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The struggle for language: John's gospel as a witness to the development of the early Christian language of faith

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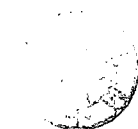
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Abstract

This thesis attempts to develop an approach to the New Testament which does justice to the New Testament as both sacred scripture of Christianity and historical human document. Based on the Lutheran and German Existentialist hermeneutical tradition language is viewed as the bearer of meaning rather than as a pointer to meaning which is to be found behind the text. This approach is relevant for the discussion of neo-Barthian as well as post-modern hermeneutics. It demands a consistent application of historical criticism, leading to a hermeneutical theology rather than the ruling of theology over against biblical interpretation.

The first main part of the thesis is dedicated to the development of a theological theory of language. The thesis starts with an assessment of the Barth-Bultmann debate, where the underlying differences in their respective theories of language are analysed. It proceeds to a critical discussion of Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutical theory, in the course of which Bultmann's theology and hermeneutics are identified as leading to a theocentric personalism. In addition, his hermeneutics are found to have important deficits in the underlying theory of language namely to ignore the role language plays as the bearer of meaning. In order to develop a theological theory of language which is based on the assumption that language is the bearer of meaning while avoiding Bultmann's shortcomings, the argument will follow the further development of existentialist hermeneutics and enter a discussion with the later Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricœur. As a result, the concept of Christianity as *Struggle for Language* will be introduced. Here, Christianity and the New Testament in particular is understood as the continuing endeavour to translate the Christian *kerygma* so that it is meaningful in present discourse.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to the application of the main thesis to selected texts from John's Gospel, namely the hymn underlying the prologue John 1:1-18, the Nicodemus-discourse John 3:1-21 and the final prayer John 17.

Contents

Declaration

No material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. The work of others contained in this thesis is properly acknowledged.

I confirm that the thesis conforms with the prescribed word length for the degree for which I am submitting it for examination.

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

<u>Prolegomena</u>

1. Language and Logos

Language is *logos*. *Logos* is Being. Language is *logos* as the meaningful interpretation of Being. Being is the human being, finding itself in a world which is alien to the human being. The world is full of other beings and manifold impressions. The human being is helpless against the rush of these other beings, unless it has language. Language is a powerful defence against the rush of the world. The human being names the other beings, like Adam named the animals in the Paradise-garden, and being which is given a name can be set into relation, into meaningful relation to other beings and to the human self. Through language the human being can make sense of the world, understand and communicate what it encounters. Indeed, humanity can communicate. As language is also based on convention within a group of people who share the same environment and experiences, one human being can tell another the individual understanding of the world. As language develops, the interpretation of the world gets more and more complex. It starts with straight-forward interpretations, like: 'I gather from the vibrations of the earth here, the trumpet-sound and the stomping we can hear that a mammoth will be here soon. As we are many and have our spears with us, we could hunt it.' to more complex ones like: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.' Both examples show how language is a meaningful interpretation of reality.

The two interpretations of reality I have taken as an example are connected by many thousand years of humanity trying to understand itself within the world in which it finds itself. All these interpretations, all this language, is connected with and related to each other. Later interpretations refer to earlier ones, contemporary interpretations refer to each other, in both cases either in agreement or disagreement. Together they form the

universe of the *logos*, which is pure discourse. Every interpretation of Being which has ever been formulated is a part of this universe of discourse. Every interpretation of the world being formulated comes from there and goes there. It comes from there, because if a human being understands his or her world, it always takes place in interaction with other interpretations which are already part of that universe. It goes there, because after the interpretation has been formulated and uttered, it is part of that universe and participates in the universal system of reference.

The human being is part of both worlds, of the natural, physical world and of the universe of *logos*. In the human being, both worlds meet. The human being, part of the universe of discourse, receives different possible interpretations of the world, which it can evaluate and apply to its physical world. The experiences someone makes in the physical world then influence the interpretation of the world, which is, again, part of the universe of the *logos*. Through the human being, *logos* and *physis* interact. The *physis* is what is interpreted by the *logos*, without *physis* there would be no *logos*. And without *logos*, *physis* would be meaningless and dead.

Logos and *physis* are related to each other also in another, paradoxical way. *Logos* is never available without *physis*. Human understanding of the world is only possible in language, which is, as we have seen above, *logos*, and language is always physically bound. There is no language without the soundwaves which transmit the spoken language from mouth to ear, without ink and paper (or, in the contemporary environment, the hardware of the computer and the electromagnetic waves rushing through the computer-networks). Therefore, *logos* is mediated by *physis*, and *physis* is able to carry *logos*. All the interpretations of the world, of which the universe of the *logos* consists, have been oral or written utterings. Theoretically, they could all be written down and collected in a library. Even the understanding of texts, which consists of setting the text

into meaningful relation to other texts, to the physical world and the human self, is a process which is expressed in language and thus can be written down. Therefore, *physis* is able to embody *logos*. Yet *physis* does not exhaust *logos*, they are not directly identical, but in a paradoxical unity. *Logos* transcends *physis* and *physis* embodies *logos*.

The universe of the *logos* is full of conflicting interpretations of the physical world. Yet there can only one be interpretation meaningful at a time and only one can be true. Yet absolute truth is not yet visible or directly accessible. A central part of Christian faith is that truth will be visible in the *eschaton*, until then there is no possibility of seeing, only of believing. Every assumption of truth is a belief, for it means to prefer one interpretation of the world over against others. Even to say that there is no truth and to assert a radical relativism is to assume that the relativist interpretation of the world is true. Therefore, in this world it is necessary to live within the conflict of interpretations and to accept that the final truth will never be found here. Knowing that absolute truth will never be seen in this world, discourse has to bear the multitude of interpretations. Theology, as any other academic discipline, has to accept that its authority is questioned and has to question the other authorities. Only in this context opinions will be tested and prejudices abandoned. To utter one's position, one's interpretation of the world, is always an act of authority, which needs to be responded to by criticism. Only according to this rule discourse will be relatively free from oppression in a communicative network of authority and critique.

Language is *logos*. Within this hermeneutical framework theology and biblical interpretation takes place. The Bible as a whole and its books as its parts are part of the universe of discourse. They offer a range of interpretations of the world which are the basis of Christian theology. Christian theology has to see the Bible and the biblical books in their place within the network of meaning which is the world of the *logos*. Having received

Christian faith and Christian thought-patterns from discourse, they need to be tested in the worlds both of *logos* and *physis*. They have to be translated so that they may be comprehensible and plausible in discourse. Then they are handed on into the communicative universe of the *logos* again, from where they will be taken up again, criticised, transformed and passed on again. In this process of receiving and passing on theology has its place, and to explore the significance of biblical studies in this framework is the aim of this thesis.

2. Biblical Interpretation in Conflict

Especially in the Anglo-Saxon environment, theologians have embarked on a new hermeneutical debate. Due to a certain frustration with the historical-critical approach to the New Testament, supposedly new approaches are discussed and find more and more acceptance. Neo-Barthian approaches like 'canonical approaches' and rediscovered 'biblical theology' are broadly discussed, not to mention the so-called post-modern approaches like reader-response, post-structuralism and deconstruction and whatever can be found in the theological marketplace. What all these approaches to the New Testament have in common is that, in my opinion, they are in danger of not taking seriously Christianity as a historically conditioned religion. The New Testament itself emphasises that it originated from historical events which happened in a certain place and at a certain time: so Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:1f and the emphasis on the eye-witness in John 19:35. Also early Christianity was strongly conscious of the historical condition of Christianity, as, e.g. the *sub Pontio Pilato* in the creeds indicates. Therefore, to separate Christianity from its historical origin means seriously to misapprehend its very nature.

This misapprehension of Christianity is, from my point of view, largely grounded in an insufficient theory of language. Language is seen as referring to something outside language, so that meaning is not in language itself but language only points at it. The post-

modern approaches reject this very notion and thus abandon the concept of an identifi-
able meaning of language. Yet a critical discussion of this concept of reference and its
presuppositions is urgently necessary and has, to my knowledge, not yet taken place in
the Anglo-Saxon context. An integral part of this thesis is to challenge this perception of
language and meaning and propose a view of language as *logos*, of language as bearer of
meaning. Language, as I am going to argue, contains, even embodies meaning rather
than merely points at it[1]. Human language is, as the Lutheran hermeneutical tradition
assumes, able to hold infinite meaning and to disclose it. This is not to say that the text
is a self-contained whole, for it was created in relation to the discourse of a particular
time and place. Therefore, the text is part of a world. The world of the text consists not
only of the world within the text, i.e. the narrative and the system of reference within it,
but also of the world in which the text was written, for it was written in a language in
which every word has not only a specific meaning but also manifold connotations and
additional references. As Gadamer puts it, 'every word causes the whole language to
which it belongs to resonate, and the whole of the perception of the world, that it is
based upon, appear.'[2] Therefore, the text is meaningful within the world of which it is
part and thus within the discourse, the network of meaning to which it belongs. To iso-
late the text from its world, i.e. its historical context, is to do great injustice to the text.
This theory of language will be developed in the first main part of this thesis and carried
out in the second part, interpreting selected passages from John's Gospel.

The view of language as *logos* sets me in opposition to approaches which find the
meaning of the text -in our case the New Testament or the Bible as a whole- behind the

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[1] There seems to be a close connection between Christology and Hermeneutics, which would be inter-
esting to explore in detail.

text. This approach is represented on the one hand by scholars who reconstruct historical events or characters (especially the historical Jesus) and use this reconstruction of a reality behind the text as the basis of theology and faith. On the other hand, neo-Barthian scholars who see the Bible as a whole as referring to the Word of God as behind the text also fall under this category. This matter certainly needs to be further explored, and I attempt to do this in the chapter on Barth and Bultmann[3]. On the other hand, the view of language as *logos* contradicts the basic assumption of so-called postmodernism, i.e. that 'signification does not present or represent some original presence; the very notion of presence is *itself* an *effect* produced by signification.'[4] Or, in other words, in post-modernism

> 'There is no extratextual reality to which texts refer or which gives texts their meaning; meaning or reference are possible only to this network [i.e. texts referring to other texts], as functions of intertextuality.'[5]

Thus, it is the very concept of meaning and text which I am going to criticise as well in this thesis which is rejected by postmodernism by separating text and extratextual reality. Yet the hermeneutics I am proposing in this thesis assume that the text has a distinct meaning which is, however, to be found in the text rather than behind it. Therefore, the approach underlying this thesis has a thrust critical of the post-modern separation of language and meaning. In consequence, we need to be aware that the way to postmodernism is actually paved by the epistemology proposed by Karl Barth and his neo-Barthian followers who are, in fact, open to post-modern criticism.

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[2] GADAMER, Hans-Georg; *Wahrheit und Methode*, in: GADAMER, Hans-Georg; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1: *Hermeneutik: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [6]1990, 434 (English: *Truth and Method*, London (Sheed and Ward) [2]1979, 415f.).

[3] Cf. below, "A. Ἐν ἀρχῇ· Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann" p.20ff.

[4] KEARNY, Richard; *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, Manchester and New York (Manchester University Press) [2]1994, 116f.

This thesis is not the place for a comprehensive discussion of post-modern epistemology (or, as post-modernists might prefer, *tarachology*), which would be subject to another study; and yet, it is appropriate to address two more points here. Firstly, an important emphasis of post-modernism is to identify power structures and hidden agendas in texts, which then need to be unveiled and criticised. This is, in fact, an important issue in hermeneutics in general as well as in biblical interpretation. To address this issue, however, a post-modern viewpoint does not have to be taken; rather the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which will be an important stage on the way to a theological theory of language, provide a framework in which the text can be taken seriously as meaningful and yet be criticised for its ideological agenda[6]. If the text is taken seriously as meaningful, then it must be accepted that it is an authority, for it has to say something new which the interpreter would not know without this particular text. Authority, however, is not something negative in itself (and, as Foucault teaches us, unavoidable anyway[7]), yet it must be non-oppressive and open to critique. Rather than pursuing the (utopian) ideal of antiauthoritarian discourse I see discourse as a network of authority and critique, receiving and passing on[8].

Secondly, postmodernism stresses the important point that there is no such thing as a neutral, innocent reading[9]. Although this perception is right, it is not necessary to conclude that the reader creates the meaning and imposes it upon the text, which, in turn, does not have any distinctive meaning in itself. As I am going to show in this thesis,

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[5] THE BIBLE AND CULTURE COLLECTIVE; *The Postmodern Bible*, New Haven and London (Yale University Press) 1995, 130.

[6] Cf. below p.81.

[7] Cf. *The Postmodern Bible*, 140f.

[8] Cf. BAYER, Oswald; *Autorität und Kritik: Zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie;* Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) 1991, 1-8.

[9] Cf. *The Postmodern Bible*, 134f.

meaning is not created by the reader. Rather I propose a model of text and reader in which the text has its own meaning within its world. The reader approaches the text from his or her world and with his or her presuppositions, prejudices and expectations towards the subject matter and even towards the text itself. In the tension between interpreter and text understanding takes place and meaning is unveiled. Not one dominates the other, but understanding takes place in the dialogue between text and reader[10]. Oppressive reading, *eisegesis* is certainly possible, but if taken as a principle it demonstrates an unwillingness to accept the text's integrity and otherness.

This thesis, however, is not the place to discuss post-modern hermeneutics, for it is dedicated to the development and initial discussion of the hermeneutical concept of the *Struggle for Language*. Only when the hermeneutical approach proposed in this thesis is further developed, will it be fruitful to embark on a thorough discussion of postmodernism, which can, however, only take place in another, later study. Therefore, this preliminary and short addressing of some of the issues raised by post-modernism may be considered sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. It is, however, necessary to discuss the neo-Barthian approaches in more detail, for I am going to develop my hermeneutical approach to some degree in critical discussion with this stream of New Testament scholarship.

Neo-Barthian approaches to the New Testament represent a current in New Testament interpretation which is growing in interest and influence. Due to a certain frustration with historical-critical scholarship, these approaches prefer interpreting the final form of the New Testament to understanding it in its historical shape. The main representatives of the application of Barthian hermeneutics to biblical interpretation are, to my knowledge, Brevard S. Childs, Hans W. Frei, Walter Moberly and Francis Watson. All of them

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[10] Cf. below, p.77ff.

apply the hermeneutics of Karl Barth differently, yet their hermeneutical presupposi-
tions are similar. Therefore, it shall be sufficient to enter into a discussion with one rep-
resentative of neo-Barthian hermeneutics. I choose Francis Watson as partner in this
discussion, for he has delivered the most recent major work on the theological founda-
tion and methodology of this school of thought, interacting with and identifying the
shortcomings of his forebears, especially Hans W. Frei and Brevard S. Childs. Within
the framework of this introduction, I cannot enter into a comprehensive discussion of
Watson's approach to the New Testament, yet it is appropriate and necessary to address
some key-issues, which will set the background for the thesis I am proposing in this
work.

The frustration with historical-critical scholarship is mainly due to the perception that,
in historical-critical scholarship, the New Testament is used as a historical source rather
than as sacred scripture of Christianity[11]. Historical interpretation is seen as being com-
mitted to secularity rather than Christian faith[12], so that private faith convictions cannot
be made explicit in the theological discussion. 'A certain faith commitment [...] accom-
panies and motivates one's advocacy of the corresponding historical case; but the "faith
commitment" itself is construed as a deeply personal orientation which it would be im-
proper to parade in public.'[13] Therefore, although the private faith commitments are
governing the exegesis, 'the real theological concerns remain on the margin.'[14] This ap-
proach to biblical interpretation is rejected and replaced by an exegesis that takes seri-

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[11] Cf. WATSON, Francis; *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, Ed-
inburgh (T&T Clark) 1994, 2f and 46f.

[12] Ibid. 12.

[13] Ibid. 13.

[14] Ibid.

ously the Bible as a canon which belongs to the reading community of the Church, so that it has to be interpreted as canon and in the light of the creeds[15].

Watson's analysis of the state of New Testament scholarship is indeed very depressing. It certainly applies to the resurrected quest for the historical Jesus, which Watson sees an important opponent in the hermeneutical debate[16], yet, in my opinion, the rejection of these paradigms does not necessarily lead to 'theological exegesis'. There are other traditions of historical-critical scholarship which display a great sense of responsibility to the church. Rudolf Bultmann's demythologisation of the New Testament, for example, is controlled by his existentialist theology, and his hermeneutics were concerned to find truth relevant to the Church as well as to the individual believer. For instance, a statement like the famous 'In fact, *the radical demythologisation is paralleled by the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of the justification without works of the law by faith alone. Or rather: it is the consistent application in the realm of knowledge.'*[17] does not point at a lack of theological interest, although some scholars favouring 'theological exegesis' seem to overlook this element of his theology. Mary Cunningham, for example, assumes that Bultmann is a merely 'technical biblical scholar'[18]. The recent study by Harrisville and Sundberg spells out the theology behind the different historical critical approaches of exemplary New Testament scholars[19], which to neglect means to do injustice to critical biblical scholars. Francis Watson, however, has included a critical dis-

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[15] Ibid. 3-6.

[16] Ibid. 228f.

[17] BULTMANN, Rudolf; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 179-208, 207 (own translation, Bultmann's italics).

[18] CUNNINGHAM, Mary Kathleen; *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election*, Valley Forge (Trinity Press) 1995, 71.

[19] Cf. HARRISVILLE, Roy A. and SUNDBERG, Walter; *The Bible in modern culture: theology and historical-critical method from Spinoza to Käsemann*, Grand Rapids (Eerdmans) 1995. In fact, it is not possible to

cussion of Rudolf Bultmann's theological agenda in his most recent book *Text and Truth*[20], focusing on Bultmann's use of the Old Testament[21].

Although the particular topic Watson is addressing in his argument is not directly relevant to this thesis, it is nevertheless necessary that a new discussion between the Barthian and Bultmannian positions takes place again, for the original debate has never really come to a conclusion. Many questions remain still open, and it can only be fruitful in the theological arena to make the differences between the positions an issue once again. This thesis, having a different emphasis than Watson's recent monograph, is a contribution to the same discussion and attempts to make explicit the underlying different presuppositions of the two positions[22].

Another important point about the canonical readings of the New Testament is that these approaches apply a literary theory to the biblical text that is alien to it. Frei pro-

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speak of *the* historical-critical method for there are different approaches to the New Testament using historical-critical methods without a unifying paradigm.

[20] WATSON, Francis; *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*, Edinburgh (T&T Clark) 1997, 153-169.

[21] The terms Old Testament/New Testament in this study are not intended to diminish the significance of the scriptures here called the Old Testament as sacred scripture of the Jewish community. This study, however, is intended as a contribution to New Testament studies and is written from a Christian point of view and thus sees the Christian Bible with its two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament as its basis. Therefore it is appropriate and necessary to name the former 'Old Testament' in relation to the latter, the 'New Testament', because, in Christian theology, the Old Testament cannot be seen as an autonomous or closed work, but only in its dialectical relation to the New Testament. It is certainly legitimate to interpret the תורה נביאים וכתובים as a self-contained work, as the Jewish community does. Yet this approach to the תורה נביאים וכתובים implies different theological presuppositions than those of Christian theology. Therefore, the use of the term Old Testament does not imply any disrespect for the Jewish community, which regards the תורה נביאים וכתובים as their sacred scripture. The same applies to the chronological terms BC/AD. As this thesis is written in a Christian context, it is acceptable to use the Christian chronology. This does not indicate disrespect for other, non-Christian cultures and their chronologies.

[22] Cf. below, p.14f.

posed to interpret the New Testament as realistic narrative, a concept that is taken from eighteenth and nineteenth century novels[23]. Watson appropriates this concept critically and adopts it as 'intratextual realism'[24]. Yet this concept of realistic narrative is alien to an ancient text. It stems from modern (i.e. post-enlightenment) literary theory and thus does not do sufficient justice to ancient texts like those of the Bible. The aim behind this approach is, certainly, to take seriously the literary dimension of the Bible, which is, in fact, an important and necessary task. The Bible is not, however, a nineteenth century novel but a collection of ancient literature. Thus the devices for interpreting it must be chosen according to the nature of the literature, which in this case is ancient oriental and Hellenistic. To apply the methods of interpreting nineteenth century novels to the Bible is, as it were, like going to a dentist with a broken leg. In order to do justice to the New Testament we must understand it as literature within its contemporary environment, in which literature functioned quite differently from the way it does in modernity[25]. For example, in ancient literature it was common to take up traditional themes and motifs and transform them to give them a different meaning. Yet the traditional and the new form of the traditional material were seen together, and the tension which was intended in the composition and thus contained in the work was perceived. The Grammatician Aristophanes, director of the library of Alexandria (c.220 BC), e.g., notes in his preface to Sophocles' *Antigone* that, contrary to the version Sophocles presented, Euripides lets Antigone survive, be relieved from the tomb and marry Haimon[26]. In fact, the whole *Antigone* material is taken from the commonly known mythological tradition of ancient

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[23] Cf. WATSON, *Text, Church and World*, 21.

[24] Ibid. 224f.

[25] Modernity is used in a strictly temporal meaning, i.e. post-enlightenment.

[26] Cf. SOPHOKLES, *Dramen*, Greek and German (ed. By Wilhelm Willige), Zürich (Artemis & Winkler) 1995, 190. Euripides' *Antigone* is, apart from some fragments, lost. Therefore we have to trust the testimony of Aristophanes the Grammatician.

Greece, which was transformed by Sophokles as well as by Euripides. This was seen as so significant, that even some centuries later, in the end of the fourth century AD, the neo-Platonist Salustios finds it important to remark that there are different traditions about Antigone and her sister and includes this in his introduction to the drama[27]. This example demonstrates that traditions behind a text used to be recognised and played a role in understanding the text. The approach I am proposing in the present thesis will attempt to take seriously the New Testament as *ancient* literature while not applying other, alien concepts to the text.

Yet all these differences between Francis Watson's approach and that which is proposed in this thesis remain at the surface of the problem. Underneath lies a deeply rooted difference in the theories of language which are applied to the interpretation of the text and to theological language in general. That there must be a fundamental difference in the views as to how understanding functions can be seen in the outline and outcome of Watson's new work '*Text and Truth*'[28]. Watson and I follow a very similar pattern of interaction with Gadamer and Ricœur, yet arrive at opposite positions, Watson at a 'canonical' reading of the Bible, leading to a 'biblical theology' and I at a radically historical approach in the framework of a 'hermeneutical theology'. In his discussion of Gadamer and Ricœur Watson does not recognise that both of them do not support his general hermeneutical theory. For Gadamer, e.g., the process of distancing the text by understanding it within its historical context plays an important role. The reflections on the classical text, which Watson uses, needs to be seen in this framework and not isolated[29]. The same way, for Ricœur narrative is interpretation of reality (seen within the frame-

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[27] Ibid. 190-192.

[28] WATSON, Francis; *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*, Edinburgh (T&T Clark) 1997.

[29] Cf. below, p.75-83 and WATSON; *Text and Truth*, 49-54.

work of Heidegger's theory of language)[30]. Yet if we take seriously that the New Testament consists of a variety of narratives, e.g. four gospels, which then all interpret Christianity differently, then they must be interpreted bringing out their distinct meaning rather than harmonising them into the framework of a 'canonical' approach[31]. As it appears from my point of view, this contradiction can only be explained by drawing attention to fundamental hermeneutical differences, which will be explored in the first chapter of my thesis. In fact, the contemporary argument between continental, historical-critical theology and the growing 'canonical' approaches in the Anglo-Saxon context are prefigured by the argument between Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth.

Therefore, I begin the first main part of this thesis, in which I will develop a methodology for interpreting the New Testament as both, historical human document and Holy Scripture of Christianity, with the discussion of the fundamental differences between the hermeneutical approaches of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. In the first chapter 'A. Ἐν ἀρχῇ: Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann', I am establishing the implicit presuppositions, which lead Karl Barth to his 'theological' or 'christological' exegesis on the one hand, and Rudolf Bultmann to his 'existentialist' interpretation on the other. As we will see, Barth is building his hermeneutics upon the reformed *extra-Calvinisticum*, which is a christological statement of the reformed tradition, saying that the eternal and divine *logos* remains separated from the flesh and the flesh separated from the *logos* when the

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[30] RICŒUR, Paul; "Erzählung, Metapher und Interpretationstheorie" *ZTK* 84 (1987), 232-253, 232-239. Cf. also WATSON; *Text and Truth*, 54-57.

[31] In this context it may be worth remarking that Watson seems to see the Bible as one narrative, beginning in Gen. 1 with the creation and ending with the new Jerusalem in Rev. 22. Yet, especially after the hermeneutical considerations in his first Chapter 'The Gospels as Narrated History' (WATSON; *Text and Truth*, p. 33-69) this position seems hardly tenable. In fact, the Bible must be seen as a collection of individual narratives which are organised according to a meta-narrative, which can be seen as the history of salvation. Therefore, to see the meta-narrative as the narrative itself and not as the organising principle of

logos enters the flesh. Applied to biblical hermeneutics this implies that the Word of God remains separated from the human word and *vice versa*, i.e. human proclamation cannot contain the Word of God, it can only point at it[32]. Bultmann, on the other hand, implicitly affirms the hermeneutical implications of the Lutheran position, which affirms the *genus maiestaticum* of the *communicatio idiomatum*, i.e. that the divine attributes of Christ are also property of his human nature: For him the Word of God can be contained in the human words. After a critical discussion of this, in my opinion, main issue of the Barth-Bultmann debate and, in addition, the question of the part the interpreter's preunderstanding takes in understanding and that of Bultmann's 'existentialist' interpretation, I am going to prefer, on the grounds of this discussion, Rudolf Bultmann's approach over against Karl Barth's, yet only to embark on a critical evaluation of Bultmann's positions.

In the second chapter 'B. Rudolf Bultmann as Interpreter of John', I am discussing the hermeneutics of Rudolf Bultmann using his interpretation of John's Gospel as a test case. Bultmann, contrary to Barth, bases his hermeneutics on the catholic and Lutheran tradition, i.e. he rejects the *extra-Calvinisticum* and thus presupposes that the Word of God can be contained in the human words. Yet I identify two important deficiencies in his theory of language, which is that he believes that the meaning of a text can be separated from its actual language and expressed in some 'neutral' language, namely in that of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. In addition, Bultmann excludes a theological perception of the world from his theology and thus arrives at a theocentric personalism.

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individual narratives, which must be interpreted as such, confuses the categories and leads to the abandonment of the individual, distinct text and replacing it with a levelled, much shallower harmonisation.

[32] That all neo-Barthian hermeneutics are build on this presupposition, consciously or unconsciously, narrows down what the abstract 'church' is for neo-Barthian theologians: it is the Church in the reformed tradition, which is identified with the whole Church of Christ.

In this respect Bultmann did not follow the development of Heidegger's philosophy, for the latter later turned to a philosophy of language investigating this very matter.

Therefore, in the third chapter 'C. The long Path to Language', I am following the later Heidegger on his 'Way to Language' in order to establish the relation between language and meaning. In this part of my study, the so-called New Hermeneutics and Hans-Georg Gadamer will be partners in discussion. This section leads naturally to the question of the historicality of understanding, which is discussed next in this chapter, mainly referring to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The last stage on the path to language is the issue as to how language actually bears meaning. Here I am entering a conversation with Paul Ricœur in order to make his theory of metaphor and symbol fruitful for biblical interpretation. So it remains only to apply these insights to the interpretation of the New Testament, which takes place in the next section, where I am developing my view of the New Testament as *Struggle for Language*, i.e. the New Testament reflecting the attempts of early Christianity to develop a language through which it could understand and communicate the new faith. This approach to the New Testament will not separate the two essential aspects of its understanding, i.e. that it is a historical human document as well as the holy scripture of Christianity. This approach enables interaction with the New Testament on the basis of one's own tradition, yet it also facilitates the ecumenical and interdisciplinary discourse. It is meant to be an approach which takes account of the New Testament, today's church and the Christian tradition which connects both and enables a critical reflection of all three elements.

In the second main part of the thesis I am applying the methodology, which follows from the hermeneutical approach of the *Struggle for Language* to selected text from John's Gospel in order to demonstrate that this approach helps us to understand the New Testament doing justice to it being both, sacred scripture and historical, human

document. In the first chapter of the second part I am discussing various introductory questions in the light of the *Struggle for Language*, thus preparing the grounds for the actual exegesis of the following chapters. It is important to note that my interpretation of John's Gospel does not attempt to be an authoritative interpretation, but an example of the way in which my hermeneutical insights can be put into action. Therefore, disagreement, even fundamental disagreement, with the historical presuppositions of my exegesis does not affect the main point of my thesis, which is the general hermeneutics and the methodology following the concept of the *Struggle for Language* rather than new insights into John's Gospel. I should be happy if anyone were to find interesting insights in or interpretations of the Fourth Gospel in my work, yet this should not be much more than a bonus[33].

The first of the studies is the interpretation of the hymn underlying the prologue to John's Gospel. Here I am discussing issues of Johannine theology prior to the composition of the Gospel and identify the influences which lead to the foundation of Johannine Christianity. The second study contains an exegesis of the Nicodemus-discourse (John 3:1-21). In the course of these considerations I am highlighting the theology of the evangelist and the forces driving Johannine theology towards Gnosticism. In the third study I am discussing Jesus' final prayer in John 17 as an example of Johannine thought after the time of the evangelist and just before the 'gnostic crisis' of the Johannine church. In the course of these studies I am highlighting how the development of Johannine theology can be made fruitful for our present understanding of Christianity and thus for our participation in the Struggle for Langue.

Through these studies I am demonstrating that a consistently historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament does not exclude theological reflection. Rather, a general herme-

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[33] Cf. below, p.95ff.

neutical approach is necessary which unites the main theological disciplines, biblical studies, church-history, including history of doctrine, and contemporary theology in the endeavour to formulate and understand the ancient Christian faith in the contemporary environment. Yet this will not take shape in the ruling of theology over interpretation but in a consistently hermeneutical theology.

Part I.

Towards an Understanding

of Theological Language

A. Ἐν ἀρχῇ: Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann

It is rather a commonplace to say that since about the end of the first world war, the hermeneutical discussion in theology has been dominated by the debate between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. This debate, as well as the discussion of Bultmann's de-mythologisation-programme, has never really come to a conclusion. It just subsided in the late sixties, being eclipsed by other questions that were able to raise more interest[34]. Thus, the differences between these two theologians are far from being resolved. In literature they are often underestimated, for example by Werner Jeanrond, who suggests that the difference basically consists of merely beginning at different starting points, i.e. Barth starting *extra nos* and Bultmann *intra nos*[35]. It is also not furthering the discussion simply to describe Barth's hermeneutics as 'theological' or 'christocentric' as opposed to Bultmann merely being a 'technical biblical scholar'[36], which underestimates Bultmann's theological and Barth's historical interest. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the different presuppositions of their respective hermeneutical approaches, which bring about the different approaches, i.e. a 'christocentric' and an 'existentialist' exegesis. The commonly discussed differences are, in fact, only the surface of a deep-rooted disagreement. Behind the two theological approaches lie completely different epistemologies and understandings of the world. Therefore, Karl Barth is certainly right when he writes in 1952 that he did not believe that he and Bultmann could come to a mutual understanding in this life and that, therefore, those theologians who try to develop a viewpoint beyond Barth and Bultmann should be advised to travel one of the two paths

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[34] Cf. KÖRTNER, Ulrich; "Arbeit am Mythos? Zum Verhältnis von Christentum und mythischem Denken bei Rudolf Bultmann" *NZSTh* 34, 1992, 163-181, 164.

[35] Cf. JEANROND, Werner; *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and significance*, London (SCM) 1991, 135.

[36] CUNNINGHAM; *What is Theological Exegesis?* 71.

consistently to its end rather than to harmonise them[37]. It shall be the task of this section to elaborate these deep differences and, on the grounds of this discussion, to come to a decision in favour of one of the different types of theology offered.

Through the discussion of the differences between Barth's and Bultmann's hermeneutical views, fundamental insights important for the argument presented in this thesis will be brought out and a decision for one of the fundamental presuppositions will be made. Hence the purpose of this chapter is to highlight and to understand the key-issues which must ground every hermeneutical theory and which come out very clearly in the tension between the positions of these two scholars. So the agenda will be set for the further course of my investigations.

As I am going to demonstrate in the first section of this chapter, the differences between Barth and Bultmann are grounded in a completely different understanding of the task of theology and the Word of God. The basis of the disagreement has its parallel in the old argument about the *extra Calvinisticum*, the Lutheran-Calvinist argument about the relation of divinity and humanity, of the transcendent and the immanent[38], which also has important hermeneutical implications. Seeing the Barth-Bultmann debate in this framework, Karl Barth takes the side of the reformed tradition, so that his hermeneutics are based upon the Calvinist *finitum non est capax infiniti!*[39] Bultmann, on

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[37] Cf. BARTH, Karl; *Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen - Christus und Adam nach Röm. 5: Zwei theologische Studien*, Zürich (EVZ) [3/2(respectively)]1964, 5f. Both essays were written 1952; ibid.

[38] *Logos extra carnem, caro extra logon*: the *logos* remains separated from the flesh and the flesh separated from the *logos* when the *logos* enters the flesh. (Cf. PANNENBERG, Wolfgang; "Christologie II: Dogmengeschichtlich" in: *RGG³*, 1762-1777, 1774f.)

[39] "The finite cannot hold the infinite!" (ibid.) This implies that the Word of God remains separated from the human words, and *vice versa*, i.e. human proclamation cannot contain the Word of God, it can only point at it.

the other hand, counters with the Lutheran *finitum capax infiniti!*[40] The discussion between Barth and Bultmann has, implicitly, this fundamental disagreement as its basis, which also accounts for Barth's and Bultmann's inability to understand each other[41].

In the light of this fundamental insight, I am going to discuss two other hermeneutical disagreements between Barth and Bultmann, first the question of the relevance preunderstanding has for understanding and, second, the implications of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation in the light of Karl Barth's criticism that Bultmann was dissolving theology into anthropology.

These three points will highlight the differences between Barth and Bultmann sufficiently, so that on these grounds a decision can be made for one of the two hermeneutical approaches, namely Rudolf Bultmann's, yet only to embark on a discussion and criticism of Bultmann's position in the next chapter. In this chapter Karl Barth's thought will be discussed in more detail than Rudolf Bultmann's, because the following chapter will focus on Rudolf Bultmann's theology and discuss it thoroughly. Hence I can restrict myself to highlighting those points of Rudolf Bultmann's thought that are necessary for the discussion with Karl Barth.

In order to highlight the differences between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, I am focusing on the writings in which the two theologians refer directly to each other, i.e. in particular their correspondence and Karl Barth's writing '*Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen*', to which Bultmann never replied in public but only in a

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[40] "The finite can hold the infinite!" (ibid.) The human proclamation of the Word of God can actually contain the Word of God itself.

[41] It seems indeed that Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann did not understand each other's hermeneutical aproaches, since they worked on the grounds of completely different epistemologies. Cf. below p.40, '4. Beyond Barth and Bultmann?'.

personal letter[42]. Yet for a full understanding of their respective positions it is certainly necessary to use other publications of theirs as well.

1. Deus dixit: Word of God and Scripture

a) Fides quaerens intellectum

Before I discuss the fundamental differences between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, it is necessary to highlight an important feature common to them both. Both agree on the presupposition that theology is essentially Christian and that the interpreter has to be part of the Church, i.e. the community of faith.

Karl Barth describes the relation between faith in theology through Anselm of Canterbury's phrase 'fides quaerens intellectum'. For him, the presupposition of all theology is Christian faith[43], having its source in the 'Word of Christ', which is indirectly identical with its reflection, particularly in the Bible[44]. Thus, the question of an external legitimisation of the revelation is entirely irrelevant; revelation as the source of all theology has to be acknowledged as the inner necessity of theology[45]. Deus dixit, 'God has spoken', as a fact, is the starting point of Barth's theology[46], which has to be accepted by the theologian and the biblical interpreter in order to be admitted to theological discourse. Thus, theology is only a task of the Church, and it takes place only within the Church.

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[42] BARTH, Karl - BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Briefwechsel 1922-1966* (ed. by Bernd Jaspert), Karl Barth, Gesamtausgabe, V. Briefe, vol. 1, Zürich (TVZ) 1971, 169-195

[43] Cf. BARTH, Karl; *Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenhang seines theologischen Programms* (ed. by E. Jüngel and I.U. Dalferth), Karl Barth, Gesamtausgabe, II. Akademische Werke, 1931, Zürich (TVZ) 1981, 25f and BARTH, Karl; *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, Zürich (TVZ) ³1985, 112-115.

[44] Cf. BARTH; *Fides quaerens intellectum*, 20-22.

[45] Cf. BAYER, Oswald; *Theologie*, Handbuch Systematischer Theologie Vol.1, Gütersloh (Gütersloher Verlagshaus) 1994, 324f. Cf. also HUNSINGER, George; *How to read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology*, New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1991, 49-64.

Since theology is, for Karl Barth, a task only of the Christian Church, and presupposes Christian faith, there are important implications for his understanding of scripture. For Barth, the Bible is an authority which exists over against the Church[47]. This authority of the Bible does not need to and cannot be justified by the Church since the Church is founded upon the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ. In fact, the Christian Church is the Christian Church only because she has accepted the Bible's witness to Jesus Christ, and therefore the Bible 'imposes itself' as normative upon the Church[48], as Barth repeatedly insists. There is no means of going beyond this authority of the Bible for it is self-evident for the Christian Church. Any attempt to question beyond the Bible's authority would inescapably lead to the Church's dialogue with herself. Barth sees this authority of the Bible also covering the biblical canon. For him, the Bible has 'imposed itself' as canon upon the Church, therefore it 'constitutes itself' the canon. The Church 'can only register this event as such, as the reality in which the Church is the Church'[49].

For Bultmann, as for Barth, the Bible is the source of divine revelation and has to be accepted as that by the interpreter. Bultmann's presupposition is that to understand the Bible means to understand its message as questioning oneself[50]. In this context the Bible is understood as Word of God by the interpreter, it is a force that speaks into today's human existence and demands a decision either to accept or reject it.[51]. The guiding question of the interpretation is that regarding God and his revelation[52]. As Word of

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[46] BAYER, *Theologie*, 322.

[47] Cf. BARTH; KD1/1, 108-110.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Cf. BARTH; KD 1/1, 110.

[50] Cf. BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 11. Cf. Also Rudolf Bultmann's response in BARTH, Karl - BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Briefwechsel 1922-1966*, 173.

[51] BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Das Problem der Hermeneutik*, 233.

[52] Ibid.

God and Church belong intrinsically together[53], theology is a task that takes place in the realm of the Church. Even the debate about his concept of demythologisation is, for Bultmann, a discussion that takes place within the Church, although it is also intended to function as a catalyst for interdisciplinary discourse[54].

Here, a main point of Barth and Bultmann's disagreement already becomes discernible. For Barth the presupposition of theology is that God *has spoken*, and has revealed himself once for all, which is reflected in the Bible, whereas for Bultmann God *speaks* through the Bible and addresses the reader or hearer. In order to find the fundamental differences between Barth's and Bultmann's thought, their understanding of the Word of God has to be discussed here.

b) Logos extra carnem?

In short, Karl Barth sees the Word of God *behind* scripture, while Rudolf Bultmann finds it *in* scripture. For Karl Barth, on the one hand, the Word of God is absolutely transcendent, so that human language is incapable of referring to God or to the Word of God directly[55]. Thus, the Word of God is the 'Word in the words'[56] of the biblical text, to which the interpreter has to reach through the text in order to understand. The Bible is one of the three forms of the Word of God, i.e. revelation, scripture and the Church's proclamation. Yet the three forms are only 'mirror images' (*Spiegelbilder*) of the one Word of God[57], which cannot be expressed in human words. The relation between the human images of the word of God and the Word of God itself is that of sim-

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[53] Cf. BULTMANN, Rudolf; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 206. Cf. Also SCHMITHALS, Walter; *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, London (SCM) 1968, 225.

