there still remains the need, as R. Kysar has pointed out, /100/ to find categories which do justice to the evangelist's thought and which are not loaded with either modern connotations or terms which belong to later theology. For example, how can we express in suitable categories the tension between "flesh" and "glory" in Christology? Hopefully research will continue in such areas since there is still plenty of elbow room for the enthusiastic disciple of John. Let him not be discouraged by the vast plethora of literature, for the evangelist himself was conscious of

how much more could be written: "But there are also many other things...; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (21:25).

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