[54] BULTMANN, Rudolf; "Zu J. Schniewinds Thesen" *K&M* I, 122-138, 138.

[55] Cf. HUNSINGER, *How to read Karl Barth*, 43.

[56] BARTH, Karl; *Der Römerbrief*, Zürich (TVZ) [15]1989, XIX.

[57] Cf. BARTH; KD1/1 136 and *Einführung*, 41.

ile (*Gleichnis*) rather than of equation (*Gleichung*)[58]. Consequently, for Karl Barth there is an 'indirect identity'[59] between the Word of God and scripture.

For Rudolf Bultmann, on the other hand, the Word of God is present in the human language of the Bible. He sees the divine *logos* manifest in the external human word, in the proclamation of the Apostles, in the holy Scriptures and carried on in the Church's proclamation of Christ[60]: 'A human being like me speaks the Word of God to me; in him the *logos* is incarnate.'[61] For Bultmann, the Word of God is present in the *verbum externum*, the actually spoken or written human word, in which a human being encounters God[62]. The Word of God, however, cannot be identified with the New Testament, and yet it is present within it: 'It is misleading if, in the discussion of methodological problems of New Testament hermeneutics, the New Testament and the Word of God are identified. Word of God is present in the human word, and the New Testament is available as a literary document of history. [...] That it is the Word of God can only be seen in the event of believing understanding.'[63]

Already in this very short description of the two different positions it has become apparent that fundamental differences are at work here. Either the reader or hearer finds the Word of God behind the words of scripture or one finds himself or herself addressed by the Word of God through the human word of scripture. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these respective positions, it is appropriate to investigate Karl Barth's and Rudolf Bultmann's view of the Word of God.

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[58] Cf. BARTH, *Einführung*, 152.

[59] Cf. BARTH; KD 1/2, 545.

[60] Cf. BULTMANN; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 206.

[61] Ibid. fn.1

[62] Ibid. 204. Cf also SCHMITHALS; *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 222f.

[63] Bultmann in BARTH - BULTMANN; *Briefwechsel*, 188.

For Karl Barth, the Word of God is God's revelation in his acting with Israel and in Jesus Christ and is testified in the biblical scriptures. This testimony of scripture is not a monotony but a polyphony, which corresponds to the variety within God's word itself[64]. The Word of God is the one unfathomable truth, which is reflected in various ways in the Bible, and so through the manifold testimony of the scriptures the interpreter may come to a knowledge of the unfathomable mystery of God[65], which is the one Word behind the multitude of words. Therefore, the aim of theology is 'knowledge of the "eternally rich" God, his one secret in the overflowing fullness of his counsels, his ways and judgements.'[66]

In order to achieve knowledge of God through the reading of the biblical scriptures, the interpreter has to read the texts in the spirit of obedience and with a willingness to understand[67]. Then the meaning of the text, i.e. the Word of God, will disclose itself to the reader. Through the text the interpreter will understand the subject matter as well as the author did, with the result that the reader almost forgets that he or she is not the author her- or himself. Eventually, the interpreter is wrestling with the subject matter itself, which in the case of the New Testament is the Word of God rather than only with its document[68]. Thus, true theology begins where the letter of the text ends[69], in the self-disclosure of God through the Holy Spirit[70].

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[64] Cf. BARTH, *Einführung*, 42.

[65] Ibid. 42f.

[66] Ibid. 43.

[67] BARTH, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 12f.

[68] BARTH, *Römerbrief*, XIX, and *Einführung*, 41. Cf. also the discussion of Barth's 'internal reconstruction' in BAYER, *Theologie*, 332-335.

[69] BARTH, *Römerbrief*, XXIXf, more clearly in *Fides quaerens intellectum*, 29f, 41f.

[70] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 328-334.

For Rudolf Bultmann, on the other hand, the Word of God is intrinsically an address. Through the saving event, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which has happened once for all, God has addressed humanity and opened the possibility of living in faith. This saving event is present in the external word, in its proclamation[71]. Where Jesus Christ is proclaimed, the saving event is present, because through this proclamation the possibility of faith is opened. So we can say that in the proclamation of Jesus Christ humanity encounters God. 'We encounter God in his word'[72], and the word of God is *verbum externum*[73]. The Word of God is present in the *kerygma*, the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Since the Bible, i.e. for Bultmann the New Testament in particular, is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the risen Lord, the Word of God is present in the human words of scripture, though hidden[74]. Thus the Word of God, God himself, is addressing the reader or hearer through the words of the New Testament. The Word of God is, for Bultmann, the Word *in* the words, as opposed to Karl Barth, for whom the Word of God is to be found *behind* the words. Consequently, Bultmann's aim is to understand the New Testament in a way that the kerygmatic address is brought out, so that the text becomes meaningful to the hearer or reader. Interpreting the New Testament, his ultimate aim is to preach the text and to continue the proclamation of Christ, in order to call the hearer to faith.

For Bultmann the theologian should not be much interested in who God is *per se*, but how he acts and deals with humanity. He is not at all interested in the mystery of God, which Barth is keen to explore[75]. In this respect, Bultmann is in line with the traditional Lutheran position which was well expressed by Philipp Melanchthon in the introduction

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[71] BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Theologie des Neuen Testamentes*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) ^{9}1984, 309

[72] BULTMANN; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 204

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid. 200.

to his first edition of the *Loci Communes*: '*Mysteria divinitatis rectius adoraverimus quam vestigaverimus*[76]. As Bultmann is mainly interested in God addressing humankind through his Word, Bultmann's position can also be described with Melanchthon's '*Hoc est Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere.*[77] Martin Luther makes the same point when he states that the subject of theology is not God in himself, but the relation between human being and God: '*Subiectum Theologiae homo reus et perditus et deus iustificans vel salvator.*[78] Theology is, for Bultmann, about God's word to humankind, about his acting with humankind and not about God himself. Thus, his theology is about the proper understanding of God's address and therefore pertains primarily to making the kerygma within scripture speak and its address audible. Theology is subservient to biblical interpretation; its function is only to help one understand the biblical texts properly and to bring about an encounter with God's word in scripture. Bultmann's theology is grammar of sacred scripture[79], whereas Karl Barth's theology is knowledge of the divine mystery.

Within the framework of this thesis it is not possible to engage in a comprehensive discussion of the positions of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. It is sufficient, however, to evaluate the two approaches and come to a decision. Thus, on the grounds of the above discussion, I shall take Rudolf Bultmann's understanding of scripture as a basis for the

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[75] Cf. above, p.27.

[76] 'The mysteries of the divinity we should rather adore than explore.' MELANCHTHON, Philipp; *Loci Communes, 1521*, Latin and German, ed. Lutherisches Kirchenamt der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands, transl. and annnotaded by H.G. Pöhlmann, Gütersloh (Mohn) 1993, 0.6., p.19.

[77] 'To know Christ means to know his benefits.' MELANCHTHON, Philipp; *Loci Communes*, 0.13., p.23. Barth has seen this parallel between Melanchthon and Bultmann, cf. *Rudof Bultmann*, 18.

[78] 'The subject of theology is the human being, guilty and lost, and the justifying and saving God.' LUTHER, Martin, WA 40 II, 328,1f.

[79] This concept of theology goes back to the Lutheran reformation. For Luther cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 123-126. Cf. also Melanchthon *Loci Communes*, W 4+5, 11+12. pp.13-17.

further course of my investigation. The main problem in Karl Barth's hermeneutical theory is in his insistence on the *diastase*, the absolute separation of transcendence and immanence, the *distinctio metaphysica*. This implies for Barth that the meaning of a text is transcendent, so that it cannot be *in* the text, but it must be *behind* the text, since for Barth *finitum non est capax infinitum*[80]. The meaning of the text cannot be said in words, for it is behind the words, which only reflect the meaning like a mirror-image. If the text is read with the willingness to understand and in the spirit of obedience, the subject of the text will disclose itself to the reader. Thus, the Word of God, which is only reflected (rather than contained) in the text, discloses itself to the faithful and obedient reader or hearer. In my opinion, Karl Barth's understanding of meaning and text, or, as in our case, Word of God and biblical text, is in danger of pneumatism. Understanding the New Testament is not at all an issue for Karl Barth, for he sees the Biblical text only as a vehicle for the self- disclosure of the true meaning of the text, the Word of God through the Spirit. Although Karl Barth believes that his hermeneutical principles

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[80] Cf. Bruce McCormack's analysis of Karl Barth's epistemology: For Barth, revelation is an entirely 'un-historical' event (cf. MCCORMACK, Bruce L.: *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, Oxford (Claredon) 1995, 251), i.e. for him the new world opened up through revelation touches the old without extension in historical time, like a tangent touches a circle (ibid. 253, cf. BARTH, *Römerbrief*, 6). The point of contact between the new world and the old is, for Barth, only the resurrection. Revelation of the new world, i.e. the resurrection, is not really part of history, but a 'suprahistorical' event. Bultmann, on the other hand, sees revelation happen in history, it is part of it. The relation between the new world (or revelation) and the old can be understood according to the model of two circles. For Barth, the circle of the new world just touches that of the old world (the point of contact is the crucifixion), whereas for Bultmann they overlap:
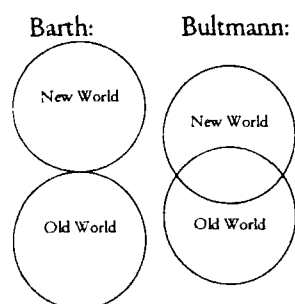
Barth: Bultmann:

This understanding of the relation between the new world and the old is paralleled by that of the two natures of Christ in Antiochenian understanding (Karl Barth) and the Cyrillian-Alexandrian (Bultmann), which reflects the argument about the extra-Calvinisticum. Cf. PÖHLMANN, Horst Georg, *Abriß der Dogmatik: Ein Kompendium*, Gütersloh (Mohn) [5]1990; 219, 224f.

are drawn from scripture[81], this hermeneutical principle is strongly influenced by Idealist philosophy. The notion of the self-disclosure of the subject matter is, in the way Barth uses it, deeply influenced by the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel[82]. Barth, however, does not reflect on his philosophical presuppositions but accuses Bultmann of being influenced by a certain philosophy. Here, Karl Barth's thought is lacking self-reflection and therefore becomes inconsistent.

In my opinion, Rudolf Bultmann's view of Word of God and biblical text is to be preferred. Bultmann does not separate the two elements, meaning and text, Word of God and *verbum externum*, but he holds them together. For Bultmann, the Word of God is in the text; it is in paradoxical identity with the text; i.e. the Word of God, which is essentially address, addresses the hearer through the human proclamation of the *kerygma*. In this respect the Word of God, the Gospel, is a *viva vox*, for it is present in the proclamation. The immanent text may contain the transcendent Word of God, *finitum capax infinitum*. Thus for Bultmann the understanding of the text itself has priority over the understanding of what is behind the text. He does not distinguish between the immanent text and its transcendent meaning.

The notion of the subject matter being in paradoxical identity with the text is, in fact, a strong safeguard against postmodernist criticism of other views of reference and meaning, like Karl Barth's[83]. If the meaning of the text lies behind the words of the text, as Karl Barth assumes, then the hermeneutical approach is open to postmodernist criticism which separates the text from what it refers to. Thus, I prefer Rudolf Bultmann's her-

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[81] BARTH, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 57.

[82] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 328-335.

[83] Cf. above, p.5.

meneutical approach to Karl Barth's, for the former avoids the difficulties arising from the latter's theory of language[84].

Because of his seeing the Word of God in the text, Rudolf Bultmann's aim is to make the text itself speak, so he is able to see the particularity of each text. Bultmann wants to bring out what is in the text; his interpretation is *exegesis* in the literal meaning of the word[85]. Karl Barth, on the other hand, by giving priority to the Word of God behind the text, is in constant danger of practising *eisegesis*, for he can read theological meaning into an individual text which is not there[86]. Knowledge of God rules over against understanding the text.

In addition, for Karl Barth the Bible and the Church form a closed circle. The Church accepts the authority of the Bible without questioning; the Bible is, in turn, the only document of the Word of God on which the Church is founded. Thus, no adequate understanding of the biblical text is possible without the willingness to understand the Word of God behind the biblical text and without faith in the Trinitarian God. Any interdisciplinary dialogue about biblical interpretation is impossible. For Bultmann, on the other hand, the text can be understood without faith, for it is, being an address, a call to faith. The text has to be understood as a historical human writing, and thus the secular methods for interpreting historical texts have to be applied. Therefore, it is possible to enter a dialogue about biblical interpretation with other academic disciplines and other faiths.

Giving the advantage of Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutical approach over against Karl Barth's, I will have to engage in a more detailed discussion and criticism of Bultmann's

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[84] Cf. above, 5f.

[85] As a detailed discussion of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation will follow in the next chapter, this claim does not have to be verified here. Cf. below, p. 48-54.

[86] Cf. Bultmann in BARTH - BULTMANN; *Briefwechsel*, 161-163.

position in the next chapter. For the purpose of this chapter, however, this concise discussion of the two positions shall have to be sufficient. Yet before I engage in the discussion and criticism of Bultmann's hermeneutical theory, I have to discuss two more disagreements between Barth and Bultmann, namely the question of the significance of preunderstanding and that of the validity of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation.

2. Preunderstanding or Prejudice?

A major point of disagreement between Barth and Bultmann is the significance of preunderstanding for understanding the New Testament and for understanding in general. For Rudolf Bultmann a preunderstanding of the subject matter is essential[87]. Karl Barth, on the other hand, sees recognising the preunderstanding of the subject matter as an obstacle to understanding and as an expression of unwillingness to understand[88]. This important disagreement between the two scholars seems to be rooted in the fundamental difference in their concepts of Word of God.

As I have shown in the previous section of this chapter, Karl Barth views the Word of God as absolutely transcendent and therefore beyond the words of scripture. As the Word of God is totally different from any worldly words, there cannot be any preunderstanding of the Word of God[89]. The Bible is for Barth the mirror image of the Word of God, the human 'document' pointing at the subject matter[90]. The Word of God itself then is, for Karl Barth, totally different from all human words; God's revelation happens 'straight from above'[91]. Thus, it is impossible for humankind to know anything about

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[87] Cf. BULTMANN; "Das Problem der Hermeneutik" in: *Glauben und Verstehen* vol. 2, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [6]1993, p. 211-235227-235.

[88] Cf. BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 56-60.

[89] Ibid.

[90] BARTH, *Römerbrief*, XIX.

[91] KD I/1, 348.

God and his Word before having encountered it. The biblical texts are, obviously, written in human words. These point at the divine revelation, through them the interpreter comes to understand the Word of God. As the texts, however, deal with something of which no preunderstanding is possible, it is not fruitful for exegesis to have a preunderstanding of the subject matter of the text. If the texts are interpreted in the spirit of obedience, the subject matter, i.e. the Word of God, will disclose itself to the interpreter through the text. In discussion with Bultmann, Barth stated:

> 'Would it not be better [...] to make great effort to be relaxed towards the text and to wait whether and how one will understand practically and factually (and thus will be able to understand) or, alternatively, will not understand (and thus will not be able to understand)? Rather than to take what one considers one's own ability to understand as catalyst for the New Testament text, to let the New Testament text be the catalyst of one's own understanding? Rather than to aim at an understanding of the text within the framework of one's own, supposedly authoritative self-understanding, to understand oneself the way one finds oneself understood by the text in order to understand the text better and better from the basis of this new self-understanding?'[92]

For Rudolf Bultmann, on the other hand, the subject matter of the text, the Word of God, is not *behind* the text but *in* the text. The Word of God as *verbum externum* speaks through the human words of the text and calls the reader or hearer to faith in Christ. As the Word of God is present in the human words, the human words have to be interpreted as such, i.e. with all the methods necessary to understand human utterings. Thus, it has to be the basis of interpretation that the human authors of the New Testament had a certain understanding of the subject matter, i.e. human existence and God, before they encountered the *kerygma*. Through their faith their previous understanding of the subject matter was transformed, yet they used their old language in a transformed way to express the *kerygma*. Therefore, as Bultmann himself puts it very pointedly: 'The main task of exegesis is to identify the ways of talking which are possible

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[92] BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 57 (own translation).

for the author within the tradition in which he finds himself."[93] The same is true for today's interpreter. For Bultmann, everybody has an understanding of human existence and divinity, although it may be different from that of Christian faith. Through encountering the *kerygma*, a possibility of a completely new understanding of human existence and divinity is opened, so the understanding of human existence and divinity is radically changed. Without having a concept of human existence or divinity at all, there would not be anything that could be transformed. Thus preunderstanding is necessary for understanding[94], but it does not presuppose the outcome of the interpretation, for openness to have one's own preunderstanding transformed is a prerequisite of interpretation[95].

This theory of understanding has the important advantage over against Barth's perception, that it anticipates an important criticism postmodernism has brought forward against the, in the Anglo-Saxon environment predominant, Barthian hermeneutics. Bultmann already sees that understanding without presuppositions is impossible. He acknowledges the part presuppositions and a pre-understanding of the subject matter play in the process of understanding. Barth, on the other hand, believes that the interpreter should make himself free of prejudices in order to understand the text in the spirit of obedience and faith. Exactly this attitude is criticised by postmodernist interpreters, who assert that there is no such thing as an innocent reading[96], but that it is always influenced by the reader's point of view. Bultmann, anticipating this criticism, avoids the drastic conclusion to which postmodernist interpreters come, i.e. that the

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[93] Cf. BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Vol. 2, Göttingen [21]1986, 6 (own translation).

[94] Cf. BULTMANN; "Das Problem der Hermeneutik" 227-235.

[95] Ibid. 230.

[96] Cf. *The Postmodern Bible*, 134f.

meaning of the text is actually created by the reader[97]. Bultmann sees the reader approaching the text with a certain understanding of the subject matter and what actually the subject matter of the text will be, yet this is through the encounter with the, in itself meaningful text, transformed and thus understanding happens between text and interpreter[98]. In this respect Bultmann's hermeneutical theory provides an important starting point for the discussion with post-modernism. There are, however, as we will see in the following chapter, important shortcomings in his theory of language, which need to be discussed critically and improved. Yet the general approach of Rudolf Bultmann has the important advantage over against Karl Barth that it anticipates post-modern criticism and provides a basis for responding without having to take a post-modern stance.

Another important factor in Karl Barth's disagreement with Rudolf Bultmann seems to be Barth's identification of preunderstanding with prejudice[99]. What Karl Barth does not appreciate in Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutics is that for Bultmann the self-understanding and preunderstanding of the interpreter is not authoritative. For Bultmann it is impossible to understand a text without any presupposition of the subject matter. This preunderstanding is, in the course of the interpretation, transformed and a new understanding of the subject matter is possible and, in fact, the aim of interpretation[100]. For Karl Barth, on the other hand, every preunderstanding of the subject matter of the text has to be abandoned, and the text has to be listened to with openness, so the text will say and disclose to the reader (or hearer) the subject matter. Every supposition about the subject matter of the text is then, for Barth, a serious obstacle on the way to understanding.

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[97] Ibid. 52-54.

[98] Cf. BULTMANN; "Das Problem der Hermeneutik" 227-235.

[99] BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 58-60.

[100] Cf. Bultmann in BARTH - BULTMANN; *Briefwechsel*, 188-190.

To sum up, for Karl Barth understanding consists of the self-disclosure of the subject matter of the text (*Die Sache des Textes*), whereas understanding for Rudolf Bultmann is to have one's own preunderstanding of the subject matter of the text transformed through encountering the possibility of understanding the subject matter which the text offers. Again, Bultmann's approach to human understanding seems to be more plausible to me than Barth's. Bultmann takes seriously the conditions of human understanding and the fact that the meaning of a text is *in* the text and not *behind* the text. Karl Barth, on the other hand, relies on the self-disclosure of the sovereign subject matter of the text. As I cannot share these presuppositions of Karl Barth's hermeneutics, which are strongly influenced by Idealist philosophy[101], I shall base my further investigations on Bultmann's perception the preunderstanding's part in understanding.

3. Anthropology or Existentialist Interpretation?

The third major difference between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann to be discussed here is the question of the legitimacy of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation. Karl Barth assumes that the existentialist interpretation, as Bultmann proposes, is in fact anthropology. Barth states that for Bultmann '[...] anthropology, or rather anthropology structured thus [i.e. by Heidegger's existentialist philosophy], is the subject matter of the New Testament!'[102] Hence, for Barth Bultmann reduces theological and biblical statements to statements about the inner life of the human being[103]. Against this criticism Bultmann insists that he does not talk just of human consciousness when he uses the term self-understanding, but of *existential* understanding[104], which is an essential part of Bultmann's epistemology. In short, for Bultmann a perception or knowledge is only

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[101] Cf. BAYER; *Theologie*, 328-335 and below, p.39.

[102] BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 45.

[103] KD III/2, 534f.

meaningful if it means something in the human being's life, if there is a life-relationship to the matter[105]. Just to assume that something is true does not constitute authentic understanding. Authentic understanding only takes place in action, by making something a part of the human self-understanding, by having a life-relationship to something[106]. Thus, in order to understand a text, it is necessary to understand what possibilities of human existence are opened by the text. For example, a biblical text offers a particular understanding of the world, seeing the world in relation to God and oneself addressed by God through Jesus Christ etc. It is not the aim of understanding just to know what the biblical text says and to assume that it is true, but to have understood the possibilities of human life which derive from this knowledge and either to accept this understanding of human existence and live according to it or to reject it.

For Karl Barth, understanding takes place on a cognitive level[107]. The interpreter leaves the text behind, is able to deal with the subject matter of the text, in this case the Word of God, directly rather than merely struggling to understand its human document. Eventually, Karl Barth deals with immediate knowledge of the subject matter. The Word of God thinks itself in the mind of the theologian[108]. Based on this epistemology, Karl Barth cannot admit that theological statements have to be a part of human self-understanding. Rather, the theologian is drawn into the self-understanding of divinity, he or she deals with the absoluteness of divinity. For Karl Barth, knowledge of the *mysteria divinitatis[109]* is the aim of theology, not the dialectics of the *homo reus et perditus* and the *deus iustificans vel salvator*. The subject matter of the biblical text is,

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[104] Cf. BULTMANN; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 201.

[105] Cf. SCHMITHALS; *Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 235-237.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 328-335.

[108] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 325f..

[109] Cf. above p.27.

for Barth, the divine mysteries, which are totally different from everything humanity can know. Thus, a preunderstanding of the subject matter is impossible, so that reflecting the preunderstanding of the subject matter leads to incapability to understand the qualitatively different Word of God.

Karl Barth is, in my opinion, wrong, when he accuses Bultmann of having made a certain philosophy ruler over his theology[110]. It is true that Bultmann uses Heidegger's existentialist philosophy as a hermeneutical key to the New Testament, yet, as discussed above, Karl Barth shows himself not to be sufficiently aware of his own philosophical and epistemological presuppositions[111]. Although Karl Barth believes that his hermeneutical principles are drawn from scripture[112], his hermeneutical principles are strongly influenced by Idealist philosophy. As we have seen, the notion of the self-disclosure of the subject matter is, in the way Barth uses it, deeply influenced by the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel[113]. Barth, however, does not reflect his philosophical presuppositions but accuses Bultmann of being influenced by a certain philosophy. Here, Karl Barth's thought lacks adequate self-reflection and is therefore inconsistent.

This is not to say that philosophical presuppositions are generally wrong in theology. On the contrary, there is no such thing as a theology without influences of philosophy; e.g. all hermeneutical theories used in theology are influenced by or drawn from philosophical discourse. It is, however, necessary to reflect philosophical presuppositions, lay them open and expose them to discussion in order to enable theological discourse and understanding within the scholarly community.[114]

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[110] Cf. BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 44f.

[111] Cf. above, p. 31, 34, 37.

[112] Cf. BARTH; *Rudolf Bultmann*, 57.

[113] Cf. above, p. 31.

[114] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 335.

4. Beyond Barth and Bultmann?

In the end, the question remains whether it is possible to find a synthesis between Barth and Bultmann and to overcome their controversy[115]. After the previous considerations, I assume that it is not possible to find a theology beyond the controversy between Barth and Bultmann. These two scholars approach theology as a whole and the New Testament in particular with completely different epistemologies and work with different conceptions of the subject of theology and the Word of God.

Karl Barth liked to use the picture of the whale and the elephant for Bultmann's and his own attempts to understand each other[116]. Being biggest animals of their realm, they happen to meet at the coast and try to communicate. Although they try every kind of gesture to make themselves understood, they are lacking the key to mutual understanding, and therefore communication between them is impossible. This analogy does, in my opinion, not apply exactly. It is true that Barth and Bultmann could not come to an agreement in hermeneutical issues, but they could have been able to understand the difference in their thought. This chance was missed for various reasons, one of which is Karl Barth's lack of reflection on his philosophical presuppositions. Thus the task of a critical discussion of the Barth-Bultmann debate is to find out the root of the differences between them, to evaluate them critically, on those grounds to take sides with one of the two approaches and follow it consistently. Through this investigation some fundamental issues of hermeneutical theory have been discussed and the agenda is set for the further direction of the argument presented in this thesis.

Having considered both positions in this chapter and taken sides with Rudolf Bultmann, it is, however, necessary to embark on a critical discussion of Rudolf Bultmann's her-

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[115] Cf. JEANROND, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 148f. Jeanrond sees the 'New Hermeneutics' as a development beyond Barth and Bultmann.

meneutical theory in the next chapter of this thesis. This discussion will lead us to a

better understanding of the issues and problems of his hermeneutical theory, so that the

hermeneutical investigation can move beyond Bultmann and discuss the role language

plays in human understanding.

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116 Cf. Barth in BARTH - BULTMANN; *Briefwechsel*, 196.

B. Rudolf Bultmann as Interpreter of John

In the previous chapter the fundamentally different presuppositions at work in the hermeneutical approaches of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann have been established. After a critical discussion of both positions I have taken sides with Rudolf Bultmann, yet only to embark on a critical discussion of his hermeneutic theory.

Through his main works, the great commentary on John's Gospel and the Theology of the New Testament, Rudolf Bultmann profoundly influenced the study of the New Testament and of John's Gospel in particular. As Bultmann's hermeneutical principles can be seen at work in his exegetical work, an investigation into his practical exegesis in connection with an analysis of his hermeneutical principles will enable us to understand Rudolf Bultmann's approach to the New Testament deeper and to evaluate it critically.

This investigation into Bultmann's interpretation of John is divided into two main parts. The first section focuses on the hermeneutical foundation of Bultmann's understanding of the New Testament. Here the main principles of the existentialist interpretation will be discussed and evaluated. In the second part I shall discuss Bultmann's interpretation of John's Gospel; at first I will attempt to establish how Bultmann deals with the questions of introduction and secondly how he approaches the actual interpretation of the text. In the course of this discussion, I shall avoid dealing with issues which are not typical of Bultmann's work and concentrate instead on his achievements and special contributions. In order to do so I will focus on Bultmann's way of interpreting John's Gospel by examining exemplary exegeses of particular texts, as this seems to me to be the most suitable way to explain the results of my efforts to understand Rudolf Bultmann. Generally, the discussion of general and specific questions will take place when the issue is raised.

Nevertheless, I will not discuss the individual insights of Bultmann's exegesis and his particular historical findings in this chapter, since it is obvious that New Testament scholarship has gained a greater knowledge of the historical and philological issues involved since his day and therefore some of Bultmann's findings are merely outdated. In any case a discussion of these issues is not relevant for my attempts to find a way to understand the New Testament based on the presuppositions outlined in the previous chapter. Therefore, I shall only discuss the hermeneutical and methodological issues, because these indeed can contribute to exegesis today.

1. Hermeneutical Foundation

a) Preunderstanding (Vorverständnis)

Bultmann's notion on the importance of preunderstanding (*Vorverständnis*) for the interpretation of the New Testament has briefly been introduced in the previous chapter[117]. This discussion, however, has to be continued more in depth than in the previous chapter, where the focus of the argument was the comparison of Bultmann's thought with that of Karl Barth. In Bultmann's hermeneutical theory, there are two different kinds of preunderstanding to be observed. The first is well known and often discussed: the preunderstanding of the interpreter of the text[118]. The second, which I am going to highlight first, is the author's preunderstanding of the subject matter. This kind of preunderstanding is certainly an important point of Bultmann's interpretation of biblical texts, but, as far as I can see, Bultmann does not use the term preunderstanding to describe this matter and thus does not relate it directly to the preunderstanding of the interpreter.

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[117] Cf. above, p.33ff.

[118] Cf. BULTMANN; "Das Problem der Hermeneutik" 211-235.

Bultmann understands the authors of the biblical texts as thinking within the contexts of their time and environment. Although the confrontation with the *kerygma* changed their self-understanding radically, the terms and concepts available to them were still those of their time and surroundings. They did not create a new language *ex nihilo* to express the *kerygma*, rather they used the terms and concepts of their environment, which they transformed in order to understand and communicate the *kerygma* in its difference from the religious and philosophical thought of their contemporaries. The new wine of the *kerygma* is, as it were, poured into the old wineskins of these non-Christian concepts.

These old wineskins can be, according to Bultmann, the metaphysical speculations of the Gnostics as well as the myths of the apocalyptic movements and those of Jewish Christianity influenced by the Old Testament and Jewish thought, as well as the earlier traditions developing in the early church[119]. These terms and concepts are taken up by the New Testament authors and used differently to their usual use. Following this insight, one has to say that the writers are, like all human beings, only able to think in the terms belonging to their own intellectual and spiritual environment. In fact, according to Bultmann's considerations, the New Testament authors have had a preunderstanding of the subject of their writings, which had been changed by the *kerygma*. So they use their preunderstanding and the terms and concepts with which they are familiar to express the new understanding of the subject matter. Bultmann himself puts this matter very pointedly as follows: 'The main task of exegesis is to identify the ways of talking which are possible for the author within the tradition in which he finds himself.'[120]

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[119] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 69, 92, 107-109, 182, 341f.

[120] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 6 (own translation).

If the interpreter takes the idea of the author's preunderstanding seriously, Bultmann's programme of demythologising the New Testament has to be seen in this light. It is, in one respect, nothing more than to recognise the preunderstanding with which the author approached the subject matter and to recognise that he had to express the *kerygma* in the terms and concepts of this preunderstanding. To interpret the text according to this hermeneutical approach involves finding out how the authors' use of the old terms and concepts has changed. Doing so, the interpreter is able to find out the 'inner meaning' of the *kerygma*, so that the interpreter can understand how the text addresses the listener or reader in his or her human existence.

Certainly, Bultmann's demythologisation programme cannot be reduced to the acknowledgement of an author's preunderstanding of his subject and his way of describing it, since it is intrinsically linked with his existentialist interpretation of the New Testament. Thus another element is brought into the hermeneutical process, which is a material aspect as opposed to the more formal issue of preunderstanding. Bultmann defines the kernel of the *kerygma* as a new human self-understanding. Every theological sentence has to be expressed in its relation to human self-understanding. Any other mode of theological language is to be abandoned, for it is objectifying language, which Bultmann, in accordance with Heidegger's epistemology, rejects for the description of human existence[121]. According to Bultmann, the *kerygma* calls the listener to faith by making the human being understand his or her life as given; the human being, realising that he or she is addressed, loses dependency on worldly security and can live independ-

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[121] Cf. SCHMITHALS, Walter; *Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 29-37 THISELTON, Anthony C.; *The two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*, Grand Rapids (Eerdmans) and Carlisle (Paternoster) 1980, 228-230.

ently from what is available ('*Gelöst von allem weltlich Verfügbaren*'), which is living in faith and thus the real freedom[122].

It has been argued that, by defining the *kerygma* as an appeal to a new human self-understanding, Rudolf Bultmann has reduced theology to anthropology[123]. As I have argued above[124], Bultmann is right to defend himself against this criticism by pointing out that he does not speak anthropologically but in an existentialist way. For him, theology is not only about the human being itself and thus dissolved in anthropology, yet human self-understanding is the key to his epistemology. For Bultmann, every theological sentence has to be expressed in relation to human self-understanding[125], it has to be understood as phenomenon of human existence in order to be meaningful[126].

For Bultmann, God acts by addressing the human being "here and now", in the present moment. Addressed by the *kerygma*, the human being has to decide whether he or she lives authentically in faith or rejects this possibility. Faith is, in this framework, basically authentic existence, i.e. life from the future[127]. It is 'the abandonment of man's own security and the readiness to find security only in the unseen beyond, in God'[128] and that 'which is lived from what cannot be seen, what is not at man's disposal. Such a life means the abandonment of all self-contrived security.'[129] The other possibility of human

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[122] Cf. BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung* (ed. by Eberhard Jüngel), Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie vol. 96, München (Kaiser) ³1988., 34-36.

[123] Cf. above, p.37f.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Cf. BULTMANN; "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" *K&M* II, 197f and the essay of the same title by the same author in *K&M* IV, page 25. Cf. also FISCHER, Hermann; *Systematische Theologie: Konzeptionen und Probleme im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln 1992, 127.

[126] BULTMANN, Rudolf; "Zu J. Schniewinds Thesen" 124f.

[127] Cf. SCHMITHALS; *Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 74-78.

[128] BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, London (SCM) 1960, 40f.

[129] BULTMANN; *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 35.

existence is inauthentic existence, i.e. seeking life in the disposable, to live from the worldly available rather than from God's future, and thus not accepting God as one's creator[130]. This decision between faith and unbelief, authentic or inauthentic existence is the centre of Bultmann's theology; every other aspect is derived from here. As Oswald Bayer has pointed out, this central principle of Bultmann's theology is a reception of Kant's *diastase* between what is and what should be[131]. For Bultmann,

> 'that which is can be experienced in space, time and in the combination of idea and concept (*Anschauung und Begriff*) and grasped in its objectivity. What should be belongs to another dimension. This dimension is not that of constant causally determined nature but the dimension of freedom, as it is known through the categorical law.'[132]

As the dimension of that which is determined by the natural laws and causality, freedom is only possible at the moment, where the human being is free to take the decision. Bultmann agrees with Kierkegaard (who is influenced by Kant here) that authentic existence is only possible at the present moment[133]. Thus, Bultmann separates the natural and the historical (historical as the free decision here and now) and puts it into a dialectical relation: the human being is on the one hand living in the world and thus subject to causal determination and on the other hand an autonomous 'I', which has the freedom to take decisions[134]. The relation of God and the human being is therefore reduced to the dimension of freedom, which, in turn, excludes the natural world. Theologically, the human being is only in view as an isolated human being *coram deo*. Hence, Bultmann excludes the world as creation, as fallen and redeemed creation, from his theology. For him, the subject of theology is exclusively the *homo reus et peccator* and the *deus*

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[130] Cf. SCHMITHALS, Walter; *Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, 74-78.

[131] Cf. BAYER, *Theologie*, 476-480.

[132] Ibid 476.

[133] Ibid 476f

[134] Ibid 477f, cf. also Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 24.

iustificans[135], whereas for Luther, from whom this definition of the subject of theology derives[136], the human being is in view only as part of the world and together with his or her fellow-creatures. Whilst the subject of theology should be threefold, God, human being and world, it is only twofold for Bultmann, it is God and human being. Consequently, Bultmann arrived at a theocentric personalism, as Ricœur put it in his essay on Bultmann's hermeneutics[137]. I will have to return to this point after the discussion of Bultmann's theory of language[138].

b) Text and Tradition

Bultmann interprets the biblical texts taking them seriously as individual historical documents coming from different backgrounds and traditions. Thus he refuses to harmonise the thought of the different New Testament authors according to a particular dogmatic view of the New Testament. In order to find a unifying principle between these different writings, he considers the development of Christian thought during the first 150 years of Christianity. As a result, he sees the Bible as a conglomerate of different reflections of the Christian *kerygma*. This view of the New Testament is reflected in the outline to his New Testament Theology, where Bultmann differentiates between the *kerygma* of the original Jewish-Christian community, Hellenistic Christianity apart from Paul, Paul's theology, the theology of the Johannine writings and the development of the growing early church.

According to Bultmann, the Christian *kerygma* was reflected by the New Testament authors in different ways. During the first stage of the development of Christianity it

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[135] Cf. above, p. 29.

[136] LUTHER, Martin, WA 40 II, 328,1f.

[137] RICŒUR, Paul; "Preface to Bultmann" in: RICŒUR, Paul; *Essays on biblical interpretation*, Philadelphia 1980, 49-72, 66.

[138] Cf. below, p.53.

was still strongly influenced by Jewish thought[139], but after the birth of Hellenistic Christianity it became more and more independent of Judaism and adopted Hellenistic ways of thinking, especially that of Gnosticism[140]. Yet both kinds of thinking were, as Bultmann points out, still strongly influenced by the mythological and metaphysical speculative ideas of their respective surrounding cultures, the Jewish apocalyptic thought and the gnostic redeemer-myth in particular[141].

Paul and John were the two great theologians, who, as Bultmann suggests, demythologised the kerygma, i.e. they attempted to present it pure and without the shell of contemporary mythological thinking[142]. Historically first is Paul, who is seen by Bultmann as the real founder of Christian theology[143]. On the one hand Paul abandons the Jewish traditions referring to the teaching of the earthly Jesus; he sees Jesus solely as the Christ and thus in Pauline theology Jesus is understood only in soteriological terms[144]. On the other hand, Paul's theology, unlike Hellenistic thought, is not a speculative metaphysical system, but a synthesis of Jewish and Hellenistic thought. In fact, it is, as Bultmann points out, theology carried out in anthropological terms, it is itself anthropology[145]. Nevertheless, Paul's theological thought still involves some mythological elements, such as his insisting on the Jewish teaching of the physical resurrection of the dead and the *parousia* of Christ, which have important functions in his theology. For Bultmann, Paul

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[139] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 35-39. The separation of Jewish and Hellenistic thought cannot be maintained today, but as I stated above, it is not the task of this investigation to criticise Bultmann in the light of more recent insights into the history of the ancient world. Here, I am focusing on Bultmann's underlying hermeneutical principles (cf. above p.43).

[140] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 69-94.

[141] Cf. Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 28f.

[142] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 362.

[143] Ibid. 188.

[144] Ibid. 192.

[145] Ibid. 191f.

is unable to free himself of his origin in Jewish mythological thought. Later in the development of early Christian thought the author of John's Gospel abandoned the mythological terms even more consistently by ignoring and reinterpreting certain mythological ideas, such as apocalyptic expectations, salvation history and a developed cosmological dualism[146].

The further development of the theological approach of Paul and John came to an end when other questions were raised and treated by the developing early catholic church when it became established in the world: The Christian faith had to be brought into a form which made it accessible for the growing church and the development of a common, i.e. catholic Christian theology. But, in a certain way, this was a step back from the theology which was dealing with the original kerygma as Paul's and John's did. Important elements of their thought, however, were kept, and thus a synthesis came about between the developed theology of Paul and John and the necessities of the growing church which had to cope with its ever-changing circumstances.

Bultmann's approach to the New Testament is an important step away from the historicism and positivism of the 19th and early 20th century. Bultmann was, despite his later dispute with Karl Barth, a part of the Dialectical Theology movement[147]. As well as Barth, Bultmann worked on the question as to how to emphasise the Word of God in its otherness from all human words and thoughts. Yet, unlike Barth, Bultmann was led to an existentialist way of interpreting the New Testament. For him, not to talk about God as he is in himself is the aim of theology, but to talk about God non-objectifyingly, i.e. in relation to the human self-understanding[148]. The encounter between a human being and God takes place through the *kerygma*, which is the unifying principle within

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[146] Ibid. 357-366.
[147] Ibid. 223-226.

the development of New Testament theology and also the place of the encounter be-
tween God and humanity nowadays. The *kerygma* is, according to Bultmann, the time-
less meaning of the New Testament, yet it has to be interpreted by every forthcoming
generation.

This move is indeed an important step away from historicism and positivism, since now
the New Testament is not only a source for research into the history of early Christian-
ity or a testimony to religious feelings the fathers of Christianity had, but in fact Holy
Scripture, which has something to say to present Christianity and humanity. As men-
tioned above, the *kerygma* is, according to Bultmann, basically the call to authentic ex-
istence, which means to understand life as given. It opens the radically new possibility to
lose dependency on worldly security and live independently from the available (*'Gelöst
von allem weltlich Verfügbaren'*), which is the real freedom[149]. Using such a herme-
neutical 'key' for his exegesis, Bultmann has to be seen within the Protestant tradition of
exegesis. Until the Age of Enlightenment, exegesis was exercised from a theological
starting point, which provided the hermeneutical 'key' for interpretation. Luther and
Melanchthon, for instance, saw the doctrine of Law and Gospel as the proper 'key' to
the biblical texts[150]. They saw this particular doctrine as the inner meaning of the bible
and therefore as the fixed point which could be appropriated by the interpreter. Fur-
thermore, starting from this inner meaning of scripture, the interpreter was enabled to
criticise parts of the Bible which contradict this inner meaning[151]. Later, from the Age of
Enlightenment to the liberal theology of the 19th century, theologians started to focus
more on the genesis of the biblical texts than on an inner meaning. The text seemed to

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[148] Cf. above, 37ff.

[149] Cf. BULTMANN, Rudolf; *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 34-36.

[150] Cf. Luther, WA DB IV 10f and Melanchthon, CR 21, 732ff.

[151] Cf. WA DB VIII, 344.

be sufficiently explained as soon as the process of its writing was understood. Interpreted in this way, the most the text could mean was that it bore witness to the moral and metaphysical truth which was accessible to human mind. The meaning of the scripture could not contradict the results of human reason and therefore the otherness of the Christian *kerygma* over against human reason was abandoned.

In this context, Bultmann developed a synthesis between these two different approaches to the biblical text. On the one hand, he accepts the historical methods radically, but on the other hand he does not use them just to abandon every element that does not agree with his world picture. In fact, what he offers is a radical reinterpretation of the mythological language of the New Testament through the *kerygma* as unifying principle of the New Testament to make it understandable to 20th century human consciousness. Thus he avoids merely dismissing the mythological and somehow offensive language and takes it seriously as being relevant to the contemporary reader.

Positively, Bultmann reinterprets the mythological language of the New Testament by bringing out the inner meaning of the New Testament, the *kerygma*, and thus making the myth understandable for the present generation. Bultmann himself was very keen to pronounce that this is not abandoning mythological language from the New Testament but reinterpreting it, a point which played an important role in the initial debate about Bultmann's proposal to demythologise the New Testament[152]. Yet it remains to be asked whether Bultmann did not reinterpret the mythological language in a way inappropriate to the *kerygma*. Bultmann separates the *kerygma* as the inner meaning or the kernel of the New Testament from mythological language, which is but the wrapping of the *kerygma*.[153] Having interpreted and demythologised the language of the New Tes-

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[152] Cf. KÖRTNER, Ulrich; "Arbeit am Mythos?" 65f.

[153] Ibid. 169.

tament, Bultmann believes that it is possible to express the *kerygma* in neutral language[154]. Bultmann interprets mythological language analogically to the rhetoric understanding of metaphor, as it goes back to Aristotle. Here, metaphorical language is seen as merely a rhetoric figure and trope, which can be translated into non-tropical language without loss of meaning[155]. It is, in my opinion, questionable to assume that the tropic understanding of mythological language is appropriate to its nature. The same way Bultmann reduces the subject of theology to the individual human being and God, to a theocentric personalism[156], he understands mythological language by reducing the meaning of biblical language to the call to the existentialist decision before God, which can be expressed in neutral or 'innocent' language. He assumes that the meaning of the text can be separated from its actual language and that one can take the concepts contained in the text and interpret them existentially, understand and apply them directly[157]. Paul Ricœur highlights this issue in his essay 'Preface to Bultmann', saying that the meaning of the text is not available without the language of the text, which is the bearer of meaning[158]. Thus, 'there is no shorter path for joining a neutral existential anthropology, according to philosophy, with the existential decision before God, according to the Bible. But there is the long path of the question of being and of the belonging of saying to being.'[159]

At this place, Bultmann's understanding of the Word of God as *verbum externum* has to be clarified. As I have pointed out in the discussion of the Barth-Bultmann debate,

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[154] Ibid 169f.

[155] Ibid. 175f.

[156] Cf. above, p.46f.

[157] Cf. RICŒUR; "Preface to Bultmann" 65f.

[158] Ibid. 68.

[159] Ibid. 72

Bultmann sees the Word of God as present in the *verbum externum*[160]. The Word of God is, for Bultmann, the *kerygma*, the call to the existentialist decision between faith and unbelief. He understands it as present in the human word and not behind it, yet he narrows it down to the call to the decision, it is something that takes place only between the individual human being and God. Bultmann is, in my opinion, mistaken to assume that the Word of God can be expressed in a neutral language, that it can be distilled out of its linguistic form and treated as if isolated from it. The task of this investigation will be to gain a wider understanding of the Word of God, which includes the whole of creation as part of the subject of theology, and to see the meaning of the New Testament inseparably embedded in its linguistic form. In the course of this inquiry I will follow the way suggested by Paul Ricœur, which is 'the long path of the question of being and of the belonging of saying to being.'[161] Before I can start the journey on this 'long path to language' I have to embark on a discussion of Bultmann's practical exegesis, which will provide important insights into his existentialist interpretation and show that Bultmann's work has to be the starting point for the 'way to language', for he provides, despite his shortcomings, an indispensable basis for biblical interpretation.

2. Bultmann's Exegesis at Work

a) Treatment of Introductory Questions

(1) The Historical Place of John

Rudolf Bultmann sees John as an important step in the development of New Testament theology. For Bultmann, there seem to be two opposite movements in early Christian history. On the one hand, there is a movement towards a purer, demythologised

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[160] Cf. above p.26.

[161] RICŒUR; "Preface to Bultmann" 72

kerygma within the New Testament period, which is represented by Paul and John[162]. On the other hand, there is the opposite movement towards the early catholic church, which had to bring extreme positions, especially John's, into line with main stream Christianity in order to protect the unity of the developing early catholic church and to establish the growing church in the world. John's Gospel seems to be for Bultmann the climax of the first development, John proclaimed the *kerygma* in such a radical interpretation that the fourth gospel had to be redacted by the growing catholic church in order to be acceptable. The thought of the former movement is characterised by a radical demythologisation of the *kerygma*, whereas early catholic thought is characterised by sacramentalism, concentrating on the worldly organisation of the church and mythological thought. As the church was growing and had to maintain its unity and organisation, the movement towards a purer *kerygma* did not have a place in the early catholic church anymore and thus came to an end.

(2) Traditio-historical Questions (Literary Criticism)

Bultmann's contributions to the investigation of the literary background of the fourth gospel have influenced Johannine studies substantially and also have been highly disputed. There are three different types of literary criticism which can be found in Bultmann's work on John's Gospel. The first is his theory concerning the sources on which John's Gospel is based, the second is the reordering of the passages within the gospel and the third the issue of secondary redactions.

Concerning the first kind of traditio-historical criticism, Bultmann sees basically three sources underlying the composition of the gospel. The first is called the '*Logien-Quelle*'

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[162] Cf. BULTMANN, *Theologie*, 358-362. Cf. also BARTH, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 37 and RICŒUR; "Preface to Bultmann" 62.

(Sayings-Source), the second one is the *'Semeia-Quelle'* (Signs- or Miracle-Source). Thirdly, the evangelist used a written source containing the passion narrative[163].

The first source, the *'Logien-Quelle'*, is, according to Bultmann, a collection of Jesus' revelatory discourses plus the hymn underlying the prologue, which material is composed in the style of Semitic poetry, as it is known from the Odes of Solomon and other gnostic material[164]. This source mainly contains the description the revealer gives of himself. Its characteristics are the Semitic *parallelismus membrorum* and the introductory ἐγώ εἰμι. The underlying world picture of the discourses is gnostic dualism. The second source, the *'Semeia-Quelle'*, is described as a collection of Jesus' deeds, especially the signs, and other accounts of his life, including the concluding verses of the gospel, i.e. John 20:30f[165]. The passion narrative is a piece of common Christian tradition, although independent from the Synoptics, from which the evangelist took passages and details, yet which he did not align to his theological agenda[166]

The investigation into the underlying sources of the fourth gospel is for Bultmann a means to establish what the evangelist intended to express in his work. The evangelist allowed himself some freedom in using his sources and changed his sources according to his theological agenda and demythologised them by eliminating or reinterpreting elements of the mythological world picture which the sources originally contained. By comparing the sources, which are the conceptual material used by the evangelist in order to express his theology, and the text of the gospel, his theological intention can be established.

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[163] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 489-491.

[164] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 362f.

[165] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 78.

[166] Ibid. 491.

Concerning the problem of literary gaps and inconsistencies which are found in John's Gospel, Bultmann has a characteristic way of solving it. He simply argues that the text of the gospel somehow got into disorder and reorders it to regain the, as he thinks, original order. Unfortunately, Bultmann does not satisfactorily explain the overall disorder in the received text. In some instances Bultmann assumes that the text somehow got into external disorder[167], by which he means that the pages of the original manuscript were accidentally mixed up. In some other cases, the text's disorders are due to the redaction, during which some pieces of the gospel were relocated[168], yet he cannot make plausible why the redaction undertook these changes in the order of the gospel. In those instances where Bultmann assumes that the text got into external disorder he reconstructs the original order of the text and relocates the passages accordingly[169]. As Bultmann's theories of the external displacement of parts of the fourth gospel do not find significant acceptance anymore, there is no need to discuss it in this investigation[170].

Another important aspect of Bultmann's view of the literary history of John's Gospel is the assumption of a later redaction[171]. After the evangelist had finished his work on the fourth gospel, it was edited in order to be brought in line with the theology of the mainstream church and thus to align its theology with synoptic and church tradition[172], esp. by qualifying it by glosses, which were intended to establish the church's view on the sacraments or the tradition of future eschatology into John's Gospel. Although Bultmann's view of the redaction of John is in many instances accurate or at least plausible,

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[167] Ibid. 162.

[168] Ibid. 178, fn 3.

[169] Ibid. 58 (discussing single verses) and 77f, 154f (for larger passages and whole chapters).

[170] For a comprehensive discussion of Bultmann's theories of external disorder cf. THYEN, Hartwig; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium" *TRu* 39, 1979, 1-69, 222-252, 289-330, pp 296-304.

[171] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 58, fn 1.

[172] Ibid. 62, fn.6; 63, fn 1, 4; 98, fn 2; 162ff; 174-177; 194-197; 525f.

it can be asked whether Bultmann's classifying of certain texts as products of the redaction is not a product of Bultmann's own theological agenda. All the aspects of John's Gospel, which do not suit his view of Johannine theology, are explained too smoothly as later additions or changes, without discussing the possibility of their being original parts of the gospel and therefore of Johannine theology.

In sum, Bultmann contributed important aspects to the discussion of traditio-historical issues, even if the results of his analysis are not generally accepted and today's knowledge of the traditio-historical issues has falsified some of Bultmann's findings. Nevertheless, Bultmann's insights still provide an indispensable methodological framework for any further research in this field, which is also flexible enough to embrace the more recent developments of New Testament exegesis.

(3) Issues of Religionsgeschichte

Bultmann's concept of preunderstanding, which I have discussed above[173], demands a thorough examination of the author's background in order to understand what the author intended to express using the terms and concepts available to him at his time. Therefore, Bultmann focuses carefully on the history of religions background of John's Gospel. He describes the parallels of non-Christian religious thought and then contrasts them with the gospel's point of view. The way the evangelist takes up these ideas and changes or adapts them is the point on which Bultmann concentrates since this is his way to find out what the evangelist meant to express in the language of his contemporary environment.

The basic insight of Bultmann's analysis of John's Gospel, on which his whole interpretation is built, is that the fourth gospel is based on the gnostic world picture and re-

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[173] Cf. above p.43-48.

deemer myth. John takes up the terminology of his religious environment and uses it to express his interpretation of the *kerygma*. To illustrate how Bultmann's history of religions analysis works, I am to discuss this issue using the gnostic redeemer myth as an example. As it is not possible within the framework of this investigation to discuss Bultmann's views on the religious background of the fourth gospel comprehensively, for this would involve an examination of the whole of Johannine theology, this representative example will be sufficient.

According to Bultmann, the background for John's theology of the incarnation is the gnostic redeemer myth[174]. In this myth, the incarnation is seen as a part of a cosmological drama in which the human souls, the original origin of which is in the heavenly realm, have been imprisoned in the darkness. Through the appearance of the redeemer, they are liberated and led back to their true heavenly origin. Within this framework, the redemption of the soul takes place because of its very nature as souls, originating from the heavenly realm. Therefore redemption takes place independently from the individual soul. It is a cosmological event on which the individual souls have no influence. They are, so to speak, brought home by the redeemer[175], who comes into the world to show the souls their heavenly origin. The redeemer in this myth is consistently not a real human being but the 'human itself' and carrying not his own flesh, but body and flesh 'itself'. Therefore, the individuality of the redeemer is irrelevant; it is the cosmological event which is significant for redemption.

As Bultmann sees it, John, in taking up this myth, makes important changes[176]. He abandons the cosmological speculation about the nature and fate of the souls in general. The redemption is no longer a matter of the actual nature of the soul but now depends

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[174] Cf. BULTMANN; *Theologie*, 358.

[175] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 41f.

on faith. The concrete decision of the human being whether to live in faith or unbelief is the factor deciding salvation. In addition, for John faith is indissolubly linked with the person of the redeemer. The redeemer does not just deliver a doctrine so that he himself becomes superfluous, but his message is to proclaim himself as the redeemer. Faith in the person of the redeemer is the redemption. Through the analysis of the differences between the history of religion background and the fourth gospel Bultmann aims to find out the inner meaning of the text, which is for him the *kerygma*, the message that humanity needs to have faith in the revealer himself. How this is carried out in detail I will show below[177].

It is indeed very helpful and important to establish the contemporary religious thought in the surrounding culture of the evangelist. It enables the interpreter to distinguish between the time-bound and possibly non-essential meaning of a biblical text and the kernel of its meaning. Some contents of the text might certainly have been common currency of thought and been taken over by the author either unreflected or on purpose. But is it always possible to say what part of contemporary thought is a time-bound encumbrance and what is essential? Bultmann seems to have taken everything for which he could find contemporary parallels as non-essential. But is it at least not possible that some thoughts, which are not original to the evangelist, are still an essential part of his writing? This problem is, in my opinion, due to Bultmann's lack of a theory of language which I have discussed above[178], as Bultmann only focuses on the *kerygma* as call to decision. Thus, he does not take seriously the world of the evangelist seriously in its own right but only the appeal to the decision of faith and unbelief. The world-view of

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[176] Ibid. 42f.

[177] Cf. below p.63.

[178] Cf. above p. 52f.

the evangelist, which is largely inherited from his environment and tradition, does not play an integral part within Bultmann's existentialist interpretation.

b) Interpreting the text

(1) Treatment of traditio-historical Questions

Bultmann's exegesis of John's Gospel is strongly influenced by his traditio-historical insights. Three different kinds have to be distinguished. Firstly, Bultmann finds older sources behind the text which the evangelist took up and used for his gospel, although not without changing them by annotations in order to align them with his theological agenda. Secondly, changes in the order of the gospel are found which are the result of a later redaction or of an accident; this latter type caused the overall disorder in which the gospel is received. Thirdly, Bultmann identifies the work of a secondary redaction, which brought the gospel in line with the theology of the early catholic church.

The underlying sources the evangelist used had, according to Bultmann, in some cases a meaning which was not originally Christian. The hymn, which underlies the prologue, for instance, had been originally a text used in the sect which considered John the Baptist the incarnate *logos*[179]. It is part of a source the evangelist used several times in the gospel, which is the '*Logien-Quelle*'. In order to protect his Christian interpretation of this hymn against 'misunderstanding', the evangelist inserts explanations, which are the verses John 1:6-8, 12c-13, 15, 17-18.

Bultmann does not delete these insertions of the evangelist as interpolations and interprets only the hymn[180]. Rather, he interprets the hymn as it is interpreted by the evangelist. So he sees the hymn itself as a literary unit and the comments of the evangelist as explanations of the hymn. Unlike Barth, who interprets the hymn and the explanations

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[179] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 4f.

as a unity[181], Bultmann distinguishes the hymn from the explanations by the evangelist, but interprets these explanations as such within the prologue and the hymn in the light of the explanatory interpolations.

In his interpretation of John 1:6 Bultmann's treatment of the literary-critical findings can be seen at work[182]. After having interpreted the first five verses of the prologue, Bultmann establishes how the evangelist wants the hymn to be understood by analysing the inserted verses 6-8. According to Bultmann, the evangelist wanted to ensure that not John the Baptist was regarded as the φῶς, as it was believed by the sect, which believed that John the Baptist was the redeemer, and with which the community of the evangelist was confronted. Yet, John the Baptist is not dismissed as pseudo-messiah or as sent by the devil. He is seen, in accordance with Christian tradition, as the forerunner and witness to Jesus.

In other instances Bultmann contrasts the meaning of a certain text in the source the evangelist used with the meaning the evangelist gave the text. An example of this kind of treatment of literary questions is Bultmann's interpretation of John 3:13[183]: καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Bultmann explains the meaning the verse had in the assumed gnostic source. Within the framework of the source, the verse meant that ascent to heaven is only possible for those who originate from there, which is the pre-existent soul. Then he proposes that the verse has been given another meaning by the evangelist and interprets it in its Johannine meaning, i.e. that the revealer, Jesus, has come from heaven to reveal

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[180] Ibid.

[181] BARTH, Karl; *Erklärung des Johannes-Evangeliums (Kapitel 1-8)* (ed. by Walther Fürst), in: Karl Barth, Gesamtausgabe, II. Akademische Werke, 1925/26, Zürich 1976, 54.

[182] Ibid, 29-31.

[183] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 107-109.

himself as the Son of Man and that only through faith in him human beings can come to faith.

In both cases Bultmann establishes what the evangelist intended to say by comparing the text with the tradition behind the text. The underlying tradition, the hymn or the reconstructed source, is compared with the way the evangelist wanted the hymn or the saying to be understood by inserting his annotations. The difference between the evangelist's and the tradition's understanding of the text then reveals the intention of the evangelist.

In cases of changes in the text which happened after the evangelist finished the gospel, either by accident or through redaction, Bultmann aims to reconstruct the original text and then to interpret it. Bultmann approaches the 'corrupted' parts of the gospel by the establishing which parts are inserted or changed by the ecclesiastical redactor and then restoring the original text[184]. Then he interprets the text he has reconstructed, the later redactions are interpreted separately.

(2) Demythologisation and Existentialist Interpretation

After having discussed the traditio-historical questions, Bultmann continues the interpretation of the text with an analysis of the religious traditions behind it, which leads directly to interpreting the text in an existentialist way. Four steps are usually taken during this analysis. At first, Bultmann analyses the natural human condition in relation to the subject matter of the text, i.e. the human self-understanding before encountering the revelation. He contrasts this with the text's literal meaning, i.e. position towards the subject in mythological language. Secondly, Bultmann focuses on the parallel texts to the text in question and its motifs. Thirdly, he compares the text with the appropriate par-

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[184] Ibid. 57-59, 161-164.

allel to find out the differences between the evangelist's understanding of the subject and that of the parallel. Finally, he deduces the text's inner meaning, the *kerygma* as it is contained in the particular text, from the findings of the former steps.

During these four steps Bultmann identifies the different human self-understanding, which the evangelist has in opposition to his environment. This is, according to Bultmann's hermeneutical foundations explained above, certainly the main task of exegesis. I shall now lay down how this existentialist analysis works in detail. As an example I have chosen Bultmann's interpretation of John 1:18a[185], where the outline of the existential analysis can be seen very clearly. The outline applies generally to Bultmann's interpretation of John's Gospel, although not always as clearly as in the passage chosen here.

According to Bultmann's interpretation, the whole of v. 18 is directed against both Jewish thought, which claims to know God through the law, and against the gnostic understanding, which claims to be able to transform themselves so that they are like God. But he insists that 'the essence is for him [*scil*. the evangelist] not the historical context, but the general meaning'[186].

In the first step, Bultmann analyses the human condition which is presupposed by the sentence 'Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε·'. According to Bultmann, human nature wants to see God and to have direct access to him. This understanding is questioned by the text, which states that humans have access to God only through the revealer Jesus Christ.

Based on this fundamental insight as to the literal meaning of the text, Bultmann then describes the view the history-of-religion parallel closest to the text, which is gnostic

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[185] Ibid. 53-57.

[186] Ibid. 54.

religious speculation. The Gnostics see God as a substantial being (in the meaning of the Greek metaphysics). Thus, in order to see God himself, the human being has to be transformed into divine nature. This transformation is, according to gnostic thought, prepared by the doctrine given in the revelation.

In the third step, Bultmann contrasts the gnostic doctrine on the subject of human access to God with the evangelist's view of it. The evangelist sees God not as a being who can be an object of human knowledge, but as a being completely inaccessible to human reason.

Finally, this insight leads directly to the existentialist interpretation of the text. Interpreted in this way, the text says that God's inaccessibility means his unavailability, that God cannot be made an object. The human desire to make God available to human reason is, basically, the same as the desire to make oneself available to oneself, i.e. to live from the available. Therefore, by negating God's availability, the text says that true human existence is not available to the human being him- or herself. Therefore, the sentence 'Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε·' implies true human self-understanding, which is living independently from worldly security.

The interpretation of the New Testament Bultmann offers, of which an example has been given here, has to be seen from two points of view. On the one hand, his exegetical results can be assessed from the historical viewpoint. In this case many of Bultmann's insights are doubtlessly outdated and wrong, as the inquiry into the historical background of the New Testament has proceeded and gained more knowledge about it. However, since this piece of work is concentrating on hermeneutical questions, the discussion of the historical questions may be ignored. On the other hand, one can, by evaluating Bultmann's interpretation, focus on his underlying hermeneutics. Firstly, a major advantage of Bultmann's interpretation is that he provides an important and in-

teresting framework for exegesis by combining historical criticism and theological exegesis, in which the latter obviously rules the interpretation. This type of exegesis has great advantages over against a theological interpretation of the New Testament which neglects historical criticism at all, like the neo-Barthian final form approaches do. On the other hand, it is also to be preferred over against a merely historical interpretation of biblical texts, as it can be found for instance in the work of Ernst Troeltsch.

The main difference between Bultmann and neo-Barthian approaches, for which Brevard S. Childs shall be the representative here, is that for the latter the meaning of the texts, which was accepted as authoritative by the Church, i.e. the final form, has to be the basis of interpretation[187]. Therefore, the texts have to be analysed within their 'canonical' rather than within their historical context[188]. The 'intertextuality'[189] of the biblical texts' meaning also has to be respected, i.e. the texts have not only to be interpreted in their own canonical form but also in their position within the canon. Childs points out that, although historical research into the New Testament is not completely obsolete, it should be given a serving role. Historical inquiries should just sharpen the view for the canonical sense of the scriptures, but they do not have any real theological relevance[190], for they do not have an actual controlling function in the interpretation. The canonical meaning is so absolute that, actually, any corrective results of historical inquiry are impossible. Yet, final form approaches are, in my opinion, lacking openness towards the text itself. The individual meaning of the text is levelled down and the text understood through the eyes of the doctrine of the church or the theological views of the interpreter. Certainly, the problems, which appear if the interpreter takes seriously the

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[187] Cf. CHILDS, Brevard S.; *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, London (SCM) 1984, p.48.

[188] Cf. above, p.IIIf.

[189] Ibid. 50, cf. also MOBERLY, R.W.L., "The church's use of the bible, The work of Brevard Childs" *ExpTim* 99/4 (1988), 104-109, 107f.

individual text as a human document, are avoided. Yet the price for circumventing the issue is that the voice, the address of the individual text is not allowed to say what it has to say anymore. The original address of the text is oppressed for the benefit of its 'canonical' meaning. Contrary to this approach, the advantage of Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament over against final form approaches like Childs' is, in this respect, that he takes seriously that the New Testament is a historical and human document. Thus he has to deal with the hermeneutical problems occurring from the distance of author and text. Additionally, not demanding a theological determination of the interpreter but seriously dealing with his preunderstanding and presuppositions, Bultmann is open to the text so that might say something new to the reader. He takes seriously the individual text, speaking, from its contemporary context, to today's reader or hearer. Or, with Jeanrond's words, he 'suggested that we ought to engage in biblical interpretation in order to see what these texts have to say to us today.'[191]

Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament is, on the other hand, also to be preferred over against a historicist approach like that of Ernst Troeltsch. Troeltsch saw the development of Christianity and of the New Testament only as a result of the historical circumstances under which it evolved[192]. For Troeltsch, the essence of Christianity is the religious fervour, the idea of God. Compared to this centre, every philosophical and dogmatic aspect is secondary[193]. Around it the doctrine and every conscious form of the Christian religion was formed, determined by the socio-cultural circumstances. Thus, for Troeltsch the whole New Testament does not have any real theological meaning but is only the reflection of this formation of the Christian religion. Any interpretation of the

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[190] Cf. CHILDS; *The New Testament as Canon*, p.44-47.

[191] Ibid. 135.

[192] TROELTSCH, Ernst; *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, Tübingen 1912, 967f.

[193] Ibid. 969.

New Testament following this concept has, obviously, done its task after the historical evolution of its writings has been brought to light, but it is free of any particular theological interest.

This kind of exegesis does certainly not lack historical consciousness like the final-from approaches, but the New Testament has lost its own theological meaning. Over against this approach to the New Testament the hermeneutics of Bultmann have certainly the advantage of bringing about a theological meaning from the biblical writings as well as admitting a radical historical criticism.

This combination of a radical acceptance of the results of historical research on the one hand and a strongly theologically oriented exegesis on the other hand are, in fact, what Bultmann has to contribute to the further development of New Testament interpretation. If the New Testament is to be interpreted with historical awareness, I suppose that the framework given by Rudolf Bultmann is indispensable. It is, however, necessary to be aware of Bultmann's deficit in his hermeneutics. The example of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation has shown that Bultmann goes from the analysis of the text, i.e. the concepts behind the text, directly to the existentialist decision without taking the world of the text seriously. Here, Bultmann takes an illegitimate shortcut, reducing the meaning of biblical language to the call to the existentialist decision before God. Thus, in order to find an appropriate theory of language for biblical interpretation, Ricœur's advice has to be taken seriously that 'there is no shorter path for joining a neutral existential anthropology, according to philosophy, with the existential decision before God, according to the Bible. But there is the long path of the question of being and of the belonging of saying to being.'[194] In the next chapter of my investigations I will have to set out on this path to language.

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[194] RICŒUR; "Preface to Bultmann" 72

C. The long Path to Language

In the first chapter of this thesis we have discussed the hermeneutical theories of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Through this discussion we came to the conclusion that biblical hermeneutics have to recognise that the Word of God is in the biblical text as its *verbum internum*. After having taken the decision for Bultmann's hermeneutical theory we have discussed it in the second chapter. Here we found that the existentialist interpretation is an indispensable tool for biblical interpretation. Yet it was established that Bultmann is not recognising the function of language as the bearer of meaning. Bultmann assumes that the meaning of the text can be separated from its actual language and that one can take the concepts contained in the text and directly interpret them existentially, understand and apply them[195]. Consequently we concluded the discussion with Paul Ricœur's appeal to take 'the long path of the question of being and of the belonging of saying to being.'[196]

The task of this present chapter is to follow this long path to understanding. An approach to the New Testament will be developed here which takes seriously the three demands for a hermeneutical theory which are drawn from the previous investigations. At first, the approach to the New Testament has to see the Word of God as present in the human language of the New Testament as *verbum externum*. At second, the interpretation has to be based on the existentialist interpretation. At third, the hermeneutical theory has to recognise language as the bearer of meaning and thus include a theological perception of the world into the hermeneutical process and into the horizon of the interpreter in order to avoid Bultmann's theocentric personalism[197]. These three presup-

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[195] Ricœur; "Preface to Bultmann" 65f.

[196] Ibid. 72

[197] Ibid. 66.

positions will be contained in the approach to the New Testament which I am going to propose.

In the first section of this chapter the relationship between language and meaning will be established, following the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. I cannot offer a comprehensive discussion of these two philosophers and deliver a thorough interpretation of their thought in my investigation. Subsequently we enter a discussion with these two thinkers and through this discussion develop a view of the relationship of language and meaning which will be the basis for the further proceedings.

In the second section the historical conditions of understanding will be reflected in discussion with Gadamer's hermeneutical theory. In this context, we will return to the question of the significance of preunderstanding for interpretation. The third section will focus on the question as to how language contains meaning. This will take place in discussion with Paul Ricœur's poetological theory of metaphor, which will allow us important insights into the function of language.

Finally a view of the genesis of the New Testament will be developed, based on the above considerations. Here the threads of the previous sections will be drawn together and the New Testament will be explained as a result of the early struggle for a language to understand Christian faith and the new world opened through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This concept of the *Struggle for Language* will be the basis for the exegetical work in the second part of my thesis.

1. Language and Meaning (Understanding through Language)

As Ricœur claimed in the essay on Bultmann mentioned above, the interpreter must not directly aim at the concepts underlying the text; rather one has to go through an analysis

of language. As a starting point for the long path to understanding I shall take the key statement of Gerhard Ebeling's essay 'Word of God and Hermeneutics': '*The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding* OF *language, but understanding* THROUGH *language.*'[198] This statement needs, certainly, some further explanation, which will lead us directly into the kernel of the problem. In order to understand what understanding *through* language means, we have to step back and enter a discussion with the philosophies of the later Heidegger and of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

After the early Heidegger analysed the human *Dasein* in his work '*Sein und Zeit*' and subsequent works, he started to focus on language and its relation to *Sein* (Being) itself. The starting point for Heidegger's approach to language and being is his criticism of conceptualising thought. From Heidegger's point of view the move towards objectifying thinking was a development in the wrong direction. The right way of seeing the world is, according to Heidegger, to see it in relation to *Dasein*, i.e. non-objectifyingly. 'Through language, which does not only talk about single beings, or Essent (*Seiendes*[199]), but puts Being (*Sein*) and relation of Being (*Seinsbezüge*) into words, the world is explicitly disclosed and communicable in its meaningful significance.'[200] In other words, language sets the subject matter in relation to the world, i.e. the totality of Being and of the relations of Beings, and thus unveils Being.

Crucial within Heidegger's thought is his distinction between language as *Geläut der Stille* (Chime of Stillness, or Sound of Silence) and as *Lauten des Wortes* (Sounding of

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[198] EBELING, Gerhard; "Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik" in: *Wort und Glaube*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) ³1967, 319-348, 333 (Ebeling's italics; English: "Word of God and Hermeneutics" in: EBELING, Gerhard; *Word and Faith*, London (SCM) 1963, 305-332, 318).

[199] The English translation "Essent" for the German "*Seiendes*" is found in THISELTON; *The Two Horizons*, 336.

[200] JAEGER, Hans; *Heidegger und die Sprache*, Bern (Franke) 1971, 15.

the Word)[201]. Firstly, language as *Geläut der Stille* is the author of meaningful relation between single Beings and World. Here, language is not the actually spoken language, but it is the disclosure of meaningful relations between Essents and World.

Language, for Heidegger, originates in the *Unter-Schied* (Difference, but Heidegger uses it in a different way). The *Unter-Schied* is the point of contact between the single thing and the world and also the painful difference between them. The *Unter-Schied* is, as it were, like a threshold, where the inside and the outside are ultimately close to each other and yet definitely separated[202]. Because of this contact and separation, relations between beings are possible. The world, to which the single thing is so close and yet separated, is the totality of relations of beings and being. In the *Unter-Schied* the thing, the single being is set in its place in the world. Here, the thing is at rest, in Stillness, because it is in the place where it belongs in the world[203]. The *Unter-Schied* also gathers the world. It calls together the world as it is in contact with the single thing[204] and thus calls Being into presence (*Anwesen*). In this respect, language 'grants' us the things[205], and so it makes them meaningful to us by showing us their place and meaning in the world. Without language the world and the single thing would be completely meaningless to us. This calling things into their being is, for Heidegger, the essence of language[206]. Heidegger calls this calling of things into their being '*läuten*', the noun, which he invents, is '*Geläut*', which usually means 'chime'. Here it is 'sounding' or 'calling'[207]. Because of this gathering and dividing of things and world, setting them into their place,

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[201] Cf. JAEGER; *Heidegger und die Sprache*, 89f, 106.

[202] Cf. HEIDEGGER, Martin; *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Stuttgart (Neske) [10]1993, 24-27.

[203] Ibid. 29.

[204] Ibid. 25.

[205] Ibid. 25.

[206] Ibid. 30.

[207] Ibid. 29f.

where they are at rest, at stillness, and calling them into their being, language is called the *Geläut der Stille*, which can be translated as 'Chime of Stillness' as well as 'Sound of Silence'. Heidegger sums up: 'Language speaks as the *Geläut der Stille*.'[208]

Consequently, it is language that speaks, as it is the Sound of Silence or the Chime of Stillness, which enables meaningful relations between single beings and the world. Therefore, language is grounded in Being itself, not in human thought, for things have their being not in themselves but in their closeness and difference to the world, in the *Unter-Schied*, which is the place where language 'dwells'.

Human language, language as *Lauten des Wortes*, can only answer what it has heard. It does not merely transmit concepts and information, but it passes on what language as *Geläut der Stille* has disclosed. The human being can only speak as listener[209], answering the *Geläut der Stille*. Being is unveiled by language, and language is disclosed in the *Ereignis* (Event), which can be seen as the connection between language as *Geläut der Stille* and as *Lauten des Wortes*. Heidegger emphasises that the *Ereignis* is not to be seen as the result of a cause; it is the giving of language[210]. In the *Ereignis* the human being encounters language, being is disclosed and the human being is enabled to speak. Language has given itself to the human being, and human language is the answer to language[211]. *Ereignis* is whenever a human being encounters Being, whenever the single thing in its relation and difference to the world is unveiled. The touchstone for authenticity of human language is, obviously, its closeness to the event. Authentic language answers the *Ereignis*.

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208 Ibid. 30.

209 Ibid. 31f.

210 Ibid. 258.

211 Ibid. 260.

It has been argued that Heidegger's theory of language is in danger of 'word-magic' and 'language-mysticism'[212]. And indeed, if the distinction between language as *Geläut der Stille* and the actually spoken language as *Lauten des Wortes* is missed, and thus language in the plain and everyday meaning of the word is understood as originating in the *Unter-Schied*, his thought looks like language-mysticism and word-magic. In my opinion, however, one cannot take Heidegger's language literally here. Especially when Heidegger talks about language as *Geläut der Stille*, he does not talk about language as we understand it. Heidegger uses this type of language to express the relation between Being and language and our perception of reality. It is, as it were, poetic language, that is able to express a thought that could not be expressed in another way. If Heidegger's theory of language and being is viewed in this way, the danger of word-magic is not present anymore.

The main aspect of Heidegger's philosophy of language for the present study is the relation between language and meaning and being, which can be mistaken as 'word-magic' if Heidegger's terminology is not carefully discerned. For Heidegger, meaning and being is language, being only becomes perceivable in language, and language contains being: 'Words and language are not just wrappings, in which the things are packed for the commerce in speaking and writing. Only in words, in language they become and are things.'[213] This important insight into the nature of language has to be developed and made practically adaptable. Therefore, I have to focus on Hans-Georg Gadamer's work, in which he presents significant contributions to the question of meaning and language, and thus will be an important further step on the Way to Language. In addition, Gadamer's hermeneutical theory will be essential to an investigation into the historical conditions of human understanding, which will follow in the next section.

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[212] Cf. THISELTON; *The Two Horizons*, 337.

In his general approach to the problem of meaning and language, Gadamer follows the thought of Martin Heidegger. For him, as well as for Heidegger, language is the relation between the speaker, the single thing and the world in total[214]. Unlike Heidegger, Gadamer does not continue to think about language as *Geläut der Stille*, but about human language and how it evolves and is understood, and how it is the medium of human thought and understanding of the world. For Gadamer,

> 'Language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realised. The mode of realisation of understanding is interpretation. [...] All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language.'[215]

On the one hand, human thought is, according to Gadamer, intimately bound up with language[216]. Human beings can only think in language and, therefore, only understand through language, which, in turn, determines the human thought. On the other hand, language is passed down in the linguistic tradition of the culture in which the individual finds himself or herself. Thus, language and the way of understanding reality is actually inherited from the tradition in which one lives. In order to understand the reality that one encounters, one has to translate it into one's own language. Therefore, language provides the conceptual framework for the interpretation of the world. Despite the fact that one's understanding of the world is determined by language, it has the potential to develop, for language may also develop. As the understanding of the world changes, language changes as well[217].

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[213] HEIDEGGER, Martin; *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen (Niemeyer) [3]1987, 11.

[214] GADAMER, Hans-Georg; *Wahrheit und Methode*, in: GADAMER, Hans-Georg; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1: *Hermeneutik: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [6]1990, 473 (English: *Truth and Method*, London (Sheed and Ward) [2]1979, 426.)

[215] GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 392 (Engl. 350).

[216] Cf. THISELTON; *Two Horizons*, 314.

[217] Ibid. 312.

In this respect Gadamer can say that the world, as it is understandable, is language[218].
To have the world is, for Gadamer, to be above the rush of that which one encounters
in the world[219]. The human being becomes free from the surrounding environment
(*Umwelt*), from being bound by that which one encounters in the world, by having lan-
guage. Through language the human being gains a world-view, an understanding of the
world in which one lives. Through language the things one encounters are put into a
meaningful relation to each other and to the horizon of the whole world[220]. Thus, world
comes into language, so that Gadamer can say: 'Whoever has language "has" the
world.'[221] This implies that the world is language, and that everything that is understood
is language. 'Being (*Sein*) that can be understood is language'[222] Thus, there is an insepa-
rable unity between the subject matter and the language in which it is expressed.

By following the long path to language we have arrived at an understanding of language
which fulfils the demands made earlier. On the one hand, language is understood as
being able to contain meaning, as opposed to only pointing at meaning as Karl Barth
assumes[223]. There is no difference between the immanent language and the transcendent
meaning, or, in other words, *finitum capax infinitum!*[224] The *verbum internum* is
contained in the *verbum externum*. On the other hand, language is understood in a way
that Bultmann's shortcut, excluding a perception of the world from theology, is avoided.
It enables the interpreter to keep Bultmann's important insights regarding New Testa-
ment interpretation while avoiding his shortcomings, fulfilling Paul Ricœur's demand to

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[218] Cf. GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 446f (Engl. 401f).

[219] Ibid. 447f (402f).

[220] Ibid. 462 (415f).

[221] Ibid. 457 (411).

[222] Ibid. 473 (426).

[223] Cf. above 25.

[224] Cf. above, p. 26f.

take 'the long path of the question of being and of the belonging of saying to being'[225] to an appropriate understanding of biblical language.

2. Understanding and History

After we have discussed the relation of language and being, we have to deal with the question of historical distance and understanding. What effect does it have on the understanding of a text that it is an ancient text, as the New Testament is? This automatically raises the question as to what is the role of the tradition which connects the ancient text and the modern interpreter?

It has become a commonplace statement that understanding a historical text works, according to Gadamer, through the fusion of the horizons of text and interpreter[226]. Text and interpreter are seen as having each an own horizon, that is formed by the world in which the text was written or in which the interpreter is living. These horizons form the background against which understanding takes place. Gadamer's definition of horizon[227] has to be seen in the light of the 'ontological shift' in the third part of Gadamer's 'Truth and Method'. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, someone's horizon is the world in which one lives. It is the world as a meaningful whole of relations which can be understood through language. In this respect an ancient text and the reader are from different worlds, since they are based in a different meaningful whole of relations, they have different horizons. Usually, there will be a relation between the horizon of the interpreter and that of the text, since both take part in the same tradition of thought, which is continuously developing. Although the world view may have changed significantly, there will still be a common basis, a common origin. In order to understand a

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[225] RICŒUR; *Preface to Bultmann*, 72

[226] Cf. GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 311 (Engl. 273).

[227] Ibid. 307f (269f).

text, the interpreter places himself within the tradition of which the text and he are a part. Understanding is [...] to be thought of [...] as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which the present and the past are constantly fused.'[228]

The different horizons of interpreter and text lead to the next feature of Gadamer's theory of understanding, which is the role of the interpreter's pre-understanding. The interpreter approaches a text already having an understanding of the text's subject matter within the framework of his or her understanding of the world. Above we have seen that understanding the world is determined by the language in which one lives, which, in turn, is passed down through the tradition. Therefore, the presuppositions of the interpreter, which are formed by his understanding of the world, are a product of the language-tradition in which the interpreter finds himself. Therefore, since text and interpreter have different horizons, the text is alien to anyone approaching it. On the other hand, there is a certain familiarity between text and interpreter, for they are part of the same tradition. Therefore, the text influences the way the interpreter approaches it through the tradition that connects them. In addition, there is the whole tradition of interpreting the text placed between the text and the interpreter. A text has been interpreted from the first time it was read and thus a tradition of interpreting and understanding the text started; at the (for the moment) final point of this tradition the interpreter finds himself or herself. Thus, interpreters are in a certain familiarity with the text, since they are part of the same tradition. On the other hand, through the meeting of past and present in the act of interpretation, the text has also the power of saying something new, to speak anew in the situation of the interpreter and thus to say something unexpected, which has not been recognised before. Therefore, the text is also a stranger to the interpreter. 'The place between strangeness and familiarity that a trans-

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[228] Ibid. 295 (258).

mitted text has for us is that intermediate place between being a historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition. The true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area.'[229]

In this intermediate area between being a historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition, new truth can emerge. 'In as much as the tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on.'[230] Through the fusion of the horizons a new horizon emerges which is larger than just the two horizons that existed before. The meaningful relations that constitute the worlds of text and interpreter add to each other in a way that completely new relations become visible and thus new truth is unveiled. The subject matter is revealed in a new way by the encounter of presence and tradition.

The encounter of interpreter and text works, as Gadamer suggests, by approaching the text having certain questions which the text is expected to answer. Every text is, according to Gadamer, an answer to a question or a whole set of questions, and thus the text speaks only in relation to the questions that it is asked[231]. The questions with which a text is approached are themselves a part of the tradition interpreters find themselves in, either because they are given to the interpreters from the tradition or they evolve from the continuous development of the tradition of thought. These questions can be new questions which the text has never been asked before and which have not been in the mind of the author, but the text may have the potential to answer these questions. If a new question is found to which the text offers a meaningful answer, understanding happens. Thus interpretation takes place as a dialogue between the text on one end of

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[229] Ibid. 300 (262f).

[230] Ibid. 466 (419).

[231] Cf. GRONDIN, Jean; *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Darmstadt (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 1991, 150f.

the tradition and the interpreter on its other end. Between them is the gulf of the tradition in which text and interpreter are placed, which is not something to be bridged but the bridge between them. This tradition enables the interpreter to formulate questions to the text and then to check whether they are valid by seeing them within the now common horizon of text and interpreter. Within this process of interpretation the questions of the interpreter may also be changed and more appropriate questions, that have been a part of neither the text's nor the interpreter's world, may be formulated, and the result of this debate will be that the text speaks in the world of the interpreter and establishes new meaningful relations and thus new meaning.

Nevertheless, an important question remains: Does the encounter between text and interpreter always work? For Gadamer and the related New Hermeneutics the task of interpretation is to ensure that understanding happens. In this context, Ebeling says:

> '[...] interpretation, and therefore also *hermeneutics*, is *requisite* only in the case *where the word-event is hindered* for some reason or other. But for that reason also the hermeneutic aid can only consist in removing hindrances in order to let the word perform its own hermeneutic function.'[232]

The main hindrance of understanding is, certainly, that the text just does not make sense to the interpreter. This may be the case especially when a text from an unknown background is interpreted. In this case the horizon of the text has to be investigated so that the text can be understood against this background. In this respect, historical research is necessary for the understanding of the text. In addition, to investigate into the world of the text historically brings about the text's otherness so that wrong familiarity will be destroyed. This move is important to alienate the text as a step towards a fresh understanding of it, through which new truth can happen.

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[232] EBELING; "Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik" 334 (English: "Word of God and Hermeneutics" 318f).

There are certainly different possible understandings of a text. For example the historical background of the text may be reconstructed differently, which could lead to different interpretations of the text. Thus, there will be a certain range of possible and valid interpretations, and if a particular interpretation leaves this range, it has to be falsified in the scholarly dispute and will probably be ruled out.

Through the ever new interpretation and the comparison of competing interpretations, Gadamer's assertion of the positive value of temporal distance is certainly true that 'not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that the true meaning has filtered out of it all kind of things that obscure it, but there emerge continually new sources of understanding, which reveal unsuspected elements of meaning.'[233]

An important issue in contemporary hermeneutics is the identification and critique of ideological and hidden agendas as well as power structures underlying the text. Yet this concern can be taken seriously by a hermeneutical approach like Gadamer's. The ideological presuppositions which can be found in the text are intrinsically part of its horizon, so they need to be explored and it has to be investigated how far they influence understanding of the text. This is still part of the exploration and explanation of the horizon of the text, and if this task is fulfilled carefully and with awareness of ideological agendas, it can be discerned how far they influence the meaning of the text and whether they need to be rejected or not. Yet being made explicit it is not likely that they will influence the interpreter unconsciously. To give an example, John's Gospel has often been said to contain a strong anti-Semitism. Yet if the interpreter is aware of this notion, then he or she can take the agenda underlying the text into account, explain its origin and the way in which it works. Then understanding the text can take place without the danger of any unconscious ideological indoctrination. Yet in this framework the text needs to be

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[233] GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 303 (Engl.265f).

accepted as an authority which has to say something new to the interpreter, though as an authority the text is open to critique. Therefore, ideological criticism can fulfil an important role in the process of understanding without silencing the text. In fact, through this critical component of interpretation a better and deeper understanding of the text will be facilitated, for the text and the interpreter are challenged and a deeper interaction can take place. Although these considerations are, to my knowledge, not included in Gadamer's work, I believe that his hermeneutical theory is open to the inclusion of a critical perspective within the process of interpretation.

What implications do these considerations have for the interpretation of the New Testament? We have seen above that the scriptures of the New Testament are a result of the struggle for a language to express the new truth that had been encountered in Jesus' cross and resurrection[234]. The authors of the New Testament writings found idioms to understand this new truth within the framework of their world. Today's humanity certainly understands the world in a very different way than people in antiquity did. Therefore, interpreters today encounter the biblical texts as strangers. On the other hand, however, interpreters are connected with the New Testament through the Christian tradition; they will probably know Christianity and thus there is already an understanding of what these texts say. They are somehow familiar to modern readers. Therefore, the intermediate area between strangeness and familiarity, which is the true home of hermeneutics[235] is given. In order to bring about this intermediate area, the interpreter has to get rid of a wrong familiarity with the text, the text's otherness and strangeness have to be brought about, which constitutes the alienating function of historical research. In addition, it is necessary to explain the horizon of the historical text in order to

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[234] Cf. below p.88.

[235] Cf. GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 300 (Engl. 262f).

understand the world of the text in a way that it can be fused with the horizon of the interpreter.

An essential part of the horizon of the interpreter is his or her ecclesial background. The interpreter's view of Christianity, even his or her whole world view is strongly influenced by the Christian tradition. The tradition will, certainly, have an impact on the result of the act of understanding, and thus influence the meaning the biblical text has for today's community of faith. This does not, however, mean that theologians from different traditions cannot discuss their interpretations of a text. On the one hand, the implications of philological and historical evidence can be discussed by scholars from different backgrounds; on the other hand the dialogue between the Christian denominations and traditions is something most important for the development of Christian theology. To discuss this issue any further, however, would leave the range of the present work.

Finally, theological tradition is important for the understanding of the New Testament. Firstly, being aware of the history of one's own theological tradition makes the interpreter conscious of the own background and thus presuppositions clear, so that they can be reflected and become a conscious part of interpretation rather than influencing it as a subconscious hidden agenda. Secondly, the theological tradition provides countless examples of how the biblical texts have been applied to the different situations and world views interpreter have found themselves in. Dealing with these previous interpretations shows the variety of possible interpretations and applications of the texts. New relations between the texts and the world can be seen in these interpretations and enrich the horizon of the interpreter. Apart from that it may be helpful to see that certain ways of interpreting the texts have been tried before and were not successful, so that these attempts do not have to be repeated by every generation of interpreters.

3. Poetic Language: Metaphor and Symbol

In the former sections of this chapter I have discussed the relation between language and meaning and the historical conditions of understanding. As a last step in my investigations into the nature of language I have to explore how language contains and expresses meaning. Mythological language as we encounter it in the Bible, is, in my opinion poetic language, functioning analogically to Paul Ricœur's poetological theory of language[236]. I use the term *poetic* in the sense of the Greek term, where ποίησις has an interesting double meaning. On the one hand, it means 'making', 'fabrication', 'creation' and 'production', on the other hand it means 'composition', or the 'writing of a poem'. These two meanings together constitute, in my opinion, what may be termed *poetic*. Poetic language in this sense is not necessarily metric language, but language that creates new meaning through composition[237]. In the context of this investigation, I have to limit myself to a discussion of non-narrative poetic language, for including the theory of narrative language would go beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, to include narrative language would not add any significant gain to the understanding of the question. A theory of narrative language would follow, however, from a discussion of Paul Ricœur's work in his book '*Time and Narrative*'[238] in the light of the insights proposed in this thesis.

Paul Ricœur has described his understanding of the functioning of poetic language concisely and clearly in his book '*Interpretation Theory*'[239]. In this section, I am going to

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[236] KÖRTNER, Ulrich; "Arbeit am Mythos?" 175f.

[237] Another term for the theory of language I propose here is that of the 'absolute metaphor', as it is suggested by KÖRTNER, "Arbeit am Mythos?" 175f. For the terminology cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* I, 1447a,1-1447b,29

[238] RICŒUR, Paul; *Time and Narrative* (3 vols.), Chicago and London (Chicago University Press) 1984-88.

[239] RICŒUR, Paul; *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth (Texas University Press) 1976.

follow his argument laid out in this work, making fruitful his insights in the light of my earlier hermeneutical investigations. For Ricœur, metaphor is not just a trope or a figure of speech, but a semantical device which bears meaning that could not be expressed in another way. As the bearer of metaphorical meaning Ricœur does not see the word, but the metaphorical utterance on the level of the sentence as a whole[240]. In a metaphorical utterance, two elements are combined that, on the literal level, do not make sense together. 'The metaphor is the result of the tension between two terms in a metaphorical utterance'[241]. Yet it is not merely a semantic deviance[242], but through this tension between the two terms new meaning is disclosed, because they are seen in the light of each other and thus give new meaning to each other.

> 'What is at stake in a metaphorical utterance [...] is the appearance of kinship where ordinary vision does not perceive any relationship. [...] It is, in effect, a calculated error, which brings together things that do not go together and by means of this apparent misundersanding [sic!] it causes a new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed.'[243]

Through metaphor, a new view of the subject matter is offered. A new range of references or relations of being (*Seinsbezüge*) is opened and the reader is invited to see the subject matter in the light of these new relations. Thus the meaning of the subject matter is changed. In this process the world of the reader is altered by this implementing of new relations of being into the system of relations in which the reader has been living. 'A metaphor, in short, tells us something new about reality.'[244] As metaphor only works in the realm of language and meaning, i.e. of discourse (*logos*), for it creates new rela-

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[240] RICŒUR, Paul; *The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling*, Critical Inquiry 5, 1978, 143-160, 145.

[241] RICŒUR, *Interpretation Theory*, 50.

[242] RICŒUR; *The Metaphorical Process*, 145. Cf. also RICŒUR, *Interpretation Theory*, 49.

[243] Ibid. 51.

[244] Ibid. 53.

tions between beings, it does not have a direct relation to the physical life (*bios*). Alternatively, as Ricœur remarks, 'Metaphor occurs in the already purified universe of the *logos*'[245]. The symbol, which Ricœur investigates next, connects life (*bios*) and discourse (*logos*). Ricœur sees symbol as hesitating 'on the dividing line between *bios* and *logos*.'[246] Through symbol, something in the world, which can be seen, touched or experienced, is linked with an additional meaning. The single thing as a symbol signifies more than is visible, and in symbolic language, the symbol stands, on the one hand, for the literal meaning, on the other hand for that to which the symbol also points. Finally, another important means of expressing new meaning is, as Ricœur calls it, the root metaphor[247]. Root metaphors are metaphors which are rooted in other metaphors and symbols, they are part of a whole system of symbols and metaphors. In this system, all metaphors and symbols are related to each other so that, if one of them is used, all of them contribute their meaning to the one which is used. In the same way, metaphors and symbols can be combined so that one or both elements of the metaphors are symbols. In this case, the whole meaning of the symbol is contributed into the metaphor.

In this respect, Gadamer's insight into the nature of language becomes important. According to Gadamer, 'every word causes the whole language to which it belongs to resonate, and the whole of the perception of the world, that it is based upon, appear.'[248] This statement has to be seen in the context of Gadamer's general theory of language, which I have discussed in the previous section. If one word or idiom is used, it entails all the meaning it has in the world, in the world of the text as well as in that of the interpreter. Every term therefore carries with it the whole weight of its meaning. Unlike

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[245] Ibid. 59.

[246] Ibid. 59.

[247] Ibid. 64.

[248] GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 434 (engl. 415f).

symbols, 'ordinary' terms do not point at something transcendent, nevertheless they have also a surplus of meaning like metaphors and symbols. They always have to be seen against their own horizon, i.e. as a part of the world from which they come.

In religious language, metaphor and symbol become extremely important, since the subject matter in this kind of language is the divine, the transcendent. One possibility to speak about the divine is the language of metaphysics, which is highly abstract and cannot really talk about the experience of the divine and its meaning in the life world of humankind. Poetic language, on the contrary, is able to communicate the experience and the meaning of the divine in a way that conceptualising language cannot do. This kind of religious language is earthly language speaking about the divine and its mystery, without collapsing the distinction. Heaven and earth, the divine and the human, are put into meaningful relation and the divine becomes speakable without losing its mystery. Immanent human language can entail transcendent meaning, *finitum capax infiniti!*

In order to interpret the mythological language of the Bible in the light of this theory of language, we have at first to analyse how the terms, concepts and figures of speech, metaphors in particular, relate to each other and understand the network and development of meaning within the text. Secondly, however, the range of meanings of the terms and concepts within the text has to be established; light has to be shed on the world they make resonate and the meaning that they carry with them has to be made explicit. The first task is a literary one, whereas the second one is a historical one. These two investigations are, as it were, two sides of a coin, they cannot be separated from each other and proper understanding of the text can only be gained through both.

4. The New Testament as a reflection of the early Christian Struggle for Language

The results of the above investigations have, certainly, important implications for our understanding of the New Testament. In analogy to Ebeling's above statement that the task of interpretation is not the understanding *of* language but *through* language, we can say that the task of New Testament interpretation is not the understanding *of* the New Testament but the understanding of Christian faith *through* the New Testament.

The same way today's interpreter understands Christianity through the New Testament, the New Testament authors, followed by the whole of Christianity, understood their faith through the language they created. Obviously, Christianity has been founded through the ministry, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For those who encountered it, it gave a new meaning to the world. Their faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord transformed everything for them. God was understood differently, but also the world, humanity and, last but not least, the human self. To use the Heideggerian terminology I have used above, new *Seinsbezüge*[249], relations of being, were unveiled. Through this event, a new world, a new creation was opened. It is, indeed, a new world that had been opened, not only a new relation between God and the human self, or the possibility of authentic existence. This new world in which the first Christians found themselves, was understood through language. Since there was no ready language at hand to understand the new world, they had to create language, a new language for a new creation. The Christian struggle for language had begun.

The natural framework of language, in which the new faith could be understood, was the language of Judaism, since the first Christians were originally Jews, and the ministry of the earthly Jesus, at least partly, that of a Jewish teacher. Traditional religious language of Judaism was used, but it was given a new meaning, by combining known terms

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[249] Cf. above, p.71.

and concepts in a creative, a poetic way so that new meaning was disclosed and thus the new creation could be understood through language. For example, the well known term βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ played an important part in the proclamation of early Christianity, being originally a term that had its place in Jewish terminology. It was, however, used to describe something different than in traditional Jewish religious language. The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ[250] was, in Christian language, connected with Jesus' person. The Kingdom of God, with all its connotations, had arrived in Christ. So all the contents of the traditional language of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ were connected with Jesus, and so both, Jesus and the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ gained new meaning, a meaning that was needed to understand faith in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. In the same way early Christianity took many elements of traditional Jewish religious language and gave them a new meaning by connecting the known concepts creatively among each other and with Jesus' person[251].

Not only the language of different Jewish traditions was used to describe what happened, but also that of other Hellenistic religious thought was useful. As the horizon of Christianity grew, its language grew, making use of elements from religious languages of different backgrounds for a better understanding of the new faith. They were transformed to express the Christian faith, the Christian world by using them in a new context and combining them poetically. Certainly, this is only an oversimplifying account of the development of Christian thought. In this respect, however, the History of Religion school is right in saying that Christianity is a synthesis of Jewish and Hellenistic thought. But it is not the religions that had been fused, but the language-worlds of the different world-views in order to express the unique message of Christianity. Struggling for a lan-

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[250] For a thorough discussion of the development of the concept of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ cf. below, p.157.

[251] Cf. LUZ, Ulrich; "βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ" in: *EWNT* 481-91.

guage to express Christian faith, elements of the different world-views, which we find as background of the New Testament writings, were combined in a poetic way, and through this combination new meaning, the new message of Christianity, was brought out. Through language, Christianity found ever new ways to understand itself.

It may be worth remarking that what was to be brought out was, in fact, the Christian *kerygma* of cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its power to transform the (language-) world. Therefore it does not seem plausible to assume that parts of the New Testament, like the *corpus Johanneum* were docetic and did not know of the cross of Jesus but only of his returning to the father, as Käsemann and others suggest, and only at a later stage it was made acceptable for the Church through an 'orthodox' redaction.[252] Here, in my opinion, the order of the development has been mixed up. Early Christianity has been struggling for a language to express the experience of the cross and resurrection and, subsequently, brought about the scriptures of the New Testament. Later, some currents left the range that was only later seen as orthodoxy. They interpreted Christianity in a gnostic way and docetism became their way of understanding[253]. But this was, in my opinion, a later development away from the struggle for a language to express the identity of the crucified one with the resurrected one.

Certainly, this struggle for language led to different results, as we can see in the different approaches the New Testament provides, not to mention all the non-canonical early Christian writings. Early Christianity, due to the different situations in the various corners of the ancient world, where the Church was growing, created a different language to express and understand what Christianity was about. Thus a wide range of theology developed, depending on the background from which the authors came and for what

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[252] Cf. KÄSEMANN, Ernst; *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [4]1980, 26-35.
[253] Cf. below, p.113f.

type of audience they were writing. Any attempts to harmonise the differences in the New Testament writings would, in my opinion, neglect this plurality. However, already in early Christianity there were attempts to unify the different languages that were used to express the new world of Christianity. Approaches that were found inadequate were ruled out and seen as heresy. Through the development of the theology of the early church up to the creeds of the ecumenical councils, one language evolved to unify the different interpretations of Christianity. The New Testament as it is, however, represents an early stage of this development towards a unifying Christian language, and it is still full of the variety of interpretations gained by earliest Christianity. However, the movement towards unification can be seen in later layers of the New Testament, like the ecclesiastical redaction of John's Gospel, through which the language of John has been brought in line with the developing mainstream Christianity[254], or in the later epistles like the Pastorals or 2 Peter or Jude. For this very plurality I thoroughly agree with Käsemann's famous statement that the canon of the New Testament does not found the unity of the Church but the plurality of denominations[255]. Different currents within early Christianity emphasised different aspects of the Christian proclamation, and Käsemann gives a concise account of the most important and obvious theological and historical differences within the canon[256]. As we find these differences in the New Testament, Churches and Christian groups through all history have emphasised some traditions within the New Testament more than others[257]. In fact, even those groups that claim to weigh all writings of the New Testament equally usually emphasise certain aspects of the New Testament more than others.

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[254] Cf. below, p.115.

[255] KÄSEMANN, Ernst; "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?" in: *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, vol 1, Göttingen (Vandenhoek und Ruprecht) 1960, 214-223, 221.

[256] Ibid. 214-221.

This view of the genesis of the New Testament involves, certainly, consequences for its interpretation. First, the theory of language and the view of the genesis of the New Testament presented here, involves seeing the Word of God within the biblical text. There is no way of finding the Word of God behind the text in some pre-verbal form, as Karl Barth does[258]. The New Testament contains the Word of God in its lingual form. The Word of God is, to refer to Melanchthon's famous statement again[259], the proclamation of the *beneficia Christi*, which takes place in the *verbum externum*, in the human language of the Bible. The *beneficia Christi* are seen in the transformation of the world. The language of the Bible and all Christian proclamation displays a transformed world, a new creation. It invites the recipient to enter this new world and have his or her own language-world transformed and thus to live in the world of Christianity. This implies that all Christian and biblical language is an open language-system, not esoteric. It is accessible from the outside, it is comprehensible without approaching it with particular presuppositions or from within a certain community. It is language which can be understood (to be accepted or to be rejected) by everybody who is willing to take it seriously and thus opens the language-world of Christianity.

Secondly, the historicality of the New Testament has to be taken seriously. The interpreter has to be aware that the Word of God came into the world in history, at a particular time and place, from the time when Cyrenius was governor of Syria until the crucifixion *sub Pontio Pilato*, and was understood in the framework of history, of the particular time and place in which the authors of the New Testament lived. The task of interpretation is, therefore, to understand the world of the New Testament in its historical and geographical context, in its closeness and familiarity as well as in its otherness

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[257] Ibid. 221.

[258] Cf. above, p.25.

[259] Cf. above, p.29.

and strangeness. Through this understanding of the New Testament the interpreter will be enabled to enter the language-world of the Bible and to become part of the new reality which the New Testament opens. Through that the interpreter's world will be transformed, he or she becomes part of the new creation within today's world. Then the interpreter can translate the language of the Bible into the language of today's communities in order to open the world of Christianity to others, a task which takes place either in the discipline of contemporary theology or homiletics. In short, today's theologian is still involved in the struggle for language, he or she is struggling to understand the world of Christianity through the Bible, entering its language-world and attempting to find a language to make this world accessible for others, to transform our world through the faith which is opened through the New Testament. As early Christianity struggled for a language for its faith and created it, today's Church is in need of an adequate understanding of the ancient language of faith, as well as creating a language for faith nowadays, which can only be based on the faith that found its expression in the language of the New Testament. In order to translate the texts of the New Testament and to let them speak in our time, we have to take part in the *Struggle for Language*, which is Christianity.

Part II.

Casestudies:

The Struggle for Language at Work

A. Introductory Questions

In the second part of this thesis I will attempt to demonstrate how my understanding of Christianity as *Struggle for Language* contributes to biblical exegesis and provides the framework of a methodology for the interpretation of the New Testament. After a brief discussion of introductory questions in this section I interpret three texts from John's Gospel using the hermeneutical insights gained in the previous part.

In this present chapter, I am going to outline my views on the introductory questions only very briefly, since a broader discussion of relevant issues will follow in the course of the exegesis in the next three chapters. At first I deliberate the relevance and use of parallel texts for New Testament interpretation. Secondly, the relevance of research into the social setting of the text, especially that of the reconstruction of a community from which the text evolved will be considered. Thirdly, I discuss some questions of literary criticism, followed by a fourth section on the history of tradition behind John's Gospel in order to reconstruct its genesis. In the light of these insights I highlight the issue as to how, during the development of John's Gospel, a language of faith was found and developed in order to understand Christianity, or, in other words, how the *Struggle for Language* took place within John's Gospel.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the interpretation of selected texts from John's Gospel. I chose these particular texts, the Hymn which is contained in the prologue (John 1:1-18), the Nicodemus-discourse (John 3:1-21) and the final Prayer (John 17), because they represent, as I am going to show, different stages in the development of the fourth gospel. The Hymn represents a text which had been written before the composition of the gospel by the evangelist and goes back to the earliest period of the Johannine community; the Nicodemus-discourse depicts a text which is a composition of the evangelist and the final Prayer is a text which has been inserted into John's Gos-

pel by a later redaction before the ecclesiastical redaction took place[260]. All three texts are non-narrative texts, they are poetry, dialogue and speech. I chose only non-narrative texts for this study because interpreting narrative texts would have involved a discussion of the theory of narrative[261] in addition to that of poetic language, metaphor and symbol above[262]. This additional discussion would not have contributed any essentially new insights to this study, since the functioning of language as bearer of meaning is sufficiently explored in the discussion of poetic language. Thus, I chose to reduce the scope of this study to non-narrative texts, the treatment of which is sufficient to show how the New Testament can be interpreted using the concept of the *Struggle for Language*. Narrative texts can be interpreted within the framework of the *Struggle for Language* applying Paul Ricœur's theory of Narrative to the ideas proposed in this thesis.

The different historical findings and insights which I am presupposing and arguing in this study are not essential to the relevance of the main thesis. The texts are interpreted as carefully and thoroughly as possible in order to demonstrate my hermeneutical approach to the New Testament and the methodology which follows from it. The guiding question in the interpretation is how the authors involved in the composition of John's Gospel have combined elements from other religious languages in order to understand and communicate the Christian *kerygma*. What I try to understand is how the early Christian authors understood their faith. Yet the approach I am using to do so is, in my opinion, generally valid for the interpretation of the New Testament. The concept of the *Struggle for Language* is not restricted to highlight how the evangelists, authors, bearers of traditions and redactors struggled for language themselves but it is relevant for every historical interpretation with theological concern. Since, as I have shown in the

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[260] For a description of the terminology cf. below, p.109.

[261] Cf. RICŒUR, Paul; *Time and Narrative*.

[262] Cf. above p. 84.

chapters on hermeneutical theory, there is no such thing as a presuppositionless and objective exegesis, every interpretation of the New Testament is governed by a theological agenda and is, therefore, never purely descriptive. Therefore, to insert a section after the allegedly descriptive interpretation of the text, which is meant to provide the fusion of horizons for the reader, as Ben Witherington III's commentary on John's Gospel[263] attempts to do, only bears witness to hermeneutical ignorance and does not take seriously the complexity of understanding. This kind of exegesis assumes that there is a purely descriptive exegesis which needs to be appropriated. Yet already the interpretation is governed by the theological agenda of the interpreter. Already in the 'descriptive' part a fusion of horizons has taken place.

In sum, already in the 'descriptive' interpretation of the text a fusion of horizons takes place. As the aim of the second part of the thesis is, however, to demonstrate the functioning of the concept of the *Struggle for Language* and its methodological implications, I have concentrated on the way the writers involved in the composition of John's Gospel approached (probably unconsciously) the hermeneutical task and created a language in which to understand and communicate their faith. This investigation displays how the earliest church approached the hermeneutical problem posed by the very nature of Christianity and thus has important implications for our dealing with the same task, which has not changed significantly during the last two-thousand years.

Certainly, as in every exegetical study, the historical insights and assumptions of my argument may and will be challenged. Yet, apart from the fact that the results of this study are based on serious exegetical effort and that I am prepared to defend them, their falsification should not affect the general thesis, which is the suggestion of a hermeneutic of

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[263] WITHERINGTON, III, Ben; *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the fourth Gospel*, Louisville, Kentucky (Westminster John Knox Press) 1995.

the New Testament and a resulting methodology. The aim of the exegetical part of this study is to demonstrate that my concept of the *Struggle for Language* enables an understanding of the New Testament as sacred scripture of Christianity, taking seriously the historical conditions and circumstances under which it developed. Yet the basis on which the discussion of the results of my exegesis must take place is the hermeneutical approach developed in the first part of this thesis and the resulting methodology based on which I interpreted the individual texts. Therefore, the results of this study are, though secondary, not arbitrary, for they represent my insights into the theology of Johannine Christianity, gained through the exegetical means available to me.

1. The Relevance of Parallels for Interpretation

In the last chapter of the previous part of this thesis I have suggested the way in which the horizons of the interpreter and the text are fused when understanding takes place[264]. In order to make this fusion of horizons possible, the interpreter has to establish the horizon of the text, as far as it is possible. This is where parallel texts are crucial to biblical interpretation[265].

It is essential for biblical interpretation, as for all interpretation of ancient texts, to compare the text in question with available parallels. Yet a parallel text does not explain the text in question, but it sheds light on its environment. It is essential for interpretation to understand what the words of the text mean. All terms and concepts can mean something different in different times, different places and circumstances. Thus it is necessary to establish how a term would have been used at the time when and in the context in which the text was written. As Gadamer said, 'every word causes the whole language to which it belongs to resonate, and the whole of the perception of the world, that it is

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[264] Cf. above, p.77f.

based upon, appears.'[266] Thus, in order to understand a text, the world of the text, the whole network of its linguistic connections to other texts have to be established. The interpreter has to hear how the world of the text resonates with each word. To establish the meaning of a particular term, parallels have to be found and compared with the text. Parallels do not determine the meaning of the word or of the text, yet they illustrate how a term or a concept was used in and which range of meaning it had at the time in which the text was written. Against this background the meaning of the language of the biblical text can be established.

Many biblical texts, whole books or epistles as well as single passages, are an attempt to answer a particular question or to deal with a particular problem which was a matter of concern and discussion at the time of the text. Certain questions were dominating the religious and philosophical discourse at particular times, thus they are reflected in the writings of that period. Therefore, these terms which are part of this discussion will be found in all writings dealing with this particular problem. For example, the term *logos* occurs in a huge range of writing during the first two or three centuries AD. *Logos* was the key term in the discussion about how the transcendent God could interact with the immanent world. This question was reflected, amongst others, by Philo, John's Gospel, Hermetic writings and Stoicism[267]. Thus it is not surprising that the term *logos* is found the writings of all these authors and traditions and is used similarly. Yet this does not mean that there is mutual dependency amongst these writings, but that the authors of the different texts were all working on their own solutions to the problem given. A careful investigation shows that all of them are using the concept of *logos* in a different way to solve the problem of the relation of transcendent God and world. It is necessary to

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[265] For the argument in this section cf. SANDMEL, Samuel; *Parallelomania*, JBL 81, 1962, 1-13.

[266] GADAMER; *Wahrheit und Methode*, 434 (Engl. 415f).

[267] Cf. below, p.131-136.

investigate these different concepts of *logos* in the light of the problem they try to solve in order to understand each of them appropriately. For example, to understand the concept of *logos* in the prologue to John's Gospel it is necessary to know the question which the author tries to answer in order to understand his thought. So the context in which he is writing has to be established, thus different approaches to the same problem have to be compared with that of the prologue to John's Gospel. If the term *logos* occurs somewhere in first or second century literature, the whole of the period thought on that matter resonates.

In this respect also later parallels to the text in question are significant, because they contribute to the interpreter's understanding of the discussion of which the text is a part. They can show the interpreter in which way the use of a term or concept developed and its general usage in later antiquity and thus give valuable insight into the meaning of a term. In addition, parallels which are literary dependent on the text interpreted may highlight how the text or concepts of the text have been understood by contemporary readers and thus how the author might have understood it himself. To use a contemporary example, if an interpreter of Kant in two thousand years endeavoured to understand what the term *Vernunft* means, it would not be absurd to use texts of the nineteenth and twentieth century as parallel, for example the idealist philosophy or the neo-Kantians of the beginning of this century or the positions which argue against Kant's perception of the issue. Certainly, the interpreter then has to be aware that the parallels are later, yet they highlight the variety of meaning and the potential of the given term. Hence, Hermetic parallels are, e.g., relevant for the interpretation of John's Gospel, although they are chronologically later than the fourth gospel. They are as well a part of the great discussion of religious questions which took part in the later ancient world and thus shed light on the meaning of the fourth gospel.

In addition, there is always the possibility that an author used another writing as a model for his own. In this case, it is essential to the understanding of the text to compare it with the source. Yet, not establishing the source is the aim of interpretation, but to find the author's creative work and learn what he made of the source to fit it into his own agenda. Only then we can find out how the thought of the author was shaped by contemporary thought and what was his individual contribution, so that we may understand the meaning of the text in its context.

Finally, not only a knowledge of related texts and traditions is essential to biblical interpretation, but also a thorough knowledge of ancient literature, philosophy and history in general, for only then the texts can be seen in the place which they take in the world from which they originate.

2. *The Social Background of the Text*

In the current debate, an important issue is the relevance of the sociological background of a biblical text. In this context, there are two main questions which have to be discussed in the course of this study. Firstly, some scholars have argued that John's Gospel is the arcane scripture of a sect which lived in complete separation from its environment and thus that John's Gospel is written in a language which is only accessible to the initiated and completely incomprehensible to outsiders[268]. This claim will be discussed in the light of the insights presented in the light of the previous chapters of this thesis. Sec-

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[268] Cf. MEEKS, Wayne A.; "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism" in: ASHTON, John (ed.); *The Interpretation of John*, Issues of Religion and and Theology 9, Philadelphia (Fortress) and London (SPCK) 1986, 141-173.

ondly, I have to discuss the position on the other extreme, i.e. Richard Bauckham's the-sis that the community from which a text originates is irrelevant for its interpretation[269].

In Johannine interpretation, it has often been argued that through the Gospel text the history of the Johannine community can be reconstructed. This type of research into John's Gospel has been introduced by Louis J. Martyn in his influential work *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*[270]. For him as well as for his main followers, most eminently Wayne A. Meeks and Raymond E. Brown, John's Gospel evolved from an isolated group of Christians, the history of which is found in the narrative of the gospel in a coded form and can be deciphered. It is more or less agreed amongst these scholars that the Johannine group was a sect in opposition to the sect of John the Baptist, the Jewish community and even the 'Apostolic Christians', the group which became later the catholic church[271]. John's Gospel is then seen as a text that is, on one level, written 'to make sense of all these aspects of the group's history'[272], it is seen as written more or less exclusively for this distinct community. R.E. Brown even tries to reconstruct the whole history of this isolated community from the evidence found in the gospel[273]. Wayne A. Meeks even takes the extreme position that John's Gospel is the arcane scripture of an isolated community or sect, that 'not only describes, in etiological fash-ion, the birth of that community; it also provides reinforcement of the community's isolation.'[274] The gospel is written in a way, that

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[269] BAUCKHAM, Richard; *For whom where the Gospels written?*, unpublished paper, British New Testa-ment Conference, Aberdeen, 1995 (forthcoming in: BAUCKHAM, Richard (ed.); *The Gospels for all Chris-tians*, Grand Rapids (Eerdmans) 1997.)

[270] MARTYN, J. Louis; *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Nashville, Tennessee (Abington) ²1979.

[271] BROWN, Raymond E.; *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Indi-vidual Church in New Testament Times*, New York, Mahwah (Paulist Press) 1979, 59-91.

[272] MEEKS; "Man from Heaven" 145.

[273] BROWN; *Community*.

[274] MEEKS, "Man from Heaven" 163.

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'only a reader who is thoroughly familiar with the whole Fourth Gospel or else acquainted by some non-literary means with its symbolism and developing themes [...] can possibly understand its double entendre and its abrupt transitions. For the outsider -even for an interested inquirer (like Nicodemus)- the dialogue is opaque.'[275]

Brown does not see the community in this complete isolation from the rest of Christianity, since he suggests that, although separated from it and having exclusivist tendencies, the Johannine community did not break communion with the 'Apostolic Christians'[276]. Can we, however, really assume such a separated group of Christians, something like the Johannine community, in and for which John's Gospel has been written? And if so, can we reconstruct its history through the sociological deciphering of the gospel narrative?

For a comprehensive critical evaluation of these theories of a closed community behind the fourth gospel it would be necessary to discuss the structuralist presuppositions at work in these proposals, for they are mainly governed by a structuralist anthropology[277]. As this discussion would be far too extensive within the framework of this thesis, I shall confine myself to historical and linguistic arguments. This will be sufficient for the argument proposed in this thesis.

Firstly, I assume that it is difficult to imagine such a group, which is, as these scholars are suggesting, completely separated and isolated, and which would even have had daughter churches, being situated in an area which would have been a centre of early Christianity, like Ephesus or Syria with its metropolitan centre Antioch[278], and which is

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[275] MEEKS, "Man from Heaven" 152.

[276] BROWN, *Community*, 89-91.

[277] Cf. BARTON, Stephen C.; "Early Christianity and the Sociology of the Sect" in: WATSON, Francis (ed.); *The open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?*, London (SCM) 1993, 140-162, 147.

[278] Cf. BROWN, *Community*, 98. For the location of the Johannine group in Syria cf. KÖSTER, Helmut; *Einführung in das Neue Testament: im Rahmen der Religionsgeschichte und Kulturgeschichte der hellenistischen und römischen Zeit*, Berlin-New York (de Gruyter) 1980, 616.

not in communication with other Christian groups and which does not see itself as a part of the larger church. In fact, before the formation of the early catholic church in the second half of the second century, which was a reaction to the crisis of the church caused by the gnostic movement, and in which the rule of faith, the canon of the New Testament and the monarchic Episcopal office developed, a much wider variety of opinions and kinds of spirituality had been possible than afterwards and no fixed structure of organisation existed in the church. In the church before the gnostic crisis there would have been space for a group like the Johannine group without it being sectarian. In addition, there would have been no opportunity for such a separated group to develop. In Syria or Asia Minor we know of Christian churches from the Pauline missions. The area in which the Johannine churches are to be located is, so to speak, the heartland of early Christianity. Thus, the 'main stream church' is strongly present here, develops as a church and also theologically. It is, in my opinion, not plausible to assume that in this environment a separate church could grow entirely independently from the rest of the church and even develop daughter churches in other towns.

Secondly, as it is one of the main points of this thesis, Johannine language is not an arcane language incomprehensible to those not belonging to a particular sect. To the contrary, it is an open system of language, drawing concepts and symbols from the Christian and non-Christian environment and combining them in a poetic way[279]. Therefore, I would like to argue that the language used in John's Gospel is comprehensible for anybody familiar with its contemporary thought, especially for members of Christian communities. Hence the fourth gospel has to be seen as a means to communicate theological insights and a particular interpretation to the community from which the gospel originated as well as to the church and beyond.

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[279] Cf. above, 88f. Cf. also BARTON; "Early Christianity and the Sociology of the Sect" 148.

On the other hand, on historical and linguistic grounds it is possible to recognise distinct traditions at work behind or within John's Gospel. These allow us to identify a particular type of Christianity which is different from that of the synoptic gospels. Thus I see the Gospel of John as a writing evolving from a particular group within the early church, having a distinct theology and spirituality. This is not, however, enough evidence to suppose an isolated church or sect. In fact, the main feature of this group is, as far as we can reconstruct it, that it developed a particular theology. The development of its theology does, in my opinion, not necessarily presuppose that the group deviated from the orthodoxy, especially since orthodoxy and rule of faith became important only later, after the gnostic crisis of the early church. John's Gospel is, therefore, to be seen as a development within the variety of early Christian theology and language, a development which brought about an impressive system of language as well as of theology. Its theological language is not arcane, yet it could be understood by Christians and everybody familiar with contemporary religious thought[280]. It invited the reader or listener to enter the world which is brought about through its language. John's Gospel is not a document of a group which separated itself from the church, but it is an offer to the church, which the church finally accepted.

The other extreme position is held by Richard Bauckham, who suggests that early Christianity was, because of the travelling activity of Bishops, missionaries and messengers in such a close contact, that the 'global village' was realised by the early Church. For Bauckham 'the early Christian movement was a network of communities in constant communication with each other, by messengers, letters and movements of leaders and teachers - moreover, a network around which Christian literature circulated easily,

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[280] Cf. below, p.180.

quickly and widely'.[281] In Bauckham's view of early Christianity there is not much space for the development of distinct groups having their own traditions, because every leading Christian figure is well travelled and has much experience of other local churches[282], and literature from each Christian group circulated quickly, so that no author could expect to address only a particular community but that it would be distributed in the Christian world very soon[283].

There are three points of criticism which I have to discuss here. Firstly, Bauckham gives an impressive account of the travelling activity in early Christianity. Yet he does not recognise that these journeys do not stand for an infinite amount of travelling messengers and clergymen. The long distance journeys which Bauckham uses as examples have been documented because they were something unusual and not every-day business. In addition, journeys through the roman empire in that period took a very long time. For example, when Ovid travelled from Rome to his exile in Tomi at the Black Sea, it took him from Autumn 8 AD until Mid- 9 AD[284]. As travelling was such a time-consuming business, it did not facilitate 'constant communication' and 'quick circulation of literature'. Thus, it is likely that, despite the travelling-activity of the early Church, strong local traditions and local groups of Churches with distinct theological and spiritual features could develop. It is also possible that leaders stayed in a Church which they had founded and which thus shared their theological thought, to the effect that their writ-

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[281] BAUCKHAM; *For whom where the Gospels written?*, 20.

[282] Ibid 16.

[283] Ibid. 2.

[284] Ovid's journey into exile is a particularly interesting example for he had been under pressure to travel as fast as possible. So his instance shows us how fast it was possible to travel through the Roman Empire of that period without using the fast imperial postal system. For Ovid's journey cf. DUFF, J.Wight; *A Literary History of Rome: From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age*, London (T. Fisher Uwin) [5]1923, 584f and OVIDIUS NASO, Publius; *Tristia Epistulas Ex Ponto*, Latine et Germanice, ed. by Georg Luck, Zürich (Artemis) 1963, X-XI.

ings, e.g. Gospel writings, were primarily written for their particular community and recognising their particular needs. In this case, investigation into the community from which a particular writing evolved may be relevant for biblical interpretation.

Secondly, it is striking that none of the early versions of John's Gospel circulated and are received. If literature was distributed as quickly and easily as Bauckham assumes, earlier versions of John's Gospel, which are very likely to have existed[285], must have circulated and hence we must know them. Thus, the fact that none of the earlier versions of John's Gospel have been received shows that it is possible that a Christian community lived not in 'constant communication' with the rest of Christianity and did not take part in the 'quick circulation of literature' The same way it is striking that, on the ground of the internal evidence, John's Gospel obviously ignores synoptic traditions and it is very likely that they were not known to the evangelist and redactors. If such a constant communication, which Bauckham assumes, really took place and led to such an interchange of thoughts and traditions, there must be noticeable traces of synoptic traditions in the fourth gospel.

Thirdly, Bauckham does not envisage that early Christian literature is often not the work of a single author, but is rooted in communities which carry particular traditions which are shaped by their particular circumstances and environment[286]. Not the far travelled and cosmopolitan individual, who is modelled after the modern scholar who travels from conference to conference to meet his fellow scholars and who is able to accept positions in nearly every part of the world, is the author of the gospels, but communities within the early Church, which have their distinct traditions and customs. In addition, since a huge diversity of opinions and positions was acceptable to the early church, even

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[285] Cf. below, p.108, '3. The Development of John's Gospel (Literary Criticism)'.

[286] Cf. BECKER, Jürgen; *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Vol 1: ÖTK 4/1, Gütersloh (Mohn) ³1991, 36-38.

the exchange between different Christian communities did not lead to uniformity of thought and customs. This is, contrary to Bauckham's thesis, a background in front of which literature directed at a particular audience is like to have been be written.

In sum, it is possible and likely that the fourth gospel originates from a community with its own traditions and theology and is written for this particular community in the first place. Nevertheless, it is not the arcane scripture of a sect, but that of a distinct group which is part of the wider church. Thus the fourth gospel was meaningful to the rest of Christianity. Hence it is appropriate for New Testament interpretation to investigate into the particular background of John's Gospel, identifying particular traditions and theological approaches which may have been part of that community. If available, even sociological factors -if available- may play a part in exegesis. John's Gospel is to be seen somewhere in between sectarianism and universal communication.

3. *The Development of John's Gospel (Literary Criticism)*

A major issue in Johannine studies has always been the reconstruction of the original order of the fourth gospel and the underlying traditions and sources[287]. Starting point for most of the investigations into these questions is the chronological and local inconsistency of the text. This has lead to theories like Bultmann's hypothesis of 'external disorder', which I have already discussed above[288]. The other strand of research is to concentrate on the underlying sources which the evangelist may have used. Authorita-

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[287] Cf. KÜMMEL, Werner Georg; *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*; Heidelberg (Quelle & Meyer) [21]1983, 162-183; LOHSE, Eduard; *Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments*, Theologische Wissenschaft Vol. IV, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln (Kohlhammer) [5]1991, 103-114. Cf also THYEN, Hartwig; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium" *TRu* 39, 1979, 1-69, 222-252, 289-330; *TRu* 42, 1977, 211-270; *TRu* 43, 1978, 328-590; *TRu* 44, 1979, 97-134; BECKER, Jürgen; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium (1978-1980)" *TRu* 47, 1982, 279-301, 305-347 and BECKER, Jürgen; "Das Johannesevangelium im Streit der Methoden (1980-1984)" *TRu* 51, 1986, 1-78.

[288] Cf. above p.57.

tive in this field has been Bultmann's analysis again, who suggested three sources behind the gospel, the Semeia-source, the Logien-source and the passion-narrative[289]. Bultmann's theory and the following discussion have been discussed broadly, so that I do not have to repeat the arguments for the different positions[290]. I may just summarise that there is no widely shared consensus about the sources of John's Gospel[291]. In my opinion, it is very likely that the evangelist drew on traditions and made use of them for his composition of his gospel. Yet I do not believe that it is possible to reconstruct the underlying sources sufficiently in order to draw conclusions, since the evangelist used the sources as material, which he transformed in order to express his theology. For example, even if the so-called Semeia-source was used in the composition of John's Gospel[292], the evangelist did not, however, use it by simply quoting it or copying it, but he changed the miracle-accounts of the source significantly so that they convey his own theology. Only the plot of the miracle-account of the source would have remained, yet the form of the narrative and the theological content would be the work of the evangelist. Hence it is unlikely that it is possible to reconstruct sources which underlie John's Gospel and so to identify their theological programme. The part of the Gospel which is the work of the evangelist is, in my opinion, an original work which is based upon earlier traditions.

Therefore, I propose an approach to the fourth gospel which starts at the level of the evangelist and takes seriously his theological work. From that level it is possible to identify traditions which the evangelist used for his compositions. In that case it is necessary to identify the way in which the evangelist transformed his material. It is also possible to

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[289] Cf. above p.55f.

[290] For a concise picture of the discussion cf. KÜMMEL; *Einleitung*, 162-183.

[291] For the disagreement even about a presumed consensus within the discussion cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 39f and KÜMMEL; *Einleitung*, 165-183.

detect the work of later redactors, who, on the one hand, inserted larger passages like the extensions of the farewell-discourse[293] or c.21. On the other hand, another redaction, which I am calling the ecclesiastical redaction, also inserted short glosses and possibly changed passages carefully in order to bring them in line with the predominant theology of their time[294]. Yet the work of the redaction as well as older traditions have to be discerned and evaluated in each individual case.

On these grounds I suggest a simple theory of the genesis of the fourth gospel. First, the evangelist, drawing on different oral and written traditions and maybe also on sources, composed the first version of John's Gospel. Second, the redaction, either during the lifetime of the evangelist or after his death, inserted additional pieces and speeches. These are the extensions of the farewell-discourses, the second ending in c.21 and possibly the appendixes after the conclusion of a passage (3:31-36, 10:1-18, 12:44-50)[295]. Later, the ecclesiastical redaction inserted smaller additions, like 5:28f or 6:51c-58[296]. Redaction of the fourth gospel, however, did not take place at once, but in different stages. For example, the farewell-discourses were added in three identifiable stages[297]. This process of John's Gospel came to an end with its 'canonisation' in the Johannine churches and coming into liturgical use. From that time on copies had to be made and circulated, so that John's Gospel became the property of the wider church.

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[292] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 134-143.

[293] John 15:1-17:26. Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 39-41.

[294] Becker also names the former stage of redaction the ecclesiastical redaction (*Kirchliche Redaktion*, cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 39-41). I do not find that title appropriate for this particular redaction, for it did not bring John's Gospel in line with the thought of the main-stream Church. Thus I use 'ecclesiastical redaction only for the redaction for which I have used it here. The other redaction I only call 'redaction' without further specification.

[295] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 39-41.

[296] Ibid.

The literary development of the fourth gospel also reflects an evolution of theological thought. On the one hand, ongoing theological reflection led to new insights and ideas, which are echoed in the different stages of John's Gospel. In the exegetical Chapters many instances for this development can be found. On the other hand, external factors like sociological developments or the relation to other groups brought new problems that had to be solved and ideas that could be built into the theology of the Johannine Churches. For example, the growing tension between the Johannine community and its environment is likely to have lead to an elaboration of the dualist world-picture. The closer contact with the growing Church let the Johannine community to adopt its theology, especially its perception of Eschatology and Sacraments. It is an important part of this thesis to bring out this development, to highlight its main threads and draw conclusions for Johannine interpretation.

4. *The Development of the Johannine Churches*

After the previous discussion of the literary history of John's Gospel it is necessary to engage in an investigation into the history of Johannine Christianity[298] and its traditions. In the course of this inquiry I am going to base my assumptions on reasons drawn from the history of tradition behind John's Gospel. It is not possible, in my opinion, to reconstruct the sociological conditions of the Johannine group, as for example Brown attempts in his book *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*[299]. In this respect I agree with Becker, who argues that it is, for everybody who distinguishes between the literary

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[297] Cf. below, p.183. Cf. also BECKER, Jürgen; "Die Abschiedsreden Jesu im Johannesevangelium" *ZNW* 61, 1970, 215-246.

[298] By 'Johannine Christianity' (or synonym terms like 'Johannine churches', 'Johannine group' etc.) I mean the branch of Christianity from which the fourth gospel originated. Although it may be an anachronism to call it Johannine before the writing of the gospel, this terminology helps to identify this particular branch of Christianity.

[299] Cf. above, p.102. fn.271.

world and lived history, impossible to read John 1-4 as an immediate reflection of the early history of the Johannine community[300].

Theologically and literary the oldest layer in John's Gospel is the hymn underlying the prologue. As I will demonstrate below in Chapter 'B. The Prologue: John 1:1-18'[301], the theology of the hymn is strongly influenced by Jewish wisdom-speculation close to that of Philo of Alexandria[302]. This influence points at the origin of the Johannine community; it is very likely that Johannine Christianity developed within a Jewish context which was part of the wisdom-circles, probably before the final separation of the Christian church from the Synagogue. During the first century AD tensions grew between early Jewish Christianity and other heterodox groups within the Synagogue on the one side and orthodox Judaism on the other, until it came to the final expulsion from the Synagogue after the inclusion of the *Birkath ha-Minim*, the cursing of heretics, into the prayers of the Synagogue[303]. The complete break with Judaism caused the development of a particular Johannine literature, which created the basis of a distinct Christian identity of the Johannine group.

Some scholars have suggested that the Johannine circle developed from a group which dissented from a group worshipping John the Baptist as the Messiah[304]. Though this construal of the evidence (especially the passages about John the Baptist John 1:19ff, 3:23-30, 10:40-42) is not impossible, it is more likely that the Johannine community grew within the framework of the Synagogue. Yet after the expulsion from the Synagogue it is possible that the Johannine church came in close contact with other hetero-

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[300] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 54.

[301] Cf. below, p.117.

[302] Cf. below, p.131, 137.

[303] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 56 and SCHMITHALS, Walter; *Neues Testament und Gnosis*, in: Erträge der Forschung 208, Darmstadt (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 1984, 113-115.

dox Jewish groups which had been excluded from the Synagogue as well, like the fol-

lowers of John the Baptist or early gnostics[305]. The Johannine church, developing its

own identity, started a dialogue with those groups, which lead, on the one hand, to the

rejection of the claims of the followers of John the Baptist, which is reflected in the

John the Baptist-passages. On the other hand, the dialogue with gnostic groups lead to a

much further interaction.

Excursus: Johannine Christianity and Gnosis

The relation between gnostic and Christian thought has been widely discussed. There is,

however, no consensus achieved in the debate. On the one hand, scholars like Hengel

or Yamauchi argue that there is no evidence for a non-Christian or pre-Christian Gno-

sis, which might have influenced the early church and its writings[306]. On the other hand,

there is a number of scholars arguing for a non-Christian origin of the Gnosis[307]. These

scholars agree that gnostic thought developed alongside the New Testament and shares

the same origin, which is heterodox Judaism[308]. Gnosis is, for these scholars, not a

closed speculative system or an established religion, but

> 'there were certainly Gnostic religions and Gnosticizing interpretations of re-
> ligious traditions and mythical materials, pre-Christian and Christian, Jewish
> and pagan. [...] And all these Gnostic religions, in spite of the vast difference
> of the materials they interpret, exhibit a high degree of affinity and congeni-
> ality. It is, therefore, quite legitimate to speak of a phenomenon 'Gnosis' in
> general [...]
>
> As Christian religion, in the early Christian period as well as today, cannot be
> grasped in the abstraction of a theological and cultural system, Gnostic relig-
> ion in its origin and development cannot be understood through the recon-
> struction of a general system in mythological and philosophical terms, but

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[304] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 55, BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 4f, BROWN; *Community*, 27-31.

[305] Cf. PERKINS, Pheme; *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, Minneapolis (Fortress) 1993, 40-42.

[306] Cf. YAMAUCHI, Edwin; *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*, London (Tyn-
dale Press) 1973 and HENGEL, Martin; *Der Sohn Gottes*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) 1975.

[307] Cf. SCHMITHALS; *Neues Testament und Gnosis*, PERKINS; *Gnosticism and the New Testament*,
KÖSTER, Helmut; "The History-of-Religion School, Gnosis and Gospel of John" *ST* 40 (1986), 115-136.

[308] Cf. PERKINS; *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 40-42.

only in the analysis of Gnostic interpretations of the traditions of myth and cult in the specific religious communities.'[309]

This theory is, in my opinion, much more able to account for the parallels between gnostic and Christian thought than the former. It sees both groups as referring to the same authorities, to the Jewish tradition, from which both of them originate. In addition, it is likely that two groups on the fringe of Judaism and expelled from the Synagogue at the same time were in contact with each other[310].

It is important at this point to observe that early Christianity before the so-called gnostic crisis in the second century was not a homogenous movement but it allowed a huge variety of approaches to the Christian faith, so that gnosticising thought would have been tolerated in earliest Christianity[311]. Early Christianity and Gnosis were both movements without a fixed organisation or a defined orthodoxy. Christianity developed these features only in its struggle against Gnosticism and the resulting evolution of early catholicism in the second century. Thus a far-reaching interaction between Christian and gnostic thought was possible and took place in the first and early second century, for Christianity had not yet recognised the danger Gnosticism would constitute for the Christian church. Consequently, the development of Gnosticism and Christianity overlapped widely and influenced each other during the first and the early second century until the two movements finally separated.

Within this historical framework it is likely that a group like the Johannine was in close contact with gnostic groups and that mutual influence took place. Even within the Johannine community gnosticising tendencies grew. This position is confirmed by the

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[309] KÖSTER, "The History-of-Religion School, Gnosis and Gospel of John" 131f.

[310] The main problem in defining the relation between earliest Christianity and gnostic thought is that there is no evidence outside the New Testament. When the first distinct gnostic writings occur in the second century, the previous existence of gnostic thought has to be assumed. Thus every argument in favour or against non-Christian gnostic thought, which might have influenced Christianity, must be circular, as it can only build on the evidence in the New Testament (Cf. SCHMITHALS, *Neues Testament und Gnosis*, p.16-21). In my opinion the assumption of a non-Christian Gnosis which may have influenced Christianity explains the internal evidence of the New Testament much better then the opposite position. Cf. (amongst others) below, pp.159, 199, 207

[311] Cf. WISSE, Frederik; "Prolegomena to the Study of the Testament and Gnosis" in: LOGAN, A.H.B. and WEDDERBURN, A.J.M. (eds.); *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, Edinburgh (T&T Clark) 1983, 138-145, 141. Cf. also BAUER, Walter, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, in: The New Testament Library, London (SCM) 1972, 229-231.

internal evidence we find in John's Gospel, i.e. the strong parallels to gnostic thought in the Nicodemus-discourse[312] and the increasing influence of these ideas in John 17[313]. This parallel development of Johannine Christianity and (Johannine) gnosticism continued until the Johannine group had to take a clear stance towards gnosticism, especially towards docetic ideas, and turned towards the developing and increasingly anti-gnostic early Catholic church. *End of the excursus*

Within the historical framework described in the above excursus, it is likely that the Johannine church was, at least at some stage of its development, open to gnostic ideas, which is reflected in the parallels to gnostic thought pointed out in the case-studies below[314]. Yet tensions between 'main-stream Johannine Christianity' (i.e. as it is known from the Gospel as it is received and the epistles) and Johannine gnostics grew to a point when it came to a split in the community, which is reflected in 1 John. Certainly, the final dissent of the opponents of 1 John may have been motivated by many reasons, for example sociological factors may have played an important role in the split of the Church. These non-theological elements in the history of the Johannine church, however, are not relevant to the study of the history of tradition of Johannine theology. The theological thought which is found in the Johannine writings is, in fact, sufficient to understand the development of Johannine theology as far as it is needed for the interpretation of Johannine writings. Yet there might be other questions for which the non-theological factors might be relevant.

After the final split of the Johannine church, the dissenters moved towards Gnosticism and contributed to its development, especially bringing with them the high estimation of John's Gospel, which is found in later Gnosticism. The remaining group, however, took an anti-gnostic stance and embraced the developing early Catholic church. In this time

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[312] Cf. below, p.159f.

[313] Cf. below, pp. 199f, 207f.

[314] Cf. (amongst others) below, pp.159, 199, 207.

the ecclesiastical redaction took place, which aligned John's Gospel with the theology of the main-stream church.

This woefully short discussion of Johannine history and of the other introductory questions is not meant to be a comprehensive study into the matter, but to provide the historical framework in which the interpretation of the fourth gospel may take place. In the study of the individual passages those questions relevant to the interpretation will be discussed in more detail[315]. Finally I have to emphasise again that it is not the aim of thesis to offer new historical insights into John's Gospel, but to propose a methodology for New Testament studies to understand and use the historical data. The historical discussion of my interpretation may bring about many disagreements, but that does not affect the main point of my thesis, which is to offer an approach to the New Testament viewing it as a witness to the early Christian *Struggle for Language*.

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[315] It must be remarked here that the development of Johannine theology is a continuous movement. Because of the outline of this thesis, discussing three texts which represent particular levels of the development of Johannine thought in relative isolation, it may appear as if these stages are only loosely connected. This is, however, not the case. Rather, they represent important stages in the history of Johannine theology, which are connected not only by the continuous thought-process, but also by texts which mirror the transition from one stage to the next. To identify and discuss these texts is not, however, the task of this thesis.

B. The Prologue: John 1:1-18

1. Introduction

Hardly any other passage of the New Testament has attracted so much scholarly attention as the Prologue to John's Gospel. It is, in fact, one of the most fascinating texts of the New Testament, so familiar and yet totally strange. It has played a crucial part in the formation of the church doctrine and was also popular amongst heretics. And it is no surprise that Goethe's Faust turns to this very text when he starts to translate the Bible - only to meet the devil.

There is a confusing multitude of literature about the prologue[316], much of which has been engaged in reconstructing the underlying hymn or arguing against its existence. In contemporary exegesis, however, it is more or less a consensus that the prologue to John's Gospel consists of an older, traditional hymn and annotations by the evangelist[317]. Since there is broad disagreement among scholars as to which parts of the prologue belong to the hymn and which to the evangelist, I shall find criteria for evaluating the different theories and take the decision for a particular reconstruction of the hymn, which will involve a detour into the wider context of Johannine theology and history of Johannine Christianity.

As a further step, I am going to interpret the underlying hymn in order to demonstrate how my hermeneutical ideas apply to the prologue. I am going to focus on the development of concepts, which are the basis of the language of the hymn, and see how they

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[316]Cf. the bibliographies in THYEN, Hartwig; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium" *TRu* 39, 1979, 1-69, 222-252, 289-330; 42, 1977, 211-270; 43, 1978, 328-590; 44, 1979, 97-134; BECKER, Jürgen; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium (1978-1980)" *TRu* 47, 1982, 279-301, 305-347; BECKER, Jürgen; "Das Johannesevangelium im Streit der Methoden (1980-1984)" *TRu* 51, 1986, 1-78.

[317] Cf. HOFIUS, Otfried; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1.1-18" *ZNW* 78, 1987, 1-25, 1, THYEN, Hartwig; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium" *TRu* 39, 1979, 1-69, 53-69.

are combined in a new and creative way in order to express the new interpretation of the Christian proclamation and the world, which can be found in the prologue. In addition, I am going to highlight how the language of the hymn is a further development of earlier languages and how it relates to the later language of the main body of the gospel.

The aim of this essay is not to give new historical insights into the history of John's Gospel or the meaning of certain parts of it, but to apply my hermeneutical views, especially the concept of the *Struggle for Language* to the findings which are already available, and to view and to arrange them according to my theories in order to show the implications and usefulness of my previous work.

2. The Hymn

a) The Problem of the Reconstruction

As pointed out in the introduction, there is a broad consensus in modern scholarship that the prologue to John's Gospel is based upon an older hymn[318]. But as much as the scholars agree on the existence of the hymn, so strongly they disagree about its extent. I cannot give an outline of the recent discussion of this matter here, but excellent reviews are available[319]. There are, as far as I can discern, two basic methods of reconstructing the hymn. On the one hand, some scholars attribute to the evangelist only those parts which are undoubtedly prose and do not fit into the context of the hymn. On the other hand, some scholars have achieved remarkable results and impressive reconstructions of the hymn by larger and sometimes rather speculative operations. In the following, I am

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[318] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18" 1.

[319] Cf. THYEN, Hartwig; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium" *TRu* 39, 1979, 1-69, 222-252, and BECKER, Jürgen; "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium (1978-1980)" *TRu* 47, 1982, 279-301, 305-347, esp. 317-321.

going to discuss two reconstructions, that of Otfried Hofius[320] as an example for the former approach and that of Jürgen Becker[321] as a model for the latter. I chose these two approaches, because they are sufficiently recent to represent the latest state of the debate. In fact, Hofius' essay is the most recent work on that matter that has come to my notice. In addition, Hofius is able to attribute to the evangelist only the minimal number of verses possible and to reconstruct a plausible (and beautiful) hymn. Becker's reconstructed hymn is only two thirds of Hofius', because he attributes much more material to the evangelist, and his investigations result in a plausible hymn, as well. Becker, however, not only ascribes much less material to the hymn, which makes him a representative of the second group of scholars, he also sees a complex history of redaction at work in the genesis of the prologue. This makes him a profitable partner for discussion in order to gain a deeper understanding of the prologue. Through this dialogue with these two interpretations of the prologue, which represent a good sample of recent scholarship, my own view on the prologue will be developed and discussed.

There are, nevertheless, important scholars not treating John 1:1-18 as a hymn with annotations. C.K. Barrett, for example, rightly observes in his commentary on John's Gospel that the prologue is not Greek poetry[322]. Not being classical Greek poetry, however, does not disprove that it is a hymn which follows different, more Semitic poetic rules, that of the christological hymns we find in different places in the New Testament. In this case, Barrett is wrong saying that it is 'impossible to strike out certain passages as prose insertions into an original "logos-ode".'[323] In addition, as a multitude of scholars have demonstrated, the passage does not show a 'marked internal unity', or 'a distinct

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[320] Cf. HOFIUS, Otfried; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1,1-18" ZNW 78, 1987, 1-25.

[321] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 79-104.

[322] BARRETT, Charles K.; *The Gospel according to St. John*, London (SPCK) [2]1978, 150.

unity of theme and subject matter with the remainder of the gospel' as Barrett assumes[324], but evidence of different layers of tradition and redaction. I am going to elaborate that more in detail in my further discussion of the prologue.

Both, Hofius[325] and Becker[326] agree with Bultmann[327] that vv.6-8,12c[328] + 13,15,17 + 18 are additions to the hymn. Apart from a few scholars who disagree about single verses[329], it seems to be a minimal consensus among scholars that these verses are not part of the underlying hymn. Hofius stops here and attributes the rest of the prologue to the hymn, whereas Becker goes further and also excludes vv.2,9 + 10,14d from the hymn. Hofius' reconstruction results in a hymn of four stanzas, which are each divided into two half-stanzas, Becker assumes a hymn of three stanzas. The exact shape of the reconstructions can be seen below, where the assumed original forms of the hymn are given.

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[323] BARRETT; *John*, 150.

[324] BARRETT; *John*, 150.

[325] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1,1-18" 2.

[326] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 82f.

[327] BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 29, 37f, 50, 53f.

[328] V.12c = τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

[329] Cf. for example Schmithals (SCHMITHALS, Walter; "Der Prolog des Johannesevangeliums" *ZNW* 70, 1979, 16-43), who attrinutes v.17 to the hymn.

Becker's and Hofius' respective Reconstructions
of the Hymn in John 1:1-18 in Synopsis

Becker	Hofius

Becker

First Stanza

(1) Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,
     καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς θεόν,
     καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος.

(2)

(3) πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
     καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν.

(4) ὃ γέγογεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωή ἦν,
     καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων

Second Stanza

(5) καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει,
     καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

(6-10)

(11) εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν,
     καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.

(12) ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,
     ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν
     τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, (12c)

Third Stanza

(14) Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο
     καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν,
     καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ
     (14d)
     πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. (15)

(16) ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ
     ἡμεῖς πάντες ἡλάβομεν
     καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος· (17,18)

Hofius

First Stanza

A. (1) Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,
       καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς θεόν,
       καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος.
   (2) οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

B. (3) πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
       καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο
       οὐδὲ ἕν ὃ γέγογεν.

Second Stanza

A. (4) ἐν αὐτῷ ζωή ἦν,
       καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων
   (5) καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει,
       καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.(6-8)

B. (9) Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν,
       ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον,
       ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

Third Stanza

A.(10) ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν,
       καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
       καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτόν οὐκ ἔγνω.
  (11) εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν,
       καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.

B.(12) ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν,
       ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν
       τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, (12d, 13)

Fourth Stanza

A.(14) Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο
       καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν,
       καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ
       δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός,
       πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. (15)

B.(16) ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ
       ἡμεῖς πάντες ἡλάβομεν
       καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος· (17, 18)

In terms of the extent of the hymn I prefer Hofius' reconstruction over against Becker's. Hofius rules out only those parts of the prologue, which cannot be a part of the hymn. Becker himself, however, states that his further operations are more controversial, though necessary, because the result of the previous operations is not yet satisfying[330]. Therefore he starts literary operations, which are possible, though not necessary. His investigations result in a plausible hymn, but the findings of the later part of his reconstruction, in which he goes further than Bultmann and Hofius[331], are, in my opinion, not certain enough. He has, in the best case, a certain probability on his side. Thus I prefer to reduce the literary operations to those which are very likely, if not certain. This reduces the possible exclusions from the hymn to the extent of Hofius' reconstruction, provided that it is possible to form a plausible hymn from this material, something Hofius is able to do. Therefore I am going to follow Hofius' reconstruction, which includes another disagreement between Becker and Hofius, which is the extent of the sentence in v.3. Two readings are possible, depending on where the interpreter sets the full stop. The full stop is either situated after the οὐδὲ ἕν or after the ὃ γέγογεν, both readings have sufficient manuscript evidence. In my opinion, Hofius' arguments for the full stop after ὃ γέγογεν are plausible. He resolves the assumed rhythmical problems by dividing v.3 into three parts rather than into two, as most reconstructions do, and thus the inclusion of the ὃ γέγογεν in v.3 does not spoil the rhythm of the hymn, rather it fits the overall structure of the hymn [332].

An advantage of Becker's approach, however, is that he recognises that it is possible that not only two hands have been at work in the prologue, as Hofius assumes, but that the received form of the prologue is the result of a number of redactions. He assumes

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[330] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 83.

[331] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 85.

[332] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1,1-18" 4-8.

that the hymn consisted originally of stanzas one and two and that the third stanza had been emended before the composition of the gospel[333]. The evangelist used this hymn and annotated it for the prologue to the gospel, and in a fourth step, after the completion of the gospel, the Ecclesiastical Redactor added v.13. That vv.14ff are not part of the original hymn has already been argued by Käsemann[334]. Käsemann sees a hymn with annotations in vv.1-13, but assumes that vv.14-18 are all written by the evangelist. The question of whether vv.14-18 contain a part of the original hymn and how they relate to the rest of the prologue will have to be discussed later[335]. Yet, if one assumes with Käsemann that vv.14-18 do not contain a part of the original hymn, one cannot assume that vv.14-18 are a literary unity, because v.15 interrupts the flow of the text, as Christian Demke has convincingly shown[336]. Therefore, Demke assumes that vv.14 + 16 are a hymn of another provenance. These two hymns, the first one a *Gesang der 'Himmlischen'* (chant of the heavenly) and a *auf diesen Gesang antwortendes Bekenntnis der 'Irdischen'* (responding confession of the earthly ones to the chant) have been adopted for the prologue to the gospel by the evangelist[337]. Becker follows Demke's argument and builds his reconstruction of the prologue upon Demke's and Käsemann's assumptions. He combines their insights with the more recent discussion of the subject and the greater knowledge about different redactions in John's Gospel for his reconstruction of the genesis of John 1:1-18.

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[333] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 86f.

[334] Cf. KÄSEMANN, Ernst; "Aufbau und Anliegen des johanneischen Prologs" in: *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, vol 2, Göttingen (Vandenhoek und Ruprecht) 1964, 155-181.

[335] Cf. below, p.124-127.

[336] Cf. DEMKE, Christian; "Der sogenannte Logos-Hymnus im johanneischen Prolog" *ZNW* 58, 1967, 45-68.

[337] Cf. DEMKE; "Der sogenannte Logos-Hymnus" 64.

The main problem for the interpretation of the prologue now is to establish whether John 1:14-18 are originally part of the hymn or a new creation of the evangelist according to his theological agenda. In this respect it is also important to establish the relation between the prologue and the rest of the gospel. Käsemann assumes that the underlying hymn was of Christian origin and had been adopted by the (Christian-) gnostic evangelist[338]. Bultmann, on the other hand, found the hymn to be originally gnostic and adopted by the evangelist, who had converted from Gnosticism to Christianity[339]. This shows how closely the reconstruction of the prologue is connected with the construal of the history of religion background of the gospel and the relation between the prologue on the one hand and the rest of the gospel on the other. Therefore, before I can come to a decision on the reconstruction of the hymn, I have to establish the relation between hymn and gospel and the underlying theological agendas.

b) The Hymn and the Gospel

An important step forward in the investigation into the background and genesis of John's Gospel was, certainly, the discovery of the connection between the history and social setting of Johannine Christianity and the evolution of the gospel, connected with a careful analysis of the history of tradition of the gospel. One of the most significant works in this area is, in my opinion, J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the fourth Gospel*[340] where Martyn shows convincingly the Jewish background of John's Gospel and that the Johannine community was, originally, a heterodox Jewish group which had been expelled from the Synagogue and formed its own community. These

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[338] Cf. KÄSEMANN, "Aufbau und Anliegen"

[339] BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 4f.

[340] MARTYN, J. Louis; *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

findings have been broadly agreed[341], and I am going to base my analysis of the prologue on these insights. Which particular strand of ancient Judaism is to be identified as the background of John's Gospel and the Prologue in particular, I leave open here, since this will become clear through the analysis of the Prologue, in which I am going to engage in the following sections of this chapter.

This view of the background of Johannine Christianity has certain implications for our reconstruction of the prologue. Firstly, it is likely that the history of religion background of the hymn contained in the prologue is of Hellenistic Jewish-Christian origin. Secondly, it is likely that it stems from an earlier stage of the development of Johannine Christianity. On the one hand, we find important elements of Hellenistic Jewish-Christian thought, like the *logos* conceptuality of 1:1+2,14, on the other hand we find a basically dualistic world view (1:4+5,10-12). The later gospel emphasises the cosmological dualism and radicalises it, but it does not use the *logos*-Christology anymore, as the evangelist thinks in terms of his Messenger-Christology (*Gesandtenchristologie*)[342], which is, in turn, unknown to the prologue. Therefore, the hymn, in the form in which the evangelist found it and used it, has its place between the expulsion from the synagogue and the development of the messenger-Christology.

But why does the evangelist include a tradition which competes with his theology? There are indeed important differences between the theology of the prologue and that of the gospel. Apart from the differences in Christology, which I have already mentioned, the prologue talks about the creation of the world by God through the *logos*. It is striking that the evangelist does not take up this important thought again in his gospel.

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[341] Cf. BROWN; *Community*, BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 47-62 and DUNN, James D.G.; "Let John be John" in: STUHLMACHER, Peter (ed.); *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, WUNT 28, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) 1983, 309-339, 318-321.

[342] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 484-494. For Messenger-Christology and the hymn cf. 94-98.

In fact, he even never mentions again that the world is divine creation[343]. The same way the evangelist never comes back to the important concept of incarnation, but uses a different concept to describe Jesus Christ's coming into the world, i.e. the sending of the son rather than the incarnation of the *logos*[344]. Here, as well as in the Christology, a certain tension between prologue and gospel is obvious, and it is possible to say that different theologies are at work here. On the other hand, there are also important parallels between prologue and gospel, e.g. the cosmological dualism and the emphasis on the rejection of the *logos* in the prologue and that of Jesus in the main body of the gospel. I suppose that the evangelist used the traditional hymn in order to embed his work in the tradition of his branch of Christianity. It is obvious that, while Johannine Christianity developed, its theology did not remain static but developed as well. From the early Jewish-Christian origin to the developed theology of John's gospel, especially to its highest developed form in John 17, is, obviously, a long way, and the hymn marks one stage of the development of Johannine thought. Since Johannine Christianity drew its legitimisation from the presence of the Paraclete, who ensures the authenticity of Johannine teaching[345], a radical break from the tradition is hardly possible, because the previous insights of the school must have been inspired by the Paraclete, as well as the more recent teaching. Thus, a strong sense of continuity in teaching is necessary. This finds its expression in the fact that development in thought has not led to abandoning the earlier writings, but to editing them and to adopting them for the new context, as it happened with the fourth gospel which went through a number of editions which mark further developments of Johannine thought. The same way, the author of the gospel used older material in order to keep continuity with the tradition, which cannot have

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[343] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 93, 96.

[344] Ibid.

been wrong, for it was inspired by the Paraclete as well. In such a context it seems to be plausible to place a prominent piece of the older tradition in front of a later writing in order to maintain this important notion of continuity.

If this construal of the relation between prologue and gospel is right, then it is not necessary to harmonise them. The conceptuality of the prologue, and of the contained hymn in particular, is perceived as one possible and true interpretation of the Christian proclamation. What the main body of the gospel offers is another, a later view of Christianity. Both are seen as true; they are not the same but they complement each other. Because of the changing historical context in which Johannine Christianity found itself, it was seen as necessary to annotate the hymn in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which also helped to make a connection between the well-known hymn and the main body of the gospel. Therefore, the tension between prologue and gospel is intended, and through this combination of two different construals of the Christian teaching, the truth about Jesus Christ can emerge fuller and richer than only through one of the two elements. They complement each other by being different. I will have to come back to the relation between prologue and gospel in greater detail after the reconstruction and interpretation of the hymn.

c) The Hymn and the Prologue

After we have established the relation between the hymn and the gospel and seen that differences in theology and conceptuality are actually intended, we can return to our attempt to find a plausible reconstruction of the hymn which had been the basis for the prologue. Since there is no need to harmonise the hymn with the rest of the gospel or to find traces of the evangelist bringing the prologue in line with his theology, the main

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[345] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 50, 566f and Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, Christian; "Paraklet und theologischer Anspruch im Johannesevangelium" *ZTK* 82 (1985), 389-408, 402-408.

criterion for the reconstruction of the hymn should be linguistic observations. In this case, the only the parts excluded from the hymn by Hofius seem to be plausibly excluded; anything else would be too hypothetical. This point of view is confirmed by the fact that Hofius is able to arrange the material into a plausible (and beautiful[346]) hymn. Therefore, I am going to use Hofius' reconstruction of the hymn as a basis for my interpretation.

Only using the linguistic argument, it is impossible to assume that the hymn is of a pre-Christian origin. Käsemann has plausibly shown that the part of the hymn which is embedded in vv.1-12 is of Christian origin[347], especially since the prologue seems to talk about the *logos ensarkos* from an earlier point than v.14. Käsemann suggests v.5 as the introduction of the *logos ensarkos*[348], Hofius sees the *logos ensarkos* as the subject of the hymn from the second stanza (v.10) onwards[349]. Each of them seems to be right in the context of his own reconstruction of the hymn, but both agree over against Becker[350], who assumes that the first two stanzas of the hymn (up to v.12) are pre-Christian and therefore cannot refer to the *logos ensarkos*. If the whole hymn is of Christian origin, then it is not a question anymore whether vv.14,16 are a Christian redaction of the hymn. The differences between vv.1-12 and 14,16 do not necessarily point at a different origin, but it is likely that the fourth stanza in the original composition of the hymn was the responding confession of the earthly ones to the heavenly and cosmological events sung of in the first three stanzas. This conception can well be ex-

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[346] Hengel (HENGEL, Martin; *Die johanneische Frage*, WUNT 67, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) 1993, p. 252, fn 156; only in the German edition) remarks that Hofius' reconstruction of the Hymn is 'nearly too beautiful to be entirely convincing.' Is he being unreasonable here?

[347] Cf. KÄSEMANN, "Aufbau und Anliegen" 164.

[348] Cf. KÄSEMANN, "Aufbau und Anliegen" 162.

[349] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18", 21.

[350] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 89-92.

plained by the original liturgical setting of the hymn, for it is very likely that this text, as a hymn, was used within worship. It is not necessary to assume with Demke[351] that this responding confession is a later addition.

d) The Language of the Hymn

After we have established the extent of the hymn, we can start the investigation into the meaning of the hymn, especially within the framework of the concept of the *Struggle for Language*. The difficulties of interpretation start, in fact, in the very beginning of v.1. The hymn uses the concept of *logos* to describe its subject. The term *logos*, however, is used in a huge multitude of ways and by nearly every Hellenistic school of thought. As understanding the concept of *logos* is crucial to understanding the hymn, I have to expand on its origin and meaning. In addition, the term *logos* in the prologue is a good example for the concept of the *Struggle for Language*, since in this term we find the creation of a new conceptuality, which re-interprets the Jewish and Hellenistic heritage and sheds new light on the significance of Christ. In the usage of the term '*logos*' in the hymn, we see how, in early Christianity, concepts of different traditions are taken and transformed so that Christianity can gain a better understanding of itself. As the hymn is, in my opinion, older than the gospel[352], the interpreter is able to see a step of the development towards the language of John's Gospel. Therefore it seems to be valuable for understanding John's Gospel as well as the *Struggle for Language* to investigate the usage of the term *logos* in the hymn.

On first sight, the ἐν ἀρχῇ alludes clearly to the בְּרֵאשִׁית of Gen. 1:1. In fact, it is a literal quotation from the LXX version of Gen. 1:1. The *logos* exists already in the beginning of creation, he is pre-existent to the creation, not part of it. V.3 says that πάντα

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[351] Cf. DEMKE; "Der sogenannte Logos-Hymnus" 64.

δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, which makes a connection to the ‘God spake’ of Gen. 1. The *logos* is God’s creating and maintaining power, which is ‘hypostatised’[353] here, i.e. it is seen as a distinct person who is with God. There are many possible origins for this type of language.

An important background for the concept of the *logos* is the Jewish *sophia*-speculation[354]. In the later writings of the Old Testament and especially in the Apocrypha the concepts of *logos* and *sophia* are fused and *logos* takes over the meaning of *sophia*. As Ashton argues in his essay ‘*The Transformation of Wisdom*’[355], through the fusion of these two terms *logos* was given the general meaning of ‘plan of God’[356]. Thus Ashton sees the hymn as a ‘meditation on wisdom offering a variation on a traditional theme; it is also a hymn to the Incarnate Word.’[357] It is about the ‘divine plan seen at work throughout the history of Israel’ which ‘has actually taken flesh in him [sc. Jesus]’[358]. Ashton has his finger certainly on a most important point, but, in my opinion, it is questionable whether wisdom-speculation alone is sufficient a background for the *logos*-hymn. Although the identification of *logos* and *sophia* is highly significant for the understanding of the hymn, I suppose that the background of the *logos*-concept of the hymn is much more complex. Since the background of John’s Gospel and the hymn is likely to be Hellenistic-Judaism, it is probable that some Hellenistic concepts also had an influence on its composition. Doubtlessly, there were concepts of *logos* known at the

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[352] Cf. above, p.124-127.

[353] Cf. KLEINKNECHT, H.; “λέγω B: Der Logos in Griechentum und Hellenismus” *ThWNT* IV, 76-89, 86-88.

[354] Cf. ASHTON, John; “The Transformation of Wisdom” in: ASHTON, John; *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford (Claredon) 1994, 5-35.

[355] ASHTON, John; *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford (Claredon) 1994, 5-35.

[356] Cf. ASHTON; “The Transformation of Wisdom” 22.

[357] Cf. ASHTON; “The Transformation of Wisdom” 31.

[358] Cf. ASHTON; “The Transformation of Wisdom” 31.

time when John's Gospel was composed, and we have to investigate whether they can be helpful for our understanding of the hymn.

Firstly, Philo of Alexandria uses the concept of *logos* in a way similar to the hymn underlying the prologue to John's Gospel. Philo, amalgamating Jewish religious thought with Greek philosophical speculation[359], sees *logos* as a god, but of the second rank (τὸ δὲ γενικώτατόν ἐστιν ὁ θεός, καὶ δεύτερος ὁ θεοῦ λόγος, τὰ δ' ἄλλα λόγῳ μόνον ὑπάρχει)[360], which he indicates by using θεός without the article for the *logos* and with the article for God[361]. The *logos* is, for Philo, 'a mediating figure which comes forth from God and establishes a link between the remotely transcendent God and the world or man, and yet which represents man to God as a high-priest [...] and advocate [...], i.e. as a personal mediator and not just in terms of the genuinely Gk. ἀνα-λογία'.[362] In addition, Philo follows the movement, which we have discussed above, of letting the concept of the *logos* take the place that *sophia* had been occupying in earlier Hellenistic Judaism[363] and identifies *logos* and *sophia* (αὕτη ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τῆς Ἐδεμ, τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ σοφίας· ἡ δέ ἐστιν ὁ θεοῦ λόγος)[364]. The important difference between Philonic thought and wisdom-speculation is, in fact, that Philo, much more than the Jewish wisdom-speculation, sees the *logos* consistently as an hypostasis

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[359] Cf. KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 86-88.

[360] PHILO; *Allegorical interpretation of Genesis II., III.*, II:86 (in: PHILO I, ed. and trans. by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, , in: Loeb Classical Library 226, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London (Harvard University Press) 1929, 278) Cf. also KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 76-89, 87.

[361] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 88.

[362] KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 87 (Translation from ThDNt IV, 89)

[363] BARRETT, Charles K.; *The Gospel according to St. John*, London (SPCK) ²1978, 154.

[364] PHILO; *Allegorical interpretation of Genesis II., III.*, I:65 (PHILO I, 188). Cf. also Kleinknecht; "λέγω B" 87, FN 88.

and thus as a divine person[365]. In addition, Philo sees the *logos* essentially within a dual-istic context. God is, for Philo, completely different from the world, he is inaccessible and absolutely transcendent[366]; furthermore, God is absolutely good while matter is evil, thus God cannot be in direct contact with matter. Thus Philo needs a device by which God can be viewed as connected with the world, which is the *logos*[367]. The cosmological dualism in Philo finds its parallel in the hymn, where, on the one hand, God does not deal with the world himself, but only through the *logos*. On the other hand, there is also a dualism between the *skotia* and the *phos*, the divine and its opponent. Although the dualism of the hymn is different from Philo's, as it does not speak of the opposition of the divine or the rational and the material, the idea of a radical cosmological dualism is common to both, but is not present in wisdom-speculation. Ashton, assuming that the hymn exclusively draws upon wisdom-speculation, does actually not acknowledge the radical dualistic element of v.5. Therefore, I assume that Philonic thought is a useful background for the interpretation of the hymn in the Prologue to John's Gospel, which can help us to clarify the meaning of the hymn[368].

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[365] Cf. KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 86-88 and SANDMEL, Samuel; *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction*, New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1979, 94f, 148f. L. HURTADO, on the other hand, argues that the *Logos* is not an own hypostasis but a metaphorical concept (cf. HURTADO, Larry W.; *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and ancient Monotheism*, London (SCM) 1988, 44-48). In fact, this particular detail may be very important for the interpretation of Philo, yet it does not matter for the exegesis of the hymn underlying the prologue to John's Gospel. The particular usage of the term *logos* as God's creating and maintaining power has been introduced by Philo, and it could be and was understood as an own hypostasis by contemporary readers. At some point in the reception of Philo the interpretation of the *logos* as a hypostasis had been introduced and in the context of this study it does not make any significant difference whether Philo himself, the author of the hymn or somebody between them first saw the *logos* hypostatised.

[366] Cf. SANDMEL; *Philo*, 94f.

[367] Cf. SANDMEL; *Philo*, 94f.

[368] In order to clarify the meaning of the hymn, we do not have to assume that the author of the hymn drew upon Philo directly. It is also possible and does not devaluate Philo for our understanding the hymn that both the hymn and Philo came from a similar background, which was based in Hellenistic Judaism

Secondly, apart from the Philonic influence, there are also interesting parallels with the mystico-religious speculations of Hermeticism[369]. In Hermetic writings, Hermes Tris-megistos is the hypostatised revealing and cosmogonic principle of the *logos*, which is essentially a cosmic and creative potency, the guide and agent of knowledge, increasingly represented as a religious doctrine of salvation, the revealer of what is hidden[370]. He is also the mediator and revealer of the will of the Gods. In fact, the *logos* can also be described as God's son and the λόγος θεοῦ. The similarities between the concepts of *logos* in Hermeticism and the prologue to John's Gospel are not likely to be accidental, but to derive from a similar intellectual and spiritual background, in which John's Gospel, Philo and Hermetic thought may have evolved.

Thirdly, there are parallels between the Stoic concept of a divine *logos* and the hymn. I assume, however, that there is no direct Stoic or other Greek philosophy influence on the hymn, rather I assume that Stoic concepts are mediated through eclectic thinking in Hellenistic Judaism, as we see it, e.g. in Philo. Through Philo or similar thought the parallels between Stoa and the hymn can easily have been brought about.

In sum, there has been a metaphysical question in late antiquity, which theological and philosophical thinkers attempted to solve: God was recognised as wholly transcendent, so how could the gap between transcendent divinity and immanent humanity be

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and Hellenistic eclecticism, fusing Jewish and Hellenistic thought. cf. WILSON, Robert McLachlen; "Philo and the Fourth Gospel" *ExpTim* LXV, 1953, 47-49 and SANDMEL; *Philo*, 158f. For the similarities in the understanding of the *logos* between Philo and the fourth gospel cf. also DODD, C.H.; *The Interpretation of the fourth Gospel*, Cambridge (University Press) 1953, 66-73 and ARGYLE, A.W.; "Philo and the Fourth Gospel" *ExpTim* LXIII, 1951, 385-386. It must not be forgotten, however, that all these authors compare Philo with the whole of John's Gospel. The similarities between Philo and the hymn, which has to be seen as an older piece of literature than the main body of the gospel, are, in fact, much more striking than those between Philo and the whole of the gospel. Therefore, the Philonic parallels to the hymn have to be taken seriously, even if the exact nature of the relation between the two cannot be established here.

[369] For the relevance of Hermetic parallels cf. the excursus on Johannine Christianity and Gnosis, p.113f.

[370] KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 85f.

bridged. The concept introduced was the *logos*, which was construed differently by the various schools of thought. In this context, the author of the hymn underlying the prologue to John's Gospel finds a distinctly Christian solution to the problem, though building upon earlier ideas. As we will see, his particular view of the *logos* is unfolded in the further course of the hymn.

In the first two stanzas of the hymn, the *logos* is further qualified. The first stanza describes in the first semi-stanza (vv.1+2)[371] the relation between *logos* and God, in the second semi-stanza (v.3) the role the *logos* played in creation. The whole first semi-stanza is playing only with the terms ἐν ἀρχῇ, λόγος and θεός and combines them in different ways in order to describe the relation between God and the *logos*. It is, in my opinion, too easy directly to identify the *logos* with Jesus, and to interpret the whole first semi-stanza as a definition of Jesus and his relation to the Father, and say that the prologue states the 'Identification of the essence of two distinguished persons. For to the person which has been named ὁ θεός has come the *logos*, in person as well and taking part in the same θεότης' as Karl Barth does[372]. In fact, I assume that the text is not really interested in objectifying the relation between Father and Son, but saying something important and new about the *logos*. Contrary to Karl Barth's assumptions I assume that the recognition of a pre-understanding of the terms used is necessary. When the term *logos* is used here, it already has a meaning, which is transformed, however, through the new combinations with ἐν ἀρχῇ and θεός. The first important statement is, in fact, that the *logos* pre-existed creation. The Philonic *logos*, for example, is part of creation, although he is the first and oldest of creation, belonging to the noëtic realm, not to matter. This notion is contradicted in v.1. The *logos* has already been there in the

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[371] Cf. above p.121.

[372] BARTH, Karl; *Erklärung des Johannes-Evangeliums (Kapitel 1-8)* (ed. by Walther Fürst), Karl Barth, Gesamtausgabe, II. Akademische Werke, 1925/26, Zürich (TVZ) 1976, 35.

beginning, he precedes creation and is therefore entirely divine and not created. The hymn is not interested in what happened before the beginning, there is no cosmogony or any explanation how the *logos* came into being; he is just there, not created but with God in the beginning, which is another important predication of the *logos*. The *logos* is together with God, and even more, he is divine himself. The use of θεός without the article can result from θεός being the predicate-noun to ὁ λόγος, as Hofius assumes[373], or it can be an influence from Philonic thought, since in Philonic terminology the *logos* is differentiated from God by using ὁ θεός for God and θεός for the *logos*, which means that the *logos* is divine, but not of the same rank as God[374]. Both interpretations are possible, but it is, in my opinion, not possible to deduce a Nicean interpretation from the former, as Hofius does, saying the 'the linguistic findings in v.1c can only mean that the Logos is *God* - true and real God.'[375] In fact, the hymn does not say anything in detail about the relation of the father to the son, because this question arose only c. 200 years later in the struggle that led to the formulation of the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople. Thus it is wrong to read a Nicean interpretation into the hymn. Yet it states that the *logos* is divine and with God from the beginning, already there in the creation and thus not part of it.

The second semi-stanza (v.3) is about the part the *logos* played in creation. Here, indeed, the more traditional view of the *logos* is taken up again. The *logos/sophia* as mediator of creation is found in Philo[376] as well as in wisdom-speculation[377]. Another traditional Jewish idea used here is that of creation out of nothing. Remarkably, this motive of the

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[373] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18" 16f.

[374] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 88.

[375] Cf. HOFIUS; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18" 17.

[376] Cf. KLEINKNECHT; "λέγω B" 87.

[377] Cf. ASHTON; "The Transformation of Wisdom", 18-23.

world as divine creation does not occur again in the body of the Gospel[378]. To discuss the question of the absence of the language of creation, however, would leave the framework of this study, which is concerned with the application of the hermeneutical concept of the *Struggle for Language* to the hymn. It shall be sufficient to remark that the dualism of the hymn seems to have different connotations than that of the main body of the gospel. I shall return to that in my discussion of the second stanza. Here, in v.3, any idea of an anti-divine cosmological power, which has been there before creation, is strictly rejected. The whole world is created by God through the *logos*, any notion that the world could be evil in itself or opposed to the divine is contradicted.

The second stanza (vv.4+5+9) introduces, in its first semi-stanza (vv.4+5), the notion of cosmological dualism by contrasting the *logos*, which is, as the *phos* the life-giving and maintaining principle of the universe and of humanity, with the *skotia*, the darkness, its opponent. As the first stanza does not say anything about how the *logos* came into being, this stanza does not speculate about the origin of the darkness, but only establishes that the darkness is there. Again, any kind of supralapsarian speculation as well as mythological language is rejected. As v.1 gives evidence that the hymn knows of Gen. 1, it is almost certain that the author of the hymn knew the Old Testament-tradition of creation and fall. The result of the Old Testament myth is kept in the hymn, but the language seems, indeed, to be demythologised, kept free of any supralapsarian speculation and is rationalised. This indicates, in my opinion, that the origin of this hymn is in Hellenised Diaspora-Judaism. In fact, there seem to be parallels between the rationalising approaches of Stoa and Philo and the hymn, which amalgamates rationalising thought and biblical conceptuality. In this framework, the dualism of the light and the

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[378] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 93, 95f.

darkness is a radical expression of what is the fallenness of the world in the language of Genesis.

The cosmological dualism of the hymn seems to be quite different from that of the main body of the gospel. In the hymn, the whole world is divine creation, which seems to stem from the Jewish legacy of Johannine theology, whereas the main body of the Gospel moves into the direction of a more radical dualism by not making explicit anymore that the whole world is created by God. I do not assume that the Evangelist abandoned the concept of the world as divine creation on purpose, rather I suppose that this matter was not a theological issue when the main body of the gospel was written, which is confirmed by the fact that he integrated the traditional hymn, which contains this material, into his gospel. The language of the Gospel could be interpreted in the light of the tradition behind the Gospel, i.e. Judeo-Christian thought. Then the world is certainly seen as divine creation. On the other hand, this tradition could also be ignored and then used by a theological current that, later, will dissolve in Gnosticism. The implications of these different construals can be seen in the argument underlying 1 John, where an 'orthodox' interpretation of John's Gospel is asserted over against a gnosticising tendency[379].

The origin of the terms φῶς, σκοτία and ζωή seems to be the same as that of the λόγος, i.e. Hellenistic Diaspora-Judaism, influenced by Philo or similar thought. Again, the similarities between the hymn and Philonic thought are striking. Firstly, as we have seen above for the term λόγος, there is an influence of wisdom-speculation as well, which has been adopted in a Philonic way. Light is connected with wisdom, the wise, i.e. righteous, good and happy man is enlightened, and the divine law is compared with

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[379] Cf. above, p.115.

light[380]. For both, the author of the hymn and Philo, φῶς is opposed by σκοτία, which is folly and wickedness[381]. In wisdom-speculation, however, light and darkness are only seen as moral categories and are lacking the cosmological dimension they have in the hymn, which is paralleled by Philonic thought. For Philo, light is wisdom, as well, and knowledge of God's claim and of his will[382]. Yet, he also sees the divine world and God himself as light, where one can get by means of mystical ascent[383]. Thus, both Philo and the author of the hymn see λόγος, φῶς and σκοτία as part not only of a moral, but also of a cosmological dualism. Another important parallel between Philo and the hymn is the identification of the *logos* with the light. The *logos*, as the middle being between God and humanity and as light is the enlightening power in the world, only through him the light can be perceived[384]. There is, however, an important difference between Philonic thought and the hymn in John 1 which must not be overlooked: Philo contrasts the light with the darkness in a different way than the hymn. The cosmological dualism of light and darkness is not part of his world view[385]. Actually, the dualism of light and darkness as it is found in the hymn is much better paralleled by the hermetic writings. Here, light and darkness are cosmological powers, which are opposed to each other[386], and coming to the light is identified with salvation[387]. But there are significant differences between Hermeticism and the hymn. Hermeticism sees human beings as originally heavenly beings, which have been alienated from themselves and the enlightenment

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[380] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς κτλ." *ThWNT* IX, 302-349, 314f.

[381] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς" 314f, and CONZELMANN, H.; "σκότος κτλ." *ThWNT* VII, 424-446, 431f.

[382] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς" 322-324.

[383] Ibid.

[384] Ibid.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "σκότος" 435f.

[387] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς" 325-327.

leads them back to their true self. The way back to the true self is asceticism[388]. This is, certainly, unparalleled in the canonical Johannine writings. I suppose that Hermetic thought is, here, a further development of the type of dualism which we find in the hymn, which, in turn, seems to be a step on the way which can lead to Johannine Gnosis as well as Johannine 'orthodoxy'.

The particular dualism of the hymn seems to be an original creation of Johannine theology. It is, in my opinion, likely, that an original view, which had been a Christian adaptation of Philonic (or similar) thought, had been transformed under the pressure of the events in which the community was involved. Above I have located the time of the composition of the hymn between the separation from Judaism, i.e. the expulsion from the Synagogue and the later development of Johannine theology[389]. Under the impression of the rejection of the Christian proclamation by the former fellow-Jews, the formerly Philonic thought could have been modified and the dualism radicalised, so that the true faith had to be separated more sharply from unbelief, which happened through the introduction of the darkness as the opponent of the light as an expression of the radical fallenness of the world and a developing cosmological dualism. Here, an existing language had been transformed in order to interpret the world in which the community found itself in the light of the Christian proclamation.

Another important transformation of language takes place in the use of the term ζωή. In the traditional use, ζωή means on the one hand physical life and on the other hand the 'leading of life', the moral quality of life[390]. True life 'is attained when life corresponds to a transcendent norm'[391], which is, certainly, living according to God's de-

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[388] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς" 327.

[389] Cf. above p. 125.

[390] Cf. BULTMANN, R.; "ζάω κτλ. D.: Der Lebensbegriff des Judentums" *ThWNT* II 856-862, 861f.

[391] Cf. BULTMANN, R.; "ζάω" 559f.

mand. This can be living according to the law as in Hellenistic Judaism or life apart from the body, as in Philo[392]. In v.4, the ζωή is now identified with the λόγος. This is, on the one hand, a further expression of the *logos* as the mediator of creation, a continuation of the thought of the first stanza. Physical life is created, and as the *logos* is the creative power, he is also the giver of life, he has life and gives it to the creation. On the other hand, life in v.4 cannot be only physical life, since life is identified with the light. Light is, as we have seen above, wisdom and knowledge of God's will. Therefore, life here must have a moral quality, which is living according to a transcendent norm. This life of humanity, the physical as well as the moral, is in the *logos*. That means that life, true, or authentic life, is not something human beings can achieve, but it is in the *logos*. The *logos* gives this life to those belonging to him, to those that see the light - and know that life is not a human possibility but only a gift of God through the *logos*. Neither mystical ascent as Philo teaches nor moral attitudes lead to life, but only the recognition of the *logos* as the life-giving principle. These views are rejected, although they had been known by the community from which the hymn evolved, because the reinterpretation of all religious thought after having accepted the Christian proclamation leads them to an entirely new view of what life really is: faith in Christ.

Where the light is not seen, there is, certainly, darkness, of which v.5 speaks, and those that do not see the true light are excluded from life. That the light shines in the darkness means that it could be known, that the revelation of the light is available, but it is rejected. Here, I suppose, the experience of the congregation, that the Christian proclamation had been rejected, helped to shape this dualism. V.5b explains this matter further: the light has not been grasped or understood by the darkness, which is the reason for the darkness being darkness. I agree with Schnackenburg against Barth and Hofius,

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[392] Cf. BULTMANN, R.; "ζάω" 561f.

that καταλαμβάνειν means comprehend rather than overcome[393]. The concept of a cosmological fight between light and darkness would not at all fit the imagery of the hymn, which deals with a dualism of belief or unbelief rather than the darkness as a cosmological power being able to fight against the light. In addition, a cosmological fight between powers would contradict the rationalising and demythologising tendencies of the hymn. On the other hand, the meaning 'to grasp', 'to comprehend' for the κατέλαβεν would be in line with the οὐκ ἔγνω of v.10 and the οὐ παρέλαβον of v.11. The darkness, being where the light is not accepted and understood (cf. v.5), is not a power of its own, but only the rejection of the only power, the light.

The second semi-stanza (v.9) deals with the phenomenon of the rejection of the light again. The light shines for every human being which has come into the world[394]. Here, the perversity of the darkness becomes obvious. Although the light shines for everybody and can be seen and grasped by everybody, it is rejected by a part of humanity. Being in the darkness is, therefore, perversion of true humanity, even ridiculous. The predication of the light as τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν seems to point at the Philonic distinction between the heavenly, true light and the earthly light, which is inferior to the divine light. To prevent any misunderstanding it is made clear that the *logos* as the light is the true and heavenly light[395], to which everybody should be able to come, as opposed to the earthly light.

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[393] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf; *Das Johannesevangelium*,Vol.1, HTKNT 4/1, Freiburg (Herder) 1965, 222f, Barth, *Johannes-Evangelium*, 57f, Hofius; "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18", 19.

[394] I agree with Hofius ("Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18" 8-10) that the ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον relates to πάντα ἄνθρωπον. Schnackenburgs point agains this interpretation (*Johannesevangelium* 230f) does not take into consideration that the text is a hymn and that, therefore, poetic language is employed. In poetic language it is possible to use the term itself and another description for the same.

[395] Cf. CONZELMANN, H.; "φῶς" 322.

The second stanza as a whole says something new about the *logos* again by combining known terms and concepts in a creative way. The terms φῶς, σκοτία and ζωή are available in the environment and tradition of the community, but they are combined so that their meaning is transformed and the Christian teaching of the community finds an expression. The dualism of the hymn seems to stand between the Philonic type of Hellenistic-Jewish thought, which may have been the background of the community, and the more developed dualism of the main body of the gospel, where the darkness is seen much more as a power that is opposed to the light than as the realm where the light is not accepted, which is a more moderate version of this dualism. The step towards a cosmological dualism has been taken, but there is still a long way to go to such pointed statements like John 17:14-16, where those that believe do not belong to the world anymore[396]. The main body of the gospel, however, keeps the conceptuality of the hymn, but it will be further developed and radicalised.

To sum up, the first two stanzas explain what the *logos* is, they define it by setting it in relation with God, creation, life and humanity by combining known terms and concepts in a new way. These terms still carry their meaning, but it is transformed by their new use and thus new meaning is brought about. Doing so, the cosmological background is set up for the event which will be described in the next two stanzas.

The last two stanzas of the hymn (III: 10-12c; IV: 14+16) deal with the events which take place within that cosmological setting. The third stanza deals with the *logos* coming into the world and being rejected. The concept of the *logos* coming into the world is nothing entirely new. As a mediator between the divine and the world, as the *logos* is seen in Hellenistic thought[397], the coming of the *logos* into the world or his being in the

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[396] Cf. below, p.201-205.

[397] Cf. above p.131f

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world is a common thought, yet this takes only place as the divine presence in the world, which is still separated from the world. The incarnate *logos* is a concept completely alien to ancient thought, where the immutability of God is one of the most important presuppositions of metaphysics. The incarnate *logos*, Jesus Christ is already implicitly subject of this stanza, but he is not made explicit yet. The third stanza can be seen as a climax and summary of the first two stanzas, leading towards the fourth. Already in V.3 it is made explicit that the *logos* came into the world, yet it may be seen as only a divine principle here. Then this idea has been, implicitly, part of the light-darkness symbolism of the second stanza. In the third stanza, v.10 in particular, the coming into the world has to be made explicit as preparation of the fourth stanza. The angle of the hymn changes at this point: From a comprehensive cosmological view it shifts focusing on the world, the *kosmos*, where the incarnation, the real subject of the hymn, is going to take place. The paradox of the rejection of the *logos*/light is expressed very pointedly in this stanza: The *logos* is the creator of the world, and the world does not accept the one who brought it into being. V.11 repeats the same subject matter, but in another way, now talking about the *logos*, as creator, coming into his own and not being accepted.

The main term of v.10 is κόσμος, which occurs three times, in each of the three first verses of the third stanza. In New Testament usage, *kosmos*[398] can mean either 'adornment' a meaning that does not apply here, or the world 'as the universe, the Sum of all Created Being', or the world 'as the Abode of Men, the Theatre of History, the inhabited World, the Earth' or the world 'as Humanity, Fallen Creation, the Theatre of Salvation History'. Bultmann assumes, that, in v.10, *kosmos* is the fallen world, unable to accept God[399]. It is, in my opinion, questionable whether the evaluation of the world is already part of v.10. Rather, the world seems to be the place where revelation, rejection

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[398] Cf. SASSE, H.; "κόσμος κτλ." *ThWNT* III, 867-898.

and acceptance of the *logos* takes place. This place is the world of humanity and human affairs, which is capable of knowing or not knowing its maker[400]. The rest of creation, not having the capability of dealing with the divine like humanity does, is not within the range of the hymn. It is the world of humanity, which is involved in the dualism of light and darkness, of accepting and rejecting the *logos*. In this respect, the hymn stands somewhere between the optimistic openness towards the world of Hellenistic Judaism, a view that is also shared by Philo, and the profound pessimism of apocalyptic thought[401]. While the former is also, as we have established above, the original background of the Johannine community, Johannine thought shifts more and more towards the latter. In the hymn we still find a moderately positive or neutral view of the world as the place where the decision for or against the *logos* takes place, but in the main body of the Gospel, a more negative view of the world begins to develop, which finds its climax in the farewell discourses and the so-called highpriestly prayer of ch17[402].

The next verse (v.11) takes up the same point, now focusing on the world as God's, and therefore also the *logos'* own. It has been argued that τὰ ἴδια/οἱ ἴδιοι refer to Israel as God's own people[403]. I agree, however, with the majority of scholars[404] who prefer to relate v.11 to v.5, so that τὰ ἴδια/οἱ ἴδιοι refers to the created realm. The phenomenon

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[399] Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium* 33f.

[400] Cf. BARRETT, *John* 161. Cf. also BARTH, *Johannes-Evangelium*, 78f.

[401] For the two views of the world in ancient Judaism cf. SASSE, "κόσμος" 891. For Philo cf. ibid, 876-878.

[402] For the worldview of the main body of the Gospel cf. SASSE, "κόσμος" 894-896. Sasse does not take into account that there may be different conceptions of the world at work in different layers of John's Gospel, but the negative perception of the world in the main body of the gospel comes out clearly in his article. Cf. also BULTMANN; *Theologie des Neuen Testamentes*, 378-385.

[403] Cf. BARRETT, *John* 163, BROWN, Raymond E.; *The Gospel according to John*, Vol. 1, The Anchor Bible 29, New York (Doubleday) 1970, 10, DODD, *Interpretation* 402.

of the rejection of the *logos* in the world is mentioned the second time in order to underline the perversity of the unbelieving world and emphasise the cosmological dualism, before in v.14 the main point of the hymn is made.

The second semi-stanza of stanza 3 contrasts the rejection of the *logos* with its acceptance by the believing community, which is, certainly, the community in which the hymn was used. As the first semi-stanza stated that the *kosmos* is rejecting the *logos*, the Christian community sees itself as an exception from the world. The reward for the accepting of the *logos* is that they become God's children. The idea of becoming τέκνα θεοῦ through the *logos* is, as Becker points out[405], of Philonic origin again. Philo sees the *logos* also as the mediator of sonship, which is the aim of salvation and the fulfilment of creation. As a whole, the third stanza does not contribute an entirely new meaning to the hymn, rather it shifts from general cosmology to a perception of the world as humanity encounters it. Viewed without the previous and following stanzas, it could be read in a 'conventional' Philonic way. In the context of the hymn, it condenses the meaning unfolded in the previous stanzas and prepares for the turn the hymn takes in v.14.

That the community sees itself as an exception from the world is a language, which can be developed further into the more radical dualism and rejection of the world which we find in the main body of the gospel and in ch.17 in particular. While, in the hymn, the world is seen as the place where the *logos* is rejected (rule) or accepted (exception), the *kosmos* is, in the later development of Johannine theology, only the fallen world, which

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[404] Cf. BARTH, *Johannes-Evangelium* 82-84, BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 90, BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium* 34f, HOFIUS, "Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 11-18" 21f, SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* 236.

[405] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 90f.

is opposed to the revelation and to God, and the Christian community is not part of the world anymore, but taken out of it[406].

The *logos*, which is not too unusual a concept in ancient thought, is now identified with the *logos ensarkos*, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. This happens, on the one hand, through the fourth stanza, where the incarnation of the *logos* is explicitly subject (although without mentioning Jesus Christ as an individual person) and through the liturgical setting on the other hand, since this hymn must have been sung in a liturgical context in which Jesus Christ must have had a prominent place. An incarnation of the *logos* is unthinkable in Hellenistic thought. In fact, the divine and the human are separated in a way which does not allow the divine to become human. The heavenly revealer, like Hermes Trismegistos, may appear in a human figure and teach or reveal cosmological truths, but he cannot possibly be human. Therefore, the καὶ ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο is indeed a *skandalon*, since the divine *logos* is a man, a thought which is impossible in any Greek or Hellenistic thought. For the interpretation of v.14 I can only point at Bultmann's impressive explanation in his commentary and New Testament theology[407]: 'In pure humanity is he [i.e. the *logos*] the revealer. Certainly, his own see his δόξα (v.14b); and if it had not been visible, it would not be possible to speak of revelation. Yet this is the paradox, which is found in the whole gospel, that the δόξα is visible not besides the σάρξ or through it, as if it was transparent, yet nowhere else but in the σάρξ. The eye has to bear having the σάρξ in view without being distracted if it wants to see the δόξα. Revelation is present only in peculiar disguise.'[408]

Through this identification of the eternal *logos* with a historical man, who, in the end, even died on a cross, as it must have been said in the liturgical context of this hymn,

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[406] Cf. John 17:14-16, and below, p. 201-205; cf. also SASSE, κόσμος 894-896.

[407] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 40f and *Theologie des Neuen Testamentes* 392-402.

both are understood anew in a different way. On the one hand, the concept of the eternal and divine *logos*, which is known from Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Jewish thought, is radically transformed, while on the other hand the figure of Jesus is understood in a new way. Jesus, the man who had been crucified, is now understood as the eternal and divine *logos*, the concept of which has been taken in order to understand what cross and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, which was doubtless the *kerygma* of early Christianity, meant. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ do not have to be mentioned in this hymn, since it is embedded in a liturgy which must have carried all the other elements of Christian proclamation. Therefore, one cannot conclude from the silence about the suffering of the incarnate *logos* that the hymn represents a docetic theology. This would see the hymn separated from its liturgical setting. Within this setting the hymn is about who Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected one, really is; and it understands him as the divine *logos*, though in a way which changes the understanding of *logos* and Jesus.

Through the combination of hymn and gospel, the horizon against which Jesus Christ can be understood is broadened even more. The fourth gospel understands Jesus Christ, as I pointed out above, mainly in terms of the messenger-Christology[409]. Here, the ancient 'messenger-law'[410], is used to describe the sending of the son by the father and the relation between God and Jesus. This concept, however, is paired with the Christology of the hymn. The Gospel is understood through the hymn, the cosmological setting presented in the prologue is connected with the rest of the gospel in a creative way: the one who is sent by the father is the eternal *logos*, the one who fulfils the will of the fa-

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[408] BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 40f.

[409] Cf. above, p.125 and below, p.176. I cannot go into the details of Johannine Christology here. Nevertheless, I must mention here that Johannine Christology is much more complex than only using the messenger-conceptuality in order to understand Jesus Christ. But for our purpose this superficial understanding of Johannine Christology shall be sufficient.

[410] Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 484-494.

ther has been with the father from the very beginning before creation. In this respect the competing concepts of understanding Jesus Christ, one in the main body of the gospel and the other one in the prologue, work like the two parts of a metaphor. They produce a fruitful tension, through which a broader understanding of the subject matter becomes possible.

When the hymn had been connected with the gospel, it was necessary to make links between the hymn and the beginning of the gospel-narrative, i.e. the testimony of John the Baptist, so that the hymn would not stand out of the gospel but be harmonically embedded. This connection is made through the insertion of vv.6-8,15, which makes an explicit link to the beginning of the narrative in vv.19ff, and, at the same time, rejects a possible interpretation of the hymn which takes John the Baptist as the light.

Vv.12c+13,17+18 were inserted as theological explanation to the hymn. They function to ensure that the hymn is interpreted along the lines of the development of 'orthodox' Johannine theology as it can be seen in the main body of the gospel and the epistles, and so to reject any other interpretation, e.g. an interpretation along the lines of the position of the opponents of 1John. This brief outline of the interpretation of the insertions into the hymn has to be sufficient here, as the main task of this essay is to interpret the hymn, which is contained in the prologue, and not the whole prologue. A comprehensive discussion of the whole prologue would go far beyond the scope of this piece of work.

As I hope I have shown, the prologue to the fourth gospel is a fine example of how the language of Christianity develops in order to gain a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ. Johannine Christianity used concepts of different origin in order to bring about the truth about Christ, and concepts developed later, such as that of the messenger, are combined with earlier ones, like the *logos*-Christology. These concepts are in a certain

tension, but this tension initiates a metaphorical process, in which the sum of meaning is more than the two elements. In addition, the keeping of older concepts and connecting them with newer ones shows an awareness of tradition within Johannine Christianity. What is old is valid as well, since it is accorded the same legitimacy as the newer findings. It is one understanding of the message of Christianity, as are the more recent insights, and only together they bring about a larger part of the unfathomable truth of the Christian Gospel.

C. Jesus and Nicodemus: John 3:1-21

In the previous chapter of this thesis I have discussed the implications of the herme-
neutical concept of the *Struggle for Language* for the interpretation of the hymn un-
derlying the prologue to John's Gospel. In that discussion we have seen that the evan-
gelist inserted an annotated hymn into the prologue of his gospel in order to embed his
own work in the framework of the Johannine tradition. The following case-study is go-
ing to focus on the original work of the evangelist by analysing the creation of language
in the Nicodemus-dialogue John 3:1-21. This passage shows how the evangelist, i.e. the
author of the main body of the gospel[411], uses different traditions and motifs of relig-
ious language in order to find a way to express the *kerygma*. The previous case-study
has dealt with the hymn underlying the prologue to John's Gospel, which represents a
stage of the development of John's Gospel previous to the work of the evangelist and
thus an earlier step in the evolution of Johannine theology. So this study considers the
work of the evangelist and the way he transformed his material in order to express his
theology and how Johannine theology was further developed, built upon the earlier Jo-
hannine tradition and influenced by thought of the contemporary environment.

In order to create new language for his interpretation of the Christian Gospel by form-
ing new, unexpected relations between known terms and concepts, the evangelist com-
bines motifs from different religious languages in a poetic way, i.e. he unveils a new
world through his invention of new language, the world of Christianity as he interprets
it. Figuratively speaking, the evangelist weaves a new web of meaning, using material
which has been passed down to him through the tradition in which he lives.

The passage John 3:1-21 is a particularly suitable text for an investigation into how the
evangelist creates meaning by connecting known terms and concepts poetically, because

in this text a comprehensive world-picture is painted this way. Starting with the question as to who is Jesus and the statement that 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above' (v.3) a whole theology *in nuce* is developed and communicated. Following this development will help us to understand creation of language, even of a whole language-world. Hence we will see how the evangelist takes part in the *Struggle for Language* to understand faith in Jesus Christ.

In this study, I will identify relevant parallels to the language used by the evangelist in order to investigate the meaning they carried at that time. Then the creative way in which these terms and concepts are combined will be investigated, so that we can see through which processes the evangelist understood and communicated his interpretation of Christian faith. Since the evangelist used known terms and concepts in order to create a language of faith, his language-world is, as I am going to show, an open system which the reader or listener is invited to enter, just as in the discourse Nicodemus is invited to do so by Jesus.

1. Introductory Questions

Before I discuss the Nicodemus-discourse, I have to establish the extent of the passage, which has been subject to debate among New Testament scholars. In particular, the relation of the passage 3:31-36 to the discourse 3:1-21 on the one hand and that of the second half of the discourse (vv.13-21) to the first (vv.1-12) on the other hand has been questioned.

It has been suggested, that the Nicodemus passage originally extended only from 3:1-12, followed by the testimony of John the Baptist (22-30) and continuing with Jesus' deci-

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[411] Cf. above p.108f.

sion to leave Judea and go back to Galilee (ch.4)[412]. In this case, 3:13-21+31-36 together would form a speech or a sermon by the evangelist which has been later inserted or which is a composition by the evangelist that has not been intended to be a part of the Nicodemus-passage itself. This assumption presupposes that the kerygmatic speech 3:13-21+31-36 has been divided by the insertion of the testimony of John the Baptist. The passages 3:12-21 and 3:31-36 are, as Schnackenburg points out, an independent document, whose original order was 3:31-36, 3:12-21. It has been added by disciples of the evangelist by inserting the two loose pages, on which the speech was found, after v12 and v30, so that they are not part of the literary composition of the gospel. I do not agree that the internal evidence in the text is sufficient to support so radical an approach. On the one hand, the theory Schnackenburg presents presupposes the theory of 'external disorder', which I have already discussed above[413]. It is, in my opinion, not plausible to assume that the disciples of the evangelist first divided a speech in order to include it and then inserted it in the wrong order. On the other hand, I regard the passage 3:1-21 as sufficiently consistent to be interpreted as a single literary composition. The passage 3:31-36, on the other hand, does not connect smoothly enough with 3:13-21 to argue that these two sections originally belonged together as a literary unity.

Bultmann argues that John 3:31-36 is a part of this discourse, separated from its main body by the insertion of the testimony of John the Baptist (v22-30) in the course of the redaction[414] and originally directly following v21. Yet, the connection between 3:1-21 and 31-36 remains awkward: 'If, by way of experiment, we disregard verses 22-30, we find that the verses 31-6 are indeed germane to the preceding discourse, but they cannot

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[412] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* I, 374-377.

[413] Cf. above, 57.

[414] Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 92f.

be said to be an appropriate continuation of it.'[415] Therefore, a direct connection between the Nicodemus-discourse and the speech 3:31-36 is not likely. In addition, Bultmann's theory is built upon an overall assumption of John's Gospel being in a state of 'external disorder', which I have already discussed above[416]. On the other hand, the discourse as a whole contains a movement of speech (*Sprachbewegung*) in which each element builds upon the former and enlarges the understanding of the subject matter by introducing new terms or new relations between terms that are already used. This passage represents, as I am going to show below, the construction of a whole language-world, and each successive section of the discourse adds something new to it. The passage v31-36 does not introduce any essentially new meaning to the world of v1-21, yet it repeats elements of it. It is about the 'Mystery of the Testimony'[417], but the theme of Jesus' testimony has already been explored in v11-13. In fact, v31f take up v11-13 and v6, not creating any new relation between the elements. V36 repeats v14f, combining it with the element of God's wrath or judgement, something that already happened in the main body of the discourse. V33f have no direct parallel in v1-21, but they do not contribute any new meaning that would not be implicit in the main body of the discourse. Therefore, the speech 31-36 does not fit into the composition of the Nicodemus-discourse as an immediate part of it, and therefore I am not going to interpret it in this particular context. They are a separate speech which is, nevertheless, closely connected with the Nicodemus-discourse. As Dodd and Becker have pointed out, it can be seen as an explanatory appendix to the discourse[418], but not as a part of it.

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[415] DODD, *Interpretation*, 309.

[416] Cf. above, p.57.

[417] BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 116.

[418] DODD, *Interpretation*, 311 and BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 154.

Yet how can the break between v.12 and v.13 be explained? Obviously, there is a change in the mode of speech between vv.1-12 and vv.13-21. Bultmann assumes that the evangelist drew on different sources for the two parts of the passage[419]. Bultmann sees the first part of the dialogue as a composition of the evangelist based upon a traditional saying by Jesus[420], and the second as taken from the source of the revelation-discourses and used by the evangelist for his composition in an edited form. Although it is not impossible that the evangelist used different sources for the composition of this passage, this does not in any event prohibit an analysis of the original work of the evangelist. Even if the evangelist used different sources, he did not merely quote them, but transformed them so that they represent his own theological agenda. Thus it is not satisfying to assume that a break in the text is to be explained by the use of different sources. This would mean to underestimate the creative activity of the evangelist. In addition, this text is, in my opinion, a composition in which the evangelist worked with different literary forms, not attempting to write a realistic scene, but to create a language-world to communicate the *kerygma*. As the following analysis shows, everything in the passage builds upon what comes previously, and the text presents a consistent train of thought and as a unity discloses reality by combining the different elements in a poetic way. Therefore, it is neither the historical Jesus speaking in the passage nor a gnostic source, but the evangelist himself, who composed material available to him freely and creatively. He drew, I assume, mainly on earlier Christian thought, religious and philosophical ideas and concepts from the Hellenistic world and Jewish religious teaching as well as on the Old

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[419] Bultmann assumes, as we have seen above, that the second part of the discourse contains vv.13-21+31-36. Although I have shown above that vv.31-36 are not likely to be part of the original composition, Bultmann's observation is correct that the break between vv.1-12 and vv.13-21 needs to be explained.

[420] Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 93, 95f.

Testament[421]. The evangelist took up concepts from these sources and combined them creatively, thereby unveiling new meaning and bringing out the world opened by the *kerygma*.

The passage John 3:1-21 can be divided into three main parts. The change in the mode of speech between vv 12+13 indicates a break in the text; the form of a dialogue is given up and a speech or monologue about Jesus as the heavenly Son of Men begins. This indicates that a new part of the passage begins here. The first half of the passage, a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, contains two parts. First, from v 1-8, Nicodemus' initial question and Jesus' reply with a statement about supernatural regeneration is the subject of the dialogue. The second part of the dialogue is about the source of knowledge of divine revelation, which is the testimony of Jesus; it can be described as being about the 'epistemology of faith'. Thus, the following structure shall be the basis of the interpretation of John 3:1-21:

> a) V. 1-8: The Ἐπίγεια· Supernatural Regeneration
>
> b) V. 9-12: An Epistemology of Faith
>
> c) V. 13-21: The Ἐπουράνια· Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man

2. Creation of Language: 'Sprachbewegung' in John 3:1-21

a) V. 1-8: The Ἐπίγεια: Supernatural Regeneration

The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus is, on the one level, a discourse about salvation and Jesus' person. Yet, on another level, it demonstrates how language of Christian faith is developed in order to communicate the *kerygma* as the evangelist interprets it. The dialogue is opened (v2) by Nicodemus presenting a statement about Jesus' per-

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[421] Cf. BARRETT, *John*, 27.

son and sets the agenda of the dialogue: who is Jesus and how can he be understood? He attempts to understand Jesus in his terms and concepts as a teacher, yet a teacher with a special divine legitimisation through the miracles, or even as a prophet. Nicodemus is the archetype of those who understand Jesus only in terms of the miracles he is performing or of his teaching rather than as what he really is: the proclaimed rather than the proclaimer, the heavenly Son of Man. This wrong understanding of Jesus' person can be found outside Christianity, e.g. in Judaism, or even among Christian groups which understand Jesus in those terms[422]. Jesus rejects this approach to his person by his response in v3: ἐὰν μή γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. This reply consists of two elements, ἐὰν μή γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν and οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, which are each taken from different contexts. They are related to each other in a metaphorical[423] way so that they disclose new meaning through the tension between each other as well as through that between Nicodemus' remark and Jesus' reply. As I am going to show in this section, Jesus' answer is at first sight cryptic, yet it constitutes a point of contact between Jesus' (or the Johannine) proclamation and the hearer, for both elements can be understood by everyone familiar with contemporary thought. Hence the meaning of the whole metaphor is accessible, provided it is taken as figurative language[424].

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[422] Becker points out (*Johannesevangelium* 155f) that the evangelist is not only arguing against non-Johannine groups, but also against his own tradition, because the view Nicodemus represents is that of the *Semeia*-source. Hence for Becker the evangelist is actually rejecting the theology of his source. I do not find it very likely that it is possible to reconstruct the *Semeia*-source with sufficient reliability to identify its theological agenda (cf. above, p.109). Becker is very much in danger of constructing a straw-man to fight against.

[423] Cf. above, "3. Poetic Language: Metaphor and Symbol" p.84-88.

[424] Ibid. In Ricœur's terminology, Jesus' reply to Nicodemus is a root-metaphor, i.e. both elements of the metaphorical utterance refer to a whole system of symbolic and metaphorical language. Cf. above, p.86.

Given that Jesus' reply is metaphorical, it is complete nonsense to take it literally, as Nicodemus' puzzled question in the next verse shows. It has to be seen as figurative language, related to Nicodemus' opening of the discourse in v2. Jesus rejects Nicodemus' approach to his person and indicates that he has to be understood in a completely different context. He is not merely a teacher, but his real significance can only be seen from within the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Consequently, the question as to how to enter the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is of great importance for understanding Jesus' person: the entry into the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ becomes possible only through being born or begotten ἄνωθεν, which can mean both, 'again' and 'from above'. As we will see in the course of the discussion, this double-meaning is important for the understanding of the whole passage.

The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is a phrase taken from the earliest Christian tradition, probably going back to the proclamation of the historical Jesus, having its roots in Jewish thought. Already in Jesus' proclamation, the concept of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ had undergone significant transformation[425]. It was generally seen as the establishing of God's rule over the world, usually connected with the notions of purity, ritual and Jewish nationalism[426]. Yet Jesus is likely to have proclaimed the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ separated from all the ideas of purity, punishment, reward for one's works and the necessity to enforce it as an earthly reality[427]. On the contrary, he saw it as spiritual reality, arriving through his healing-ministry and preaching to the poor[428]. In short, he proclaimed the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as the reinstatement of God's rulership over the world yet spiritually and with divine love as its ruling principle. In the developing Christian theology the

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[425] RICHES, John; *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism*, London (Darton, Longaman & Todd) 1980, 87-111.

[426] Ibid. 100.

[427] Ibid. 99f.

βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and Jesus' person are seen in a close relation[429]. In some instances in the gospels, Mark speaks about the kingdom of God (or a synonym)[430], while in the parallels Matthew and Luke use Jesus' person instead of the kingdom[431]. Here, the kingdom as the bearer of salvation fulfils the same function as Jesus. The kernel of the language of the kingdom seems to be the new loving relationship between humanity and God that is near or has already arrived in Jesus[432]. Interestingly, the discourse with Nicodemus is the only place in the fourth Gospel where the traditional term βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ can be found. A similar term only occurs in the passion-narrative, where Jesus speaks of ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμή (18:36). The introduction of a non-Johannine, traditional term must have a particular function in the Nicodemus-discourse[433], which is to provide a point of contact between Johannine theology and contemporary religious thought, whether non-Christian or Christian.

The familiar concept of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is paired with the idea of being born or begotten ἄνωθεν, with that of supernatural regeneration. This concept has parallels in

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[428] Ibid. 105-107.

[429] Cf. SCHMIDT, Karl-Ludwig; "βασιλεύς κτλ. E: Die Wortgruppe βασιλεύς im Neuen Nestament" *ThWNT* I 576-593, 590.

[430] Cf. Mk 11:10 with Mt 21:9 and Lk 19:38; Mk 10:29 and Lk 18:21 with Mt 19:29; Mk 9:1 and Lk 9:27 with Mt 16:28.

[431] Cf. SCHMIDT; "βασιλεύς κτλ." *ThWNT* I 584, 590f.

[432] Certainly, the Jewish use of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ continued to be known. Yet in Judaism, the concept of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ was used quite differently. In Rabbinic thought, in continuation of the Pharisaic conceptuality, it was seen as a sacred realm in which the faithful were separated from the Gentiles and a state of purity in which one could live according to God's will (Cf. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism*, 97f). This is, however, neither the background of the use of the term here not a relevant parallel, because it represents the further development of the use of the concept in another context.

[433] Although it has been argued that the sayings John 3:3,5 are taken from the tradition (Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium* 95f, fn.5), the particular function of this term at this place must not be diminished. As the evangelist is not likely to have adopted a tradition without reflection but only purposefully, the reason behind his choice has to be considered.

Hellenistic religious thought, yet it is not well represented in Judaism or earlier Christianity[434]. A close parallel to this saying can be found in Corpus Hermeticum XIII. Here, the follower of Hermes alienates himself from the world and, when he has prepared himself and is fit, he will be supernaturally regenerated and born again and be of a completely different substance, i.e. he will be divine himself[435]. While C.H. XIII itself is generally considered to be later than John[436], it is not likely to be dependent on or influenced by John or any other early Christian literature[437].

> The parallels between C.H. XIII and the NT [...] really only show that C.H. XIII and ECL [i.e. early Christian literature] both made use of similar religious language and that both were part of the same world of Hellenistic religions.[438]

In Hermetic literature, the illuminated person is begotten from God or from the will of God (γεννώμενος θεοῦ or τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ θεοῦ, C.H. XIII, 2). Hermes describes his supernatural regeneration (παλιγγενεσία):

> While seeing in myself a true vision which came from the mercy of God, I came out of myself into an immortal body, and I am not now what I was before, but I have been begotten in Intellect. This thing is not taught, not even by this fabricated element through which comes sight. Therefore the first composite form also does not concern me. I am no longer colored and have neither touch nor measure, but I am different from these. (C.H. XIII, 3)[439]

Here, the concept of supernatural regeneration is used to describe the transition from the worldly state of being into the intellectual or divine. The physical body has to be

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[434] Cf. BARRETT, *John*, 206f, BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium* 95f.

[435] Cf. Corpus Hermeticum lib.XIII, 1-7, GRESE, William C.; *Corpus Hermeticum XIII and Early Christian Literature*, Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti, vol. 5, Leiden (Brill) 1979, 2-15, cf. also pp. 72-74.

[436] Cf. GRESE, 48f, BARRETT 38.

[437] Cf. GRESE 57f.

[438] GRESE 58. The parallels between C.H. XIII and John's Gospel help the interpreter to understand the religious language used by both. This relevance does not depend on literary dependence of John's Gospel on C.H. XIII. Cf. also the above section on the relevance of parallel text for interpretation, p.98-101.

replaced by an intellectual body through a second generation (i.e., regeneration). The individual has to be transformed from existence as man to existence as god.'[440] The language of supernatural regeneration thus means ultimate discontinuity and a transition that is not a human possibility, but happens by the will of God. As Grese points out, this concept of regeneration also occurs in Hellenistic mystery religions[441]. Therefore, it was a familiar concept in Hellenistic religious thought, so the evangelist of John's Gospel could use it as well as the author of C.H. XIII. Consequently, Jesus' statement that one must be born from above was comprehensible to everyone familiar with contemporary religious thought.

These two broadly known concepts, that of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and that of supernatural regeneration, are combined in a metaphorical way[442], so that through this saying the evangelist's view of Christian existence is displayed. It is, on the one hand, communion with God and participation in the realm of his love, on the other hand it is ultimate discontinuity, it comes from above and is outside human possibilities. It means becoming part of the divine realm, but, unlike in C.H. XIII, it does not mean to cease being human and to become a god[443].

As response to Nicodemus' opening of the dialogue, Jesus' saying is about his person. Who Jesus is can only be seen from within the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, thus only through supernatural regeneration. On the level of language, to enter the kingdom of God and to understand who Jesus really is, another language than the 'earthly' one, over which Nicodemus has command, is required. It is not only the perception of his person as a

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[439] Translation from GRESE, 9.

[440] GRESE 72.

[441] Ibid

[442] Cf. above, "3. Poetic Language: Metaphor and Symbol" p.84.

[443] Cf. GRESE 73.

teacher or prophet Jesus is criticising, but the whole conceptuality and language-world of Nicodemus. In order to understand Jesus' significance one has to have joined the world of faith[444], which entails a completely new perception of reality and thus a new language. This new world can be communicated through language, but it requires a new language, the language of faith, which is able to disclose the world in which Jesus' true significance can be seen, and which is, in this case, figurative language[445]. Thus, in order to communicate who Jesus is, the evangelist has to create a new language by combining elements from different language-worlds in a poetic way and thus discloses the new meaning he wants to express, which is his particular interpretation of the world, centred around the person of Jesus.

Nicodemus, not familiar with the language of faith, takes Jesus' saying literally and understands ἄνωθεν merely as 'again', so that he asks how this new birth is possible in physical terms. In his response, Jesus does not change the mode of his language at all; he explains what he means in strictly figurative language. Jesus explains the meaning of being born ἄνωθεν by combining it with other concepts and pictures rather than by explaining it in non-figurative language. In v 5 he explains that the new birth is not a physical act by connecting it with water and spirit, so that the birth is understood in spiritual terms.

The combination of water and spirit is, on the one hand, an allusion to baptism and seems to take up the saying of John the Baptist in John 1:29-34[446]. The baptism with

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[444] In this context the relation between πιστεύειν and γινώσκειν described by Bultmann (*Theologie*, 425f) can be of importance for understanding the phenomenon of joining the language-world of faith and exploring it.

[445] Cf. above, 156, fn.424.

[446]Bultmann (*Johannesevangelium*, 98) rules out the 'ὕδατος καὶ' as a later assimilation of this passage to the doctrine of the early catholic church. I agree with Barrett that the 'ὕδατος καὶ' is part of the original gospel. Apart from Barrett's arguments the mentioning of water matches the concept of this whole pas-

water and spirit is, in early Christianity, closely connected to repentance, forgiveness of sins and the death of Jesus[447]. These meanings are introduced into the language by alluding to baptism. They are, however, not just taken over, but significantly altered. Only the activity of the spirit opens the possibility of entering the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, i.e. to become part of the realm of the spirit (v6). Hence, the supernatural regeneration, which is the work of the spirit and completely outside human possibility, is closely connected with the church's practice of baptism. Baptism is radically spiritualised; it is seen as 'the material sign of the Spirit's work'[448]. This verse can be seen as a 'warning against a sacramentarian misapprehension of baptism'[449]. Although baptism is part of the meaning of this verse, the main focus is still on the work of the spirit, which causes the transformation from flesh to spirit.

On the other hand, there is another field of meaning introduced into the discourse be the mentioning of water and spirit. In Jewish tradition, water is understood as ultimate cleansing, as it is e.g. expressed in Ezek. 36:25-28:

> 'I will sprinkle new water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness [...] A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; [...] I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow the statutes and be careful to serve my ordinances. [...] and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.'

Here, water is a sign of cleansing, through which Israel gets a new spirit and the communion between God and his people is restored. The motif of cleansing and new spirit

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sage, the enlarging of the horizon of the text by adding new concepts from the sources available to the evangelist. The concept of baptism was certainly known to the evangelist, since the practice of baptism must be presupposed in all early Christianity (Cf. BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 163f) and so it would be only natural for him to use this concept creating his language. Cf. also KOESTER, Craig R.; *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, Minneapolis (Fortress) 1995, 164-166.

[447] Cf. EWNT 459-469.

[448] Cf. KOESTER, *Symbolism*, 166.

[449] BARRETT 209.

is also to be found in Jub. 1:23-25: 'I will create in them a holy spirit and I will cleanse them [...] I will be their father and they shall be my children.' A similar thought was also used in the Rule of the Community from the Qumran texts.

> 'Meanwhile, God will refine, with his truth, all man's deeds, and will purify for himself the configuration of man, ripping out all spirit of injustice from the innermost part of his flesh, and cleansing him with the spirit of holiness from every irreverent deed. He will sprinkle over him the spirit of truth like lustral water (in order to cleanse him) from all abhorrences of deceit and defilement of the unclean spirit. In this way the upright will understand knowledge of the Most High, and the wisdom of the sons of heaven will teach those of perfect behaviour. For these are those selected by God for an everlasting covenant.' (1 QS IV 20-22) [450]

Both, the parallel Jub. 1:23-25 and 1QS are likely to be receptions of Ezek. 36:25-28. This shows how the passage from Ezekiel has influenced Jewish thought of that time and that the concept of sprinkling of water was understood as a sign of ritual cleansing in order to restore the relation between humankind and God. Thus this concept must have been known to the community from which John's Gospel evolved, for they were a part of Jewish religious thought. Therefore, the idea of cleansing and restored communion with God is introduced to the meaning of this verse. The supernatural regeneration is also ultimate cleansing, and restoration of the communion between God and his people, which had been destroyed by human disobedience. The full meaning of the verses about being born ἄνωθεν is, in my opinion, to be seen in the combination of both the Jewish and Hellenistic concepts of supernatural regeneration and ultimate cleansing; it combines these concepts in order to disclose what coming to faith means.

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[450] Translation from MARTÍNEZ, Florentino García; *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, Leiden (Brill) 1994, 7. It is worth remarking at this place that there are, as I am going to show in this study, some interesting parallels between John 3:1-21 and 1 QS. I cannot picture any plausible relation between the Johannine churches and the community which brought about the 'Rule of the Community', yet the parallels are striking. The connection between the dualism of John's Gospel and that of 1 QS would be an interesting study.

The distinction between the realms of flesh (σάρξ) and spirit (πνεῦμα) is introduced in v6. Both terms are known from Paul's epistles and thus they must have been common to early Christian theology. Yet the evangelist uses these terms very differently from Paul and thus from the early Christian tradition. Paul uses these terms anthropologically to describe the human condition. Characteristically he uses κατὰ σάρκα and ἐν σαρκί. Naturally every human being lives ἐν σαρκί, in the sphere of natural life, which does not necessarily contain a theological judgement[451]. Only if the σάρξ determines the human existence, the human being lives κατὰ σάρκα, i.e. in Sin[452]. The antonym to σάρξ is πνεῦμα, which represents the non-worldly, the invisible[453]. Living κατὰ πνεῦμα means to live in faith, having one's live determined by Christ[454]. Thus, the dualism between σάρξ and πνεῦμα is about how human existence is determined, whether one lives in obedience or disobedience against God. The evangelist uses these concepts, yet transforming them by combining them with his particular world-view: He does not use the forms ἐν σαρκί/πνεύματι or κατὰ σάρκα/πνεῦμα, which are known in Christian tradition, but ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς/τοῦ πνεύματος. In this usage, they do not describe human existence as either in Sin or in faith, as in Paul, but they are used to describe the origin of a human being. The evangelist clearly moves in the direction of the conceptuality of cosmological dualism[455], which was also current in antiquity. In some, respects, the dualism found in Qumran-literature forms an interesting parallel to the

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[451] Cf. BULTMANN, *Theologie*, 236f.

[452] Cf. BULTMANN, *Theologie*, 237f.

[453] Cf. BULTMANN, *Theologie*, 336.

[454] Ibid.

[455] Although Johannine thought moves towards a cosmological dualism, it has to be noted that there is no notion of a dualism within the deity, i.e. that a god of light is opposed by a god of darkness. The division in Johannine dualism is between God/being from God and the world/being from the world. It is a radical expression of the creation having turned away from its creator and not of the world being created by an evil force as in Gnosticism.

Johannine. In 1QS III, 13-IV,26, humanity is seen as determined by its origins. There are two groups of human beings, the first is given the spirit of truth, the second the spirit of deceit[456]:

> In these lies the history of all men; in their (two) divisions all their armies have a share by their generations; in their paths they walk; every deed they do falls into their divisions, dependent on what might be the birthright of the man, great or small, for all eternal time. For God has sorted them into equal parts until the last day and has put everlasting loathing between their divisions. (1QS IV, 15-17)[457]

There is, however, an important difference between the dualistic language in the *Rule of the Community* and John 3:1-21. The Qumran dualism is strictly determinist, i.e. every human being is given one of the two spirits and belongs to the respective group 'for all eternal time'; no transition from one division to the other is possible. The Nicodemus-discourse, on the other hand, is about how the transition from the one group to the other is possible. The supernatural regeneration, which is a concept which cannot be found in the Jewish tradition[458], allows the human being to become part of those born of the spirit. Thus, the Johannine determinism is not a determinism strictly speaking, for a human being does not belong to one group or the other 'for all eternal time', because he or she may be born ἄνωθεν and then be from the spirit. Nevertheless, there are important points of contact with the dualism of 1QS, since in both texts the deeds of an

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[456] Cf. 1 QS III, 19.

[457] Translation from MARTÍNEZ; *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 7.

[458] CHESTNUTT points out that in Rabbinic Judaism the language of new birth was known for the conversion to Judaism and being proselytised. Yet the point of this language is not to describe what happens in the conversion, but the legal position of the proselyte, who is seen like a new-born child. It is a transformation of status, not of essence (CHESTNUTT, Randall D.; *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth*, JSPS 16, Sheffield (Academic Press) 1995, 174-176). Thus the imagery may be similar to that of the Nicodemus-discourse, yet it does not contain the idea of supernatural regeneration. In addition, if such a concept of supernatural regeneration had been known in contemporary Judaism, then Nicodemus as representative of the Jewish establishment would have known the imagery and not completely misunderstood Jesus' saying.

individual are determined by his or her origin, an issue which will be made explicit in v.19[459].

In C.H. XIII a distinction similar to that of σάρξ and πνεῦμα is made between σῶμα and νοῦς[460]. The supernatural regeneration causes the illuminated to cease bodily existence and start a new being ἐν νῷ, to which the material realm does not matter, as the real Hermes cannot be found in the body anymore[461]. Only through supernatural regeneration it becomes possible to know (νοεῖν) the transcendent god.

> This νοεῖν, however, is a possibility only for those who are themselves νοῦς, and in becoming νοῦς they are made divine and are translated out of human, physical existence. Like God himself, Hermes, who is also νοῦς, can be known only by νοεῖν, not by sense perceptions.[462]

There are, indeed, some parallels between John's perception of the supernatural regeneration, but there are even more important differences. John, as we have seen above, agrees that the divine, in his case Jesus, cannot be understood by anybody who is not born ἄνωθεν and is thus still part of the realm of the σάρξ. For John, however, supernatural regeneration does not lead to direct and immediate knowledge of God, but to understanding the person of Jesus, which mediates knowledge of God. In addition, the supernatural regeneration in John 3 is closely connected with the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, which is the realm of a new, loving relationship between humanity and God, in which divine love is the ruling principle. This βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, which takes place in the world, although not being part of this world, is the realm of the spirit, into which one enters by the divine gift of understanding Jesus' person. Being taken out of the realm of the flesh means, therefore, not being literally taken out of this world, but being put into

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[459] Cf, below, p.178.

[460] Cf. GRESE 93f.

[461] Cf. GRESE 90.

[462] GRESE 91.

a new relation to God and the world, which is opened by the Gospel, in this case as it is proclaimed by John, and which to enter is not a human possibility but the work of the spirit. John combines the early Christian concept of σάρξ and πνεῦμα with Hellenistic dualistic thought and thus arrives at a new interpretation of Christianity, which involves a concept of dualism, which is particular to Johannine thought[463] and a means to express the Johannine interpretation of Christian faith.

In v 8 the work of the spirit is explained in a peculiar way. Playing on the double meaning of πνεῦμα, which can mean 'spirit' as well as 'wind', the πνεῦμα, like the wind, can be recognised by its effect, but origin and end are not known. It blows or breathes according to its own law[464], it is completely outside of any kind of human availability, cannot be predicted or domesticated, it is completely external to this world, or, as Barrett points out: 'It breathes into this world from another.'[465] The new birth is a power from outside, that overcomes humanity, and it proves its existence only by its effect, i.e. those that are supernaturally regenerated know that the spirit is at work and therefore exists, but no other evidence for it is available. The evangelist apparently abstains from delivering a doctrine of the πνεῦμα, rather he defines it by its effect and the mystery of its effectiveness only. Therefore he refuses any attempt to make the supernatural regeneration, the coming to faith comprehensible as a worldly phenomenon, but presents it in its otherness from all worldly phenomena and in its not being available to humanity. It is a divine mystery and, since it is not bound to any condition, it is not a human work but the activity of divine grace.

In this first part of the Nicodemus-discourse, a whole cosmology is opened up. Through new relations between concepts, that have not been connected before, are

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[463] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 174-179.

[464] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* I 387.

uncovered and thus a new meaning is disclosed. Through the dialectic between the concept of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and that of supernatural regeneration and the following explanation, the relation between the realm of faith and that of unbelief is outlined. As the whole passage is a response to a remark about Jesus' person, it has to be seen in relation to Jesus' himself. Who he really is can only be understood from within the realm of faith, only through being begotten ἄνωθεν, being taken out of the world and put into a new understanding of the world, which is communicated through the language of faith. The evangelist, however, did not find the language to express his particular understanding of the kerygma; he had to use poetic language, combining known concepts in a new, creative way, in order to communicate his interpretation of the kerygma.

b) V. 9-12: An Epistemology of Faith

The next part of the dialogue (v9-12) is the transition from the more general cosmology of vv 3-8 to the christological discourse of vv 13-20. Its subject is the source of knowledge about faith, it is, as it were, an epistemology of faith. Jesus responds to Nicodemus' question 'How can this happen?' by presenting himself as the source of knowledge about the spiritual realm. Jesus is the proclaimer in these verses, before he becomes, as the proclaimed, subject in the last part of the discourse.

When Nicodemus asks: 'How can this happen?' he obviously has understood the cosmology of v3-8, for he asks not for clarification of that system, but wishes to know how the supernatural regeneration through the spirit is possible. Jesus' answer 'You are a teacher of Israel and do not know that?' is, certainly, ironic. As a Φαρισαῖος and ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων Nicodemus had to claim to know about the will of God through the revelation of the Old Testament. The real and ultimate revelation of God's

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[465] BARRETT, John, 211.

will is, however, Jesus himself, and so Nicodemus' knowledge of scripture cannot be sufficient. The teaching of Israel cannot answer the question as to how salvation is possible, because they do not know Christ as the key to scripture and thus do not understand its real meaning. The mystery of rebirth is completely incomprehensible to natural human beings[466]; it is accessible only through the testimony of Jesus, as the evangelist makes clear in v11.

In v11, peculiarly, the person speaking changes, since this verse is completely in plural form. Schnackenburg[467] observes that, by using of the plural, the evangelist exceeds the setting of the scene as a dialogue. In this setting, Jesus' horizon includes the time in which the disciples take his testimony and make it part of their proclamation. Schnackenburg is certainly right in observing that the setting of the scene is exceeded, but one could even go further and say that it is not only Jesus speaking in this verse, but the Johannine community. The perspective of the ministry of Jesus is left and the church is envisaged[468]. The distinction between Jesus and the post-Easter Christian community is, in fact, diffused in this verse; the Church is seen not only as continuing Jesus' ministry, but it is, in a certain way, even identified with him. The church is continuing Jesus' mission in the world by bearing witness to God as Jesus has born witness to him, and the testimony of the church is rejected by the world as Jesus' testimony has been rejected, a feature that also can be observed in other parts of John's Gospel, e.g. in the farewell-

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[466] Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium* 102f. SCHNACKENBURG (*Johannesevangelium* I, p.388) suggests that Nicodemus' question proves his ignorance and not understanding of what Jesus had said before, since he attempts to inquire deeper into that mystery. This perception of the situation is, in my opinion, wrong, since the supernatural regeneration Jesus is talking about is something so alien to human understanding, that it cannot be understood before it is revealed. Nicodemus' question is therefore necessary in order to continue the discourse and to talk about the essential part of the mystery of rebirth, which is Jesus' own person.

[467] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* I 388f.

[468] Cf. BARRETT, *John*, 211f.

discourses (cf. 15:18-21), in the 'highpriestly' Prayer of c.17 and in the resurrection narratives (cf. 20:21). In the verse discussed here, this theological point is not made explicit, but it underlies this shift of perspective. The different levels of the narrative are fused here and the change in the person speaking signals that this discourse is not only about Jesus, but also about the congregation and the argument between the early Christian community and the Jewish community, and thus the listeners are taken into the course of the narrative, which is, in turn, applied to their situation.

The contrast ἐπίγεια - ἐπουράνια in v12 refers, in my opinion, to the parts before and after this verse. It matches very well to say that the cosmological background outlined in v2-8 is the ἐπίγεια and the following passage v13-21, which could be titled 'The Johannine *Kerygma*'[469] is referred to by the ἐπουράνια. Since I see, unlike Bultmann and Schnackenburg, the passage 3:1-21 as one literary composition, it is not necessary to relate the ἐπουράνια to something external to the text, as Schnackenburg suggests[470]. Schnackenburg sees the ἐπουράνια as another revelation of heavenly things, which is not contained in the passage, but will follow at a later stage of Jesus' ministry. Barrett[471], similarly, sees the ἐπουράνια as another revelation which Jesus does not give here, because it would be pointless since Nicodemus does not even believe him when he is talking about the ἐπίγεια. It is certainly questionable whether, in the framework of Johannine theology, a higher revelation than that given in v13-21 is possible. Here, the whole *kerygma* is outlined in a very concise way, and thus everything of the ἐπουράνια is revealed in the rest of the passage. Therefore I suggest that the ἐπίγεια refer to the cosmological background outlined in v2-9 and the ἐπουράνια to the revelation of the salvation by faith in Christ in v13-21. The cosmological background can be seen as an

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[469] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* I 393.

[470] Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* I 390-393.

[471] Cf. BARRETT, *John*, 212.

ἐπίγειον because it refers to what happens on earth. It is a phenomenological description (by means of a cosmological metaphor) of the distinction between the believers and the non-believers and that supernatural regeneration is necessary to become part of the believers. This also explains that Jesus concludes his talking about the ἐπίγεια with the statement about the πνεῦμα that blows/breathes where it wants, since it points to another level on which the supernatural regeneration has to be seen and leaves it a mystery on the level of the ἐπίγεια, which is further explained on the level of the ἐπουράνια in v 13-21.

c) V. 13-21: The Ἐπουράνια: *Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man*

In the section vv13-21, the mode of discourse changes from a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus to a speech given by Jesus. This change in the mode of discourse correlates with the content of the second half of the passage, because there is no point of contact between natural human understanding and what Jesus is about to reveal about the ἐπουράνια. In the first section of the discourse, where the subject matter is the cosmological background for an understanding of Jesus' person, and in the second section, where the source of knowledge about God and Jesus is discussed, a dialogue could take place between the positions of Nicodemus and Jesus. Yet in the third section, the true significance of Jesus' person is explained, which is something incomprehensible in human terms. In fact, the proclamation of the ἐπουράνια and of Jesus' person, i.e. that Jesus is the heavenly Son of Man and truly sent by God, is the Johannine *kerygma* and thus the call to faith. Believing understanding of this section of the discourse can only take place from within the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, thus through supernatural regeneration. Faith in Jesus' testimony about himself is not a natural human possibility, but an act of God's love.

The uniqueness of Jesus' revelation is emphasised in v13, here giving the reason for Jesus' unique revelation: he is the only one who has ever been in heaven and thus is able to reveal the ἐπουράνια. The ἐπουράνια are, in turn, that Jesus is the one who came down from heaven and who makes the new birth from the spirit possible. Nobody else brings salvation than the one who came down from heaven. It is impossible to ascend to heaven by human power, e.g. by means of mysticism; it is only possible through Jesus' mediation. Only through him authentic knowledge of God, i.e. that God is the one who sent Jesus into the world, is possible.

In this verse, Jesus identified with the Son of Man, which was a common Christian description of Jesus. Earliest Christianity, possibly even Jesus himself, had connected the figure of the Son of Man from Dan 7:13 with Jesus' person[472]. This meant a far-reaching reinterpretation of that text, for this text had not commonly been interpreted as referring to an individual before[473]. In the Christian tradition the picture had been used to express 'the belief that Jesus had been vindicated after death and would soon "come with the clouds of heaven".'[474] Jesus Christ was expected to come again in final triumph and judge the world[475]. This interpretation of Jesus as the Son of Man is radically transformed in this passage. Firstly, in Christianity, the Son of Man had not been seen as a pre-existent figure before. It was the future coming of Christ which was understood

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[472] Cf. DUNN, James D.G.; *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, London (SCM) 1980, 82-95, esp. 87. There is, however, no consensus in the debate about the origin of the term 'Son of Man' (Cf. BORSCH, F.H.; "Further Reflections on the „Son of Man:" The Origins and Development of the Title" in: CHARLESWORTH, James H.(ed.): *The Massiah: Developments in Earliest Christianity (the first Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins)*, Minneapolis (Augsburg Fortress) 1992, 130-144). I cannot discuss the origin and development of the term comprehensively, yet the rough outline of the understanding of the term at the time when the Nicodemus-discourse was written which I am giving here shall be sufficient for the understanding of the passage.

[473] Ibid. 67-82, esp. 81f.

[474] Ibid. 87.

[475] Ibid. 96.

through the reference to Dan 7:13. In John 3:13, however, the Son of Man is connected with the Johannine concept of Christ's pre-existence, which stems from the early stages of Johannine Christology, as it can be seen in the *logos*-hymn in John 1[476]. Secondly, the reference to Dan 7:13 was, in pre-Johannine Christianity, an expression of the expectation of Jesus' future coming, not a retrospective understanding of his earthly ministry. In John, however, Jesus in his earthly ministry is given the title Son of Man. Thirdly, the Son of Man was seen as Christ coming back in triumph and judgement. While, in pre-Johannine Christianity, the lowliness of Jesus' earthly ministry was contrasted with the glory of his second coming, the evangelist does not differentiate between these two anymore. On the one hand, the earthly Jesus possesses his full heavenly glory (cf. John 1:14) already during his earthly ministry. On the other hand, to describe Jesus as the Son of Man before his exaltation means that his first coming into the world, his earthly ministry, is his coming to judge the world. In the encounter with Jesus' proclamation the judgement takes place; either one accepts it believing and thus is rescued or rejects it and is judged. This aspect is further explored in v.18f[477]. To sum up, through the combination of the reference to Dan 7:13 with Jesus' earthly ministry, the latter is understood in a completely different way. The distinction between his first and second coming collapses, and already Jesus' earthly ministry is understood as the ultimate eschatological event. In the encounter with his person the final judgement takes place.

The motif of ascent and descent in John's Gospel is closely connected with the Johannine messenger-Christology[478]. This understanding of his ministry sees Jesus as being sent by the Father, thus coming down from heaven into the world (cf. v.17), and returning to the Father by his ascent to heaven through his exaltation. This scheme of

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[476] Cf. the section "B. The Prologue: John 1:1-18" p.117-149, esp. 129-136.

[477] Cf. below p.177.

[478] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 178, 487-494.

mission and return is not fully elaborated in this passage, but the ascent and descent motif is used to understand the outline of Jesus' ministry. It will be taken up again in v.17, where Jesus' coming into the world is described as his being sent[479].

In v 14 and 15, however, the Son of Man image is altered in by connecting it with the image of the serpent on the pole from Num. 21:8, a way of understanding the crucifixion for which no earlier example is known[480]. As the serpent has been lifted up by Moses, the Son of Man has to be lifted up. By putting these concepts in relation to each other, a new meaning is added to the picture of Jesus that is presented here. The eschatological Son of Man, the one who bears the ultimate witness to God and who's appearance on earth is the final judgement, is the one who will be lifted up onthe pole as the serpent is in Num. 21:8. In Num. 21:8, the bronze serpent is lifted up to heal everybody who looks at it from the bites of the fiery serpents which have occurred as a punishment of Israel's disobedience. In the second half of the sentence (v15), this picture is altered even more by changing the seeing of the bronze serpent (ὁράω, Num. 21:8 (LXX)) into believing (πιστεύω) and the 'he will live' (ζήσεται) into 'he may have eternal life' (ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον). Through the introduction of the bronze serpent in v14 and 15, a new element is added to the description of what Jesus is. Firstly, the tradition of the bronze serpent is a story about Israel's disobedience. The fiery serpents are sent to punish Israel for its disobedience, by biting and so killing many Israelites. Because of Israel's repentance, the bronze serpent is lifted up and those that see it survive. Barrett remarks that ancient Jewish exegesis related the healing through seeing the serpent not to the serpent itself but to faith in God, who caused the healing[481]. In a similar

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[479] Cf. below, p.176.

[480] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 170 and SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* 408.

[481] Cf. BARRETT 213f and STRACK, Herrmann L. and BILLERBECK, Paul; *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, München (C.H.Beck) , 5 vols., 1922-1961, vol 2, 425f.

way, the eternal Son of God has become incarnate because of human disobedience to-wards God and to open the possibility of a positive relation between God and humanity and to rescue from death, though the salvation does not merely consist in physical sur-vival, as in Num. 21:8, but in eternal life. Secondly, the task of the heavenly Son of Man, to reveal what God is and to judge the world, is fulfilled only through his being lifted up, i.e. through the crucifixion, which is, at the same time, the exaltation (ὑψόω = *to lift up* and *to exalt*). The picture of being lifted up illustrates the motif of the ascent in v.13. The Son of Man has to ascend into heaven (v.13), and so he has to be lifted up and thus to be exalted[482]. Thirdly, salvation, which is brought by the eternal Son of God incarnate, is only possible through faith in the crucified, exalted one. As the healing from the bite of the serpents happened, as it was understood in ancient Judaism, through faith in God, mediated by the bronze serpent, salvation from death and eternal life happens through faith in Jesus the crucified one because God becomes visible in him.

In order to define more clearly the meaning of the picture outlined in the previous verse, the metaphorical speech is explained in v16 by a direct statement about Jesus' mission in the world. Jesus' coming into the world is an act of God's love; the Son of Man is also the eternal Son of God, who is given in order to save humankind and open the possibility of eternal life. The term μονογενής, in connection with Jesus as the Son of God, occurs only in the fourth gospel. It must be part of the Johannine tradition, since it already occurs in the hymn underlying the prologue (1:14) and describes the unique relationship between God and Jesus[483]. The ἔδωκεν contains an element of giving away or sacrifice. As the 'believing in him' takes up the comparison with the ser-pent on the pole of the previous verses, this verse means that the Father is giving away

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[482] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 171.

his only Son to be lifted up like the serpent. The crucifixion is in focus here, yet not explicitly mentioned. The pair 'believing' and 'having eternal live' of v.15 is supplemented with its opposition, which is 'being lost'. Without faith in the Son of God, which is only possible because of the Son's being given, the world is in a state of perdition. Because of God's love towards the world, one of the most important motifs in Johannine theology (Cf. 1 John 4:8-10), God gives away his only Son so that the world may have the possibility of leaving the state of perdition and have eternal life. The language of this verse is strongly dualistic, for the world is seen as lost *per se*, and life is only possible for those who believe in the Son. This is, in fact, the subject of this whole passage and only possible through supernatural regeneration.

The same point is made again in v.17, yet from another angle. Jesus' coming into the world is understood in terms of the messenger-Christology[484]. As in antiquity all communication and trade depended on messengers, universally recognised and standardised rules for the tasks of messengers developed, which were used also in religious thought to describe the exchange of heavenly and earthly beings[485]. If the evangelist uses the messenger-terminology in order to understand Jesus' earthly ministry, the whole institution of messengers in antiquity resonates. Jesus is God's one messenger, who is sent into the world to bring eternal life[486]. Before the concept of κρίσις is elaborated in v.18, it is emphasised again that the purpose of the Son being sent, part of which is the judgement, is the salvation of the world. Therefore, the whole concept of judgement is pre-

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[483] Cf. FITZMEYER, J.A.; "μονογενής" EWNT 1082-1083.

[484] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 488 and above p.173.

[485] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 488.

[486] It is not relevant for the understanding of the Nicodemus-discourse to expand the discussion of the messenger-Christology, as it is not elaborated in this passage. For a comprehensive discussion cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium* 484-494.

ceded by that of God's love towards the *kosmos*, and the judgement is seen as subordinate to it, i.e. it is but a function of God's love, though a necessary one[487].

In v.18, the concept of judgement, an important aspect of Jesus' person which has not been elaborated yet, is unfolded. The concept has, indirectly, been introduced through the concept of the Son of Man, yet only in the final part of this passage is it carried out. The concept of judgement itself is transformed radically here. Judgement is seen not just as a future event that the world is waiting for, but as taking place in the encounter with the only Son of God, a term that carries now all the meaning that has been connected with it in the previous verses. In the encounter with Jesus as the only Son of God it is decided whether someone belongs to the realm of the flesh or to that of the spirit. In this encounter the supernatural regeneration takes place if Jesus is accepted as what he is, i.e. as God's authentic messenger the ultimate expression of God's love towards humankind. If one belongs to the realm of the spirit, he or she will not be judged, one has already the ζωή αἰώνιος. Not accepting Jesus for who he is, not having faith in him, means belonging to the realm of the flesh and thus already being judged and condemned. This is, certainly, not to say that there is only realised or present eschatology to be found in John's Gospel. The task of this study is, however, not to establish a comprehensive view of Johannine theology, but to investigate how a language to understand Christian faith is developed in the Nicodemus-discourse. Therefore, I concentrate only on the theological content of this passage, although it would be interesting to investigate how the different statements about eschatology in John work together and play their part in the communication of the Johannine *kerygma*.

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[487] Cf. also John 12:47. The idea of judgement as a function of God's love and prerequisite for salvation is already found in the Old Testament. Cf. HERNTRICH, V.; "κρίνω κτλ., B. Der at.liche Begriff מִשְׁפָּט"

In v19, dualistic language is used again, though this time it is not the dualism of σάρξ and πνεῦμα, but that of φῶς and σκοτία, a language that connects to the prologue, where this kind of language has already been used as part of the great cosmological narrative (John 1:4f, 9). In v19, it is said explicitly that the judgement is the light's coming into the world, and since humanity belongs to the other part of that cosmological dualism to the darkness or the flesh, the light is rejected. Consequently, those rejecting the light are judged by their staying in the darkness and in the flesh. By taking up the cosmological dualism again in the end of this passage, the second part about the ἐπουράνια is linked with the first one about the ἐπίγεια, and thus it is expressed that the second part is the answer to Nicodemus' question how the supernatural regeneration can happen. The dualism of light and darkness is also linked with human works. As the κρίσις takes place in the encounter with Jesus, human works do not have direct implications for salvation, since the works do not bear a consequence for judgement, which take place only on the ground of faith or unbelief in Jesus. Therefore, doing evil or truth is apparently not a merely moral matter, but a matter of having faith in Jesus. Since works are put into relation to the world which is opened through the creative language of Jesus, they get a place in the world of Jesus' language and are now related to faith in Jesus and lose their old meaning as a way to communion with God. Everything that is done through faith in Jesus is truth, and everything that is done without that faith is evil. The sentence v20,21 expresses this in a paradox way: those that do evil hate the light and keep away from it, whereas those that do the truth come to the light so that it may be shown that their deeds have been done in God. This sentence seems to contradict what has been said before, that the decision, whether someone is saved and being

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ThWNT III 922-933, 929-932 and Liedke, G.; "שפט" THAT II 999-1009, 1007-1009. Note that in the Qumran-texts the term is used the same way, Liedke, "שפט" 1009.

supernaturally regenerated, is taken in the encounter with Jesus. This tension between these statements leads to an altered understanding of morality.

The concept that the moral quality of human deeds is determined by the origin of the human being is known from the kind of dualism which is represented by the *Rule of the Community* of the Qumran-texts[488]. In 1QS III, 13-IV,26, for example, the deeds of human beings are determined by the spirit which has been given to them. Those that have the spirit of injustice hate truth and vice versa[489], like those who do evil hate the light. An important difference is however, that, as pointed out above[490], in the dualism as it is expressed in the *Rule of the Community* no transition from one state of being to the other is possible. One has the either the spirit of truth or that of deceit for ever and thus belongs to those loved by God or hated by him for all time. Yet Johannine dualism allows the transition from one state of being to another, from the realm of the flesh to that of the spirit, by means of supernatural regeneration, which leads to a new existence in Christ. A new loving relationship in which the human individual is loved by God only because the human being believes in Christ, is opened through the mission of the Son. Therefore, in this new relation between God and humanity the human being lives, indeed, by grace alone. Thus, the human being does not act in order to define his or her personality, in order to gain reward from God, for the human being in Christ is part of the loving communion with God because of his or her faith in the divine love. Being part of this communion has, certainly moral implications (cf., e.g. John 13:34), but they do not constitute the membership in that communion. Everybody, who is part of that loving communion, can, therefore, come to the light regardless of his or her works, since one does not have to trust, i.e. have faith in them anymore. On the other hand,

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[488] Cf. above, p.165.

[489] 1QS IV, 17.

[490] Cf. above p.165.

those that are living in the flesh have to trust in what they are doing in order to define themselves, in human as well as in divine terms. Therefore they cannot be part of the simply loving communion, and they cannot persist before God, because human works are generally seen as evil (cf. v19). In this way it is possible to talk about works in the context of the belief in being accepted by God through divine grace as it is presented in this passage. The introduction of human works into the argument fulfils, certainly, also another function, since it excludes libertinism, which could result from the teaching of the sole work of divine grace in this text. The decision whether one belongs to the realm of the light or the darkness comes about in the encounter with Jesus, resulting in faith or unbelief in his person. Yet human action is not irrelevant but those who are part of the realm of the light act in accordance with their being in loving communion with God.

3. Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, creation of language takes place in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. This creation of language does not happen by creating a language *ex nihilo*, but existing human language is taken up and transformed so that it opens up a new language-world. The evangelist takes up elements from the religious languages of different traditions, which he combines in a new, creative way, so that new meaning is brought about.

New meaning is brought out by the combination of known terms and concepts, which still carry their old meaning with them. In fact, the new meaning of language does not mean the extinction of former meanings of the elements of language, but they are put together in a poetic way so that they mean more than merely the sum of the single elements. Programmatically this is shown in v3, where the evangelist sets the agenda for the whole discourse by introducing a strong metaphor: 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above'. Both elements can be understood by everybody

familiar with religious language of that time, so the metaphor is comprehensible, provided that the hearer knows that the mode of speech is metaphorical. Starting from this metaphor, the evangelist introduces more and more known concepts, which he combines with the initial metaphor, thus unfolding ever new meaning until he arrives at his theology *in nuce*, which is expressed only in figurative language.

As Heidegger suggested, language gathers up things, i.e. it collects the whole world of that what is said[491]. Thus, the content of meaning remains with the language when languages are combined into a new one, and the new language entails the worlds of the old languages. Therefore, the creative and gathering language of the passage which I studied here is essentially open to other language-worlds and has the ability to transform them. This openness is an important feature that has to be brought out by exegesis. If this general openness of the text is recognised, one sees that the text is not open only to the worlds from which its language is taken, but it is open to different languages in general, and it can relate to the different worlds of these languages. Nevertheless, to make possible an encounter between the modern interpreter and biblical texts, the texts need to be translated, so that they are able to speak into today's world and transform it by adding new meaning to it.

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[491]Cf. above, p. 72 and Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 337-340.

D. The final Prayer: John 17

1. Introduction

As the third of my case-studies, the great final prayer in John 17 seems to be a suitable text. The first text I interpreted, the hymn which is contained in the prologue to John's Gospel, represents, as I have shown, a very early stage of Johannine theology[492]. The hymn had been embedded in the Gospel, the main body of which displays a distinctive theology again. A fine example of this stage of the development of Johannine thought is the Nicodemus-discourse, which I have discussed in the second case-study[493]. The final prayer, or the 'High-Priestly-Prayer', as it is traditionally called, represents the last stage of theological reflection to be found in John's Gospel. In addition, it contains a remarkably comprehensive and distinguished theological approach which is, in my opinion, one of the most fascinating of all that can be found in the New Testament. In John 17, an extremely condensed language is developed to express the Johannine circle's interpretation of Christianity, or, in other words, what the presence of the living Christ means for the life of the community and, not least, for the church through all generations.

In the discussion of the hymn, we have seen that it is strongly influenced by Philonic or similar thought[494]. In the Nicodemus-Discourse the main influences were traditional Christian thought, apocalyptic thought -especially embodied in the Son of Man concept- and a strong element of gnostic thought, which we have found in the Hermetic parallels to the language of supernatural regeneration[495]. The aim of this investigation is to establish the particular interpretation of Christian faith which John 17 offers and to ascertain

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[492] Cf. above, p.124ff.

[493] Cf. above, p.150ff.

[494] Cf. above, p.131f and 137f.

how Johannine thought developed the language of faith that it has taken over from its forebears. As we will see, certain strands of Johannine thought, namely the gnostic current, have gained more influence, whereas other strands have disappeared from Johannine theology. In this section, I am going to analyse the influences on Johannine thought which helped to shape the particular language of John 17. In order to do so I am going to identify parallels in contemporary religious thought which will help to explain the particularities of the language of John 17. This will show how a developing understanding of Christ leads to the further development of a language for faith within the Johannine community and Johannine theology.

2. The Language of John 17

a) Introductory Questions

Amongst those scholars who accept that John's Gospel is not written by a single author but the result of an editorial process, it is broadly agreed that John 17 has been inserted into the Gospel at a late stage[496], and there is much evidence for this assumption. Firstly, the whole farewell discourses after John 14:31 seem to be a later addition in different stages. John 18 connects ideally with 14:31, and c.15-17 interrupts the plausible flow of the narrative, so that c.15-17 are likely to be an insertion[497]. It is then possible to discern between different layers of redaction in the Farewell Discourses. It would be, however, beyond the scope of this investigation to discuss the genesis of the farewell-

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[495] Cf. above, p.159f.

[496] Cf. BECKER, Jürgen; "Aufbau, Schichtung und theologiegeschichtliche Stellung des Gebetes in Johannes 17" ZNW 60, 1969, 56-83, BROWN; John 2, 582-588, PAINTER, John; "The Farewell Discourses and the History of Johannine Christianity" NTS 27 (1980-81) 525-543, SCHNACKENBURG, Rudolf; Das Johannesevangelium, Vol.3, HTKNT 4/3, Freiburg (Herder) 1976, 190, 230f.

[497] Cf. BECKER, Jürgen; "Die Abschiedsreden Jesu im Johannesevangelium" ZNW 61, 1970, 215-246.

discourses in detail[498]. In the given context, it should be sufficient to discuss the position of c.17 within the Farewell-Discourses and the Gospel.

Within John's Gospel, as well as within the Farewell Discourses, John 17 stands out quite remarkably. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, there are important theological differences between the main body of the Gospel and the Farewell-Discourses on the one hand and the final Prayer on the other. In addition, John 17 cannot have been part of the Gospel before the addition to the farewell discourses c.15-16, because c.17 does not at all connect with 14:31, but it connects comparatively smoothly with c.15f. Therefore, John 17 must have been inserted either together with the Farewell-Discourses or afterwards[499]. As I am going to point out, a development of theological thinking can be traced from the main body of the gospel to the Farewell-Discourses. The final Prayer represents, as it will be shown in the course of this section, an even later stage of this development. Thus it is likely that, after the composition of the main body of John's Gospel, the Farewell-Discourses have been inserted and then, in a final stage, the final Prayer of John 17, which represents the last stage of distinctive Johannine theology known to us.

An important question for the understanding of the prayer in John 17 is its setting. The situation described in the prayer is that of departure. Jesus is praying in front of his disciples when the hour, the time of his passion and glorification[500], has arrived. The place, in which the prayer has been inserted, underlines this setting; just after the Farewell-Discourses and before the Passion-narrative. There are, however, indications that this fictional setting of the prayer is not carried out consistently. Jesus, as he is presented

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[498] For this question cf. BECKER, "Abschiedsreden" and PAINTER, John; "Farewell Discourses".

[499] Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, Christian; 'Seminar über Johannes 17, SS 1993', unpublished manuscript, Tübingen 1993, 10.

[500] Cf. below, p.188.

here, does not speak as the earthly Jesus just before the Passion, but as the glorified Christ[501]. Verse 4, for example, expresses that Jesus has already fulfilled his task, yet he can only say the "τετέλεσται" when he is dying after his suffering (19:30). The glorification of Christ in the church[502], as it is mentioned in v.10, is only possible after the resurrection, when the disciples really understand who Jesus is. Verses 11 and 12a describe Jesus as already having left the world, although he is still talking to his disciples. In addition, the mission of the church in v.18, which is expressed in the aorist, can take place only after Easter. This leads to the assumption that it is not only the Johannine Jesus speaking here, but also the Johannine church at the end of the first century. Their experiences and context is dealt with by this prayer, which is a prayer of the *Christus praesens*, who is with his church now and intercedes at the Father's throne for his church. The horizons between the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Christ are completely fused, a feature which is common in John's Gospel[503]. Thus, to interpret this prayer as really spoken in the situation of departure or as intended to be read as such would lead to grave misinterpretations. It is meant to be spoken by the already glorified Christ who is interceding for his church, as well as by the earthly Jesus just before his passion. The Johannine church gained the authority to fuse the horizons between the

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[501] Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, 'Seminar über Joh 17', 2-4.

[502] I am using the term 'church' as a collective term for those that believe in Jesus Christ and that are given to him by the Father. Although the term is an anachronism in the fictional setting of the prayer, it reflects the understanding of the Johannine community, which certainly understood itself as the church (or a part of it). It seems to be plausible that the Johannine community meant itself when it spoke of 'those that have been given to Jesus by the Father'.

[503] Cf. ONUKI, Takashi; *Gemeinde und Welt im Johannesevangelium*, WMANT 56, Neukirchen-Vluyn (Neukirchener Verlag) 1984, 167-173 and KÄSEMANN, Ernst; *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [4]1980, 16-20. Cf. also above, p.169f.

earthly Jesus and the glorified Christ, and to insert their context and concerns into the gospel by the presence of the Paraclete in the church[504].

b) Structure

The structure of John 17 has always been seen as a problem. A multitude of different structures for John 17 have been suggested. In his article on John 17, Becker[505] provides a good summary of these different approaches. The attempts to find a coherent outline in John 17 have shown, however, that it is nearly impossible to achieve a consistent structure of John 17 without violating the text by too many literary-critical operations. The major obstacle to finding a coherent structure in this passage is that the different motifs in this prayer are interwoven and cross-linked, so that they cannot be separated clearly. Thus I agree with Dietzfelbinger[506] that ch.17 does not have a clear structure, but that, as a solemn prayer, it consists of four motif-'circles', which are situated around central imperatives. These motif-'circles' are not closed to each other, but may overlap and allow anticipation of later or recurrent earlier motifs. This structure of the passage enables the interpreter to take seriously the particular form of this text whilst, at least partly, satisfying the interpreter's desire for structured exegesis.

The first 'circle' extends from v.1-5 and is situated around the imperative δόξασον (v.1b,5). The Subject of this 'circle' is the mutual glorification of Father and Son after the Son has finished his task.

The second 'circle' includes vv.6-13. It surrounds the imperative τήρησον (v.11) and deals, mainly, with the preservation of the church in the ὄνομα of the Father.

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[504] Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, Christian; "Paraklet und theologischer Anspruch im Johannesevangelium" *ZTK* 82 (1985), 389-408, 402-408. Cf. also above, p.126f.

[505] BECKER, Jürgen; "Aufbau" 56-61.

The third 'circle' stretches from v.14-19 and focuses on the imperative ἁγίασον (v.17). It addresses the subject of the sanctification of the church in the λόγος and the ἀλήθεια.

The fourth 'circle' consists of the vv.20-26 with the imperative-like form θέλω ἵνα (v.24) as its centre. Its topic is the unity and perfection of the church.

These four circles are not, however, proper sections, but they are loose gatherings of thought around key motifs. As I stated above, anticipation and repetitions are possible. For example, the term ὄνομα is connected with the τήρησον of v.11 and occurs again in v.26. The term λόγος dominates the third circle around the imperative ἁγίασον (v.17), yet it is used already in v.6[507]. In addition, what is said about the ὄνομα and the λόγος 'penetrates and supplements each other'[508]. This particular outline of the prayer John 17, which does not show any clear structure, underlines the overall meditative character of the piece and its particular use of language.

c) Interpretation

(1) The Son prays for Glorification (17:1-5)

After the introduction to the prayer (v.1a), Jesus states that the hour has arrived. He prays that the Father may glorify him, so that he may glorify the Father. Without much introduction, Jesus goes directly *in medias res* and asks for what this whole prayer is basically about: glorification. The first petition is, in fact, so central to the whole prayer, that Becker assumes that it is the main petition and the following are its expositions[509]. Although the motif of glorification is familiar in John's Gospel, it is never systematised

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[506] Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, 'Seminar über Joh 17', 8f. In my outline of the structure of John 17 I am generally drawing on Dietzfelbinger's approach.

[507] Ibid.

[508] Ibid. 9.

as in c.17. The motif of Jesus being glorified by the Father occurs in 7:39, 12:16,23, and John 13:31 knows of a mutual glorification of Father and Son. However, the motif is not explored in such a comprehensive way as in c.17.

The glorification of the Son, through which the Father will be glorified, takes place in 'the hour', which is the time of Jesus' passion. The hour is introduced and explained in 12:23-25[510]. It is the time when Jesus will be glorified through his passion and death. This thought is presupposed and further developed in this passage. The hour is the time when Jesus has fulfilled the task which has been given to him by the Father (v.4), which is the time when he can say 'τετέλεσται' and die (19:30)[511]. Through the fulfilment of his task the mutual glorification of Father and Son takes place. In this passage, the understanding of Jesus' ministry up to his crucifixion is established: Jesus is the messenger, who has been sent by the Father and who has been given the Father's ἐξουσία, the right of disposal of God's own rights, in order to fulfil the task that has been given to him (cf. v.2)[512]. The task which has been given to Jesus, is, in John 17, different from that in the main body of the gospel. In John 17, the task is to give eternal life to those given to him by the Father, although it is necessary for the task that authority is given to him over against all flesh. The universal perspective, which we have seen in the Nicodemus-discourse, where Jesus has come for the κρίσις of the world, has gone out of the focus here. In c.3, Jesus comes into the world as the light, so that encountering him the world will have to decide for or against him, and thus the κρίσις takes place. This

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[509] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 69 and BECKER; *Johannesevangelium*, 617f.

[510] Certainly, the motif of the hour occurs already in 2:4 and 7:30, but, in 12:23-25, it is explained for the first time.

[511] The passion-narrative is presupposed by c.17, for c.17 is, as I have stated above, later than the main body of the gospel and the narrative must have been known to the author of c.17.

[512] Cf. BÜHNER, Jan-Adolf; *Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium*, WUNT 2/2, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck), 1977, 194.

whole event is an expression of God's love to the world (cf.3:16f, 12:47[513]). In John 17, however, Jesus seems only to be in the world to gather those that belong to him, those who have been given to him by the Father. A certain shift in the significance of Jesus takes place here. This becomes particularly clear in v.2. Though Jesus has the ἐξουσία over against all flesh, his task is only to gather his own and bring them eternal life. The universal κρίσις makes space for the collecting of his own. This shift is also a shift towards a more radical doctrine of predestination. In the main body of the gospel, on the one hand, there is a certain dialectic between predestination and the decision between belief and unbelief. In the κρίσις, which is the self-revelation of Jesus, the decision between acceptance and rejection, belief and unbelief takes place[514]. Certainly, this decision is not a human possibility, as the language of the supernatural regeneration in c.3 shows. In John 17, on the other hand, the decision does not take place in the κρίσις, but only by the will of the Father, who has given a part of all flesh to the Son, who gives, in turn, eternal life to this group. I will have to return to this question later, after having established the wider cosmological framework of John 17.

The term ἐξουσία is used in the same way as in the main body of the gospel. The term is used twice before in connection with Jesus, once (5:27) the Father has given the Son the ἐξουσία to execute the κρίσις, the second time in 10:18 Jesus has the ἐξουσία to lay down his life and to take it again. Both instances are God's very own right, which has been handed over to Jesus, in order to enable him to fulfil his task as the messenger. The handing over of the ἐξουσία over against all flesh is consistent with this understanding. There is, however, an enormous development from the view of the ἐξουσία of the earthly Jesus Mark's gospel presents. There, Jesus has the ἐξουσία to teach, to

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[513] Cf. above, p.487.

[514] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 620.

perform healings and exorcisms and to forgive sins[515]. Matthew attributes the full divine ἐξουσία to the risen Christ[516], but an understanding of the full divine ἐξουσία attributed to the earthly Jesus cannot be found elsewhere in the New Testament. Thus, a much deeper understanding of Jesus Christ has been achieved in Johannine theology. The first traces of this can be found in the prologue, where the church is able to see the divine δόξα in the incarnate Word through the flesh. This insight has been carried out and, in the main body of the gospel, the full divine δόξα and ἐξουσία apply to Jesus.

Verse 3 is a later, redactional insertion into the prayer[517] to explain the meaning of αἰώνιος ζωή and to guard against misinterpretations. Eternal life consists of the recognition that Jesus Christ is sent by the Father. The direct connection of the name 'Jesus' and the title 'Christ' occurs only three times in John's Gospel, the first time in the redactional addition to the prologue 1:17[518], then at this place 17:3, and, finally, in the first ending of the gospel, 20:31, where the purpose of the gospel is given and described as 'so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ'. The connection of 'Jesus' and 'Christ' seems to have become the core of the christological argument, which is addressed in 1 John 2:18-25. The dissenters from the Johannine community seem to deny the identity of the Christ with Jesus, and thus the title Jesus Christ occurs six times in 1 John. It is likely that the insertion of v.3 is a result of this christological argument, inserted to guard the right understanding of the concept of eternal life against the opponents of 1 John[519].

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[515] Cf. BROER, Ingo; "ἐξουσία" EWNT II, 23-29, 25f.

[516] Ibid.

[517] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 615, 621, BROWN, *John* 2, 741.

[518] Cf. on page 148

[519] Cf. above, p.115.

(2) Prayer for Preservation (17:6-13)

(a) The Revelation of the ὄνομα and the λόγος (v.6-8)

The second petition of the final Prayer can be divided into three groups: Revelation of the ὄνομα and the λόγος (v.6-8); distinguishing of and reason for the petition (v.9-11a); content of and another reason for the petition (v.11b-13)[520]. The first group describes how the glorification of the Father, which had been the subject of v.4, takes place. The Son has revealed the Father's name to the people whom the Father has given to him. The most striking feature v.6 is that Jesus has revealed the Father's name only to those that have been given to him. In the main body of the gospel, the Son reveals himself as the divine messenger to all the world, and in this revelation the κρίσις takes place. So the revelation is, in the main body of the gospel, to the whole cosmos, whereas here it is restricted to a certain group out of the cosmos that has been given to the Son. The rest of the world is not addressed by the revelation. In a way, the universal significance of Jesus is played down in John 17: he has not come into the world for the κρίσις of the world, but to reveal the divine name to those that belong to him.

As Bietenhard and Untergaßmair point out, the ὄνομα of the Father is God as he can be perceived and understood by humanity[521]. The name of the Father is revealed by Jesus through his proclamation (ῥήματα, v.8+9) and the fulfilment of his task as the messenger, which is his earthly ministry up to his death on the cross. Through these elements of revelation, those who are given to Jesus can see who God really is and live in communion with him. An important element of the divine name is, certainly, the

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[520] Cf. DIETZFELBINGER, "Seminar über Joh 17" 21.

[521] Cf. BIETENHARD, H.; "ὄνομα κτλ." *ThWNT* V, 242-283, 271 and UNTERGASSMAIR, Franz-Georg; *Im Namen Jesu: Der Namensbegriff im Johannesevangelium*, FB 13, Stuttgart (Katholisches Bibelwerk) 1974, 79f. Cf. also HARTMANN, Lars; "ὄνομα" EWNT II, 1268-1278, 1271.

oneness[522] of the Son with the Father, the fact that Jesus, who revealed God's will and died on the cross, is sent by the Father and is one with him. As we will see later in the discussion of the Prayer for Unity and Perfection (17:20-end), this oneness between the Father and the Son is extended to those belonging to the Son.

It is interesting to observe that, as Untergaßmair has shown, there are -amongst others- important parallels between the use of the concept ὄνομα in John 17 and in the gnostic *Evangelium Veritatis* (EvVer)[523]. These parallels become even more significant if the interpreter considers that the addressees of the revelation are, contrary to Untergaßmair's assumption[524], only those given to Jesus by the Father, not the whole world. Untergaßmair seems to harmonise the statements of John 17 too much with those of the main body of the gospel, which is, in my opinion, not legitimate to do. This is not to say that John 17 is a gnostic text[525]. On the one hand, there are too many important differences from the EvVer, on the other hand John 17 represents a stage in the Johannine struggle for understanding the meaning of the cross of Christ. It is noticeable, however, that John 17 takes up patterns of thought for understanding Christianity which come close to Gnosticism. Already in our discussion of the Nicodemus-Discourse we have seen that there are affinities between Johannine thought and Gnosti-

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[522] For the discussion of the terms 'oneness','unity' and 'loving communion' cf. below, p.207. Until then, I will use these terms as parallel.

[523] Cf. UNTERGASSMAIR: *Im Namen Jesu*, 291-305. Cf., e.g. EvVer 40:23-29: 'When, therefore, it pleased him that his name which is loved should be his Son, and he gave the name to him, that is, him who came forth from the depth, he spoke about his secret things, knowing that the Father is without evil. For that very reason he brought him forth in order to speak about the place and his restingplace from which he had come forth.' (Translation from ROBINSON, James M. (ed.); *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, San Francisco (Harper & Row) ³1988, 50) and 21:1-5, 11-14: '[...]teach those who will receive teaching. But those who are to receive teaching [are] the living who are inscibed in the book of the living.[6-10] Then, if one has knowledge, he receives what are his own and draws them to himself.' with the passage John 17:6-8.

[524] Cf. UNTERGASSMAIR: *Im Namen Jesu*, 300-302.

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cism[526], and the influence does not decrease, but increases to the level that brings about the understanding of the world in John 17, which is much closer to Gnosticism than the main body of the gospel. Struggling for language to understand Christian faith in its own spiritual and social environment led Johannine Christianity into this dangerous closeness to Gnosticism, and indeed, as 1 John illustrates, it brought about gnostic dissenters from the Johannine community. There is, however, one most important difference between gnostic and Johannine thought. Whilst the EvVer, e.g., only knows of a mythological revealer without real existence, John 17 uses the Gnosticising cosmology and understanding of revelation in relation to a historical figure, Jesus, and uses the gnostic elements to understand the historical event of Jesus' crucifixion. If the connection between the historical figure of Jesus and the heavenly Christ is broken, then the thought becomes gnostic indeed. Here, however, the taking up of this kind of thought is an extremely daring approach to understanding the truth of Jesus Christ more deeply and more fully.

Another important difference between the EvVer and John 17 is that the teaching in EvVer is actually about the human self. 'It is about themselves that they receive instruction, receiving it from the Father, turning again to him.'[527]. The EvVer teaches about the true heavenly origin of the human soul, which has to return there, whereas John 17 is talking about redemption from a radically fallen world. Is must be noted that John 17 is placed within John's Gospel, which knows about the world being divine creation and its fallenness[528]. Jesus is the redeemer who comes into a fallen world in order to bring salvation which is outside the human self and brought about through faith in him rather

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[525] Cf. above, 113ff.

[526] Cf. above, p.159. Cf. also p.113

[527] EvVer 21:5-8.

[528] Cf. above, p.125.

than to bring knowledge about the heavenly origin of the human soul and the way back to this primal state. John 17 is about faith in Jesus as the one who is sent by the Father rather than about knowledge about the true human nature.

Verse 6 takes up again the motif of the Father giving a group out of the world to the Son. The Father, equipping the Son for his task as the messenger, gives him people out of his own property. Again, it is interesting to notice that only those who have held God's word, which is Jesus' proclamation of himself being the Father's messenger, are given to the Son. The rest are ignored and belong somewhere else. The *logos*, the proclamation they have held is explained in v.7: everything Jesus has said and done is from the Father, thus that he is really sent by the Father. Verse 8b.c. makes the same point. The subject of Christian faith, as John 17 understands it, is to recognise that Jesus came from the Father and to believe that he has really been sent. Only Jesus' proclamation, the ῥήματα are mentioned here explicitly. But it is important that Jesus is not only an authoritative teacher, because his teaching is all about himself and his relation to the Father. To accept his words therefore means to accept him as the true messenger. In addition, it must not be forgotten that the whole prayer John 17 is spoken in the hour. Everything which the Father has given to the Son also includes the hour, the hour of Jesus' suffering and death. To lose sight of this connection leads, inevitably, to the gnostic misunderstanding of Johannine Christology. Faith means, for John 17 as well as for the rest of John's Gospel, that Jesus, the teacher who ended his career on the cross and died there, is the Christ, the divine messenger with all ἐξουσία given to him. As this motif is repeated again and again in John 17, it must be a major concern of the author and, probably his community.

(b) Distinguishing of and Reason for the Petition (v.9-11a)

In v.9, the object of the petition is distinguished. Jesus does not pray for the world, but only for those he has been given by the Father, the reason of which is given in the ὅτι-clause: because they are his own. The idea presented here seems to be inconsistent with the rest of the gospel and also with v.2. In v.9, exclusively those belonging to the church seem to belong to the Father, consequently the rest of the world does not belong to him but somewhere else. Yet it cannot be assumed that such a nearly metaphysical dualism is part of Johannine thought. In fact, v.2 as well as the whole development of Johannine theology make this interpretation impossible. Thus, the ὅτι σοί εἰσιν can only refer to the positive relation between God and the church as opposed to the negative relation between him and the world. The church belongs to God and to Christ in the sense of v.2.

It is surprising that a church can pray or a theologian can let Jesus pray only for the church and not for the world, especially in such an eminent position as in the final prayer in John 17. The complete rejection of the world which finds its expression here can only be explained by a dualistic world view. In John 3:16 Jesus' coming into the world is seen as an act of God's love for the world, and here, in John 17, the world is completely rejected and not even worth intercession. This development of thought, like the use of the concept of the ὄνομα[529] and its revelation to the church, suggests an important step toward Gnosticism, and indeed, especially statements as v.9, including the ὅτι σοί εἰσιν-clause, are very close to that thinking which the church will have to rule out as heretical in its struggle against Gnosticism. The Johannine *Struggle for*

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[529] Cf. above, p. 191.

Language has reached a critical stage, and 1 John bears witness to the dangers involved in this kind of language[530].

Verse 10 concludes the sentence and qualifies the ὅτι σοί εἰσιν-clause. Since everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to the Father as well, and vice versa, therefore the special relation between Jesus and the church, which is that they have been given to him by the Father, extends also to the church's relation to the Father. A completely new aspect in Johannine theology is the notion that Jesus is glorified in the church. Becker assumes that Jesus is glorified in the church because it is the visible evidence that he has fulfilled his task[531]. Although this is an important element of Jesus being glorified in the church, v.10b is also to be seen in the light of v.18, the sending of the church into the world to continue Jesus' task. As Jesus proclaimed himself and as in the encounter with his proclamation the κρίσις takes place, the church proclaims Jesus as God's Son and messenger, and so continues Jesus' ministry. Thus in the encounter with the risen Christ through the proclamation of the church the gathering of those who belong to God takes place. In this respect Jesus is present in the church, his glory is perceived and pro-claimed only here, so that he is glorified within and through the church[532].

The prayer continues with the reason why the prayer is so urgent. Jesus is leaving the world and thus the church is left in the world. Yet the church is not part of the world and an alien in it, as Jesus was an alien in the world. While Jesus' ministry ends with his return to the Father, to the place where he belongs, he leaves the church as an alien in the world, as the place where he is glorified and as the successor to his mission. There-fore the church is in a dangerous position, and the prayer for its preservation is urgent. Becker, in his essay *Aufbau, Schichtung und theologiegeschichtliche Stellung des*

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[530] Cf. above, 115.

[531] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*,624. Similar SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium III*, 203.

Gebetes in Johannes 17, argues that the clause κἀγὼ πρὸς σὲ ἔρχομαι is a secondary addition and a doublet to v.13a. Furthermore, he takes the rest of v.11a as an insertion, 'which has borrowed its thought from v.12f, where it really belongs'[533]. Contrary to Becker I suppose that v.11a is important in the context of the second petition. Verse 11a seems to be a bridge between the introduction to the petition in v.9f and the petition itself (v.11b) and constitutes a climax in the description of the background of the petition. V.11a produces an additional tension which is resolved by the petition: the church is founded through Jesus' revelation of the Father's λόγος and ὄνομα (v.6) and it is an alien in a hostile world (v.9, expanded in v.16). This situation of the church in the world is contrasted by the close relation between Father and Son as well as the glorification of the Son in the church. Thus, the church is Jesus' foundation in a hostile world. Thus v.11a introduces the urgent demand for the petition: Jesus is going back where he belongs and leaves the church in the world. A tension is built up between the heavenly foundation of the church in a hostile world and the going away of its founder. Therefore it is urgently necessary to take measures to preserve this alien church in the world. The action Jesus takes is to pray to the Father for the preservation of the church. Without this introduction the petition would stand isolated and would not mean as much as it does in this wider context. The fact that v.11a anticipates several motifs from the following prayer does not make it superfluous here, since it has a distinct meaning in the movement of language in this prayer.

(c) Content of and another Reason for the Petition (v.11b-13)

After this introduction, the petition itself is vital for the church. The church cannot survive in the world on its own, because it is not of the world, and its founder, Jesus Christ, has left it alone. It is remarkable that the church is to be protected in the ὄνομα of the

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[532] Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 383f, and DIETZFELBINGER, "Seminar über Joh 17" 25.

Father rather than through the Paraclete, who has this task in the rest of the Farewell-Discourses (Cf. 14:16+26; 15:26; 16:7+13). I commented on the particularities in the use of the term ὄνομα above[534], but it has to be added that the preservation of the church in the ὄνομα of the Father seems to take over the function of the assistance and preservation through the spirit. Here, an important shift in the language about the preservation of the church takes place. While, in the main body of the gospel and in the Farewell-Discourses, the church saw itself protected and assisted through a divine helper, who inspired them to act as a church and mediated the presence of Christ in the church[535], this task is now fulfilled by the possession of the ὄνομα. This does not exclude divine guidance, but this does not happen through inspiration anymore, but through knowledge of the divine nature, which is oneness. The more dynamic concept of the inspiration through the Paraclete has been replaced by the static concept of the possession of the ὄνομα[536].

Verse 12 reflects further on the subject of preservation in the Father's name. Because Jesus is not physically present amongst his own anymore, he cannot preserve them in the Father's ὄνομα as he did while he was amongst them. The church has to be guarded against leaving the communion with the Father and the Son in the Father's ὄνομα, hence against their becoming a part of the world again. The fear, against which this petition is a reaction, is not the fear of persecution or failure in the church's mission, but that of not living according to the ὄνομα anymore, that of becoming worldly again. The

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[533] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 75. Interestingly, he does not mention this complex in his commentary.

[534] Cf. above, p. 191.

[535] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 625.

[536] It is not clear whether John 17 rejects the concept of the Paraclete completely or whether it proposes to supplement this concept with that of the ὄνομα. It has to be observed, however, that the activity of the Spirit does not find room in c.17, for its place is occupied by the ὄνομα. For the implication cf. my remarks on the revelation of the ὄνομα (above, p.191) and salvation as State of Joy (below, p.199).

focus of this petition is, like that of the whole prayer, directed inward; the global perspective which is to be found in the main body of the gospel and the Farewell-Discourses has been lost. Certainly, through the insertion of c.17 into the gospel, the connection to the more outward-looking language of the main body of John's Gospel has been made, but this is not a question for the Johannine community anymore. The community is mainly concerned with what is happening inside, it is not afraid of the world as a persecutor anymore, but it sees it as an ensnaring and seductive power, which may lead the church astray, so that it becomes like it and thus ceases to be the church.

Another important difference to the rest of John's Gospel is that, after Jesus' departure, the church is alone in the world and needs to be protected by the Father because the Son is not present anymore. Apparently, for the author of John 17 Jesus' mission to the church ends with his departure to the Father, and the Father has to care for the orphaned church, while, in the main body of the gospel, the glorification of Christ is the coincidence of Easter, Pentecost and Parousia, through which Christ is eternally present in and for his church[537]. In the final Prayer, Jesus' task seems to be to reveal his oneness with the Father and to draw the church into it. After he has fulfilled his task, the church is commissioned to continue this task and gains the necessary protection from the Father. The focal point of thought has shifted from Christology to the doctrine of God[538]. The result of Jesus' departure to the Father is, that the church lives in the perfect joy (χαρά) of being part of the oneness between the Father and the Son (v.13). This joy is given to them by the revelation Jesus gives to them, it is now part of the church's being and it has to be maintained in this state of joy. To have joy apparently means to be the final state of salvation, in which the church has to be maintained. This type of language

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[537] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 625.

[538] Ibid.

is paralleled by the concept of rest in the EvVer[539], where the aim of revelation is to give rest to its recipients. Through the revelation of the divine name the recipient receives gnosis and rest. In turn, being in the state of rest is having gnosis and thus salvation[540]. Again, John 17 has developed a language very similar to that of gnostic writings, although it is definitely Christian and not Gnostic. The author of John 17 uses this language in order to describe what Christ means to him and his community in their particular surrounding, and the possibilities of this language for expressing Christian faith are explored.

Verse 12b is to be seen as a redactional insertion[541]. As Barrett and Brown point out, the expression ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας is a Semitism[542] and a *hapax legomenon* in the Johannine writings[543]. Whilst Barrett does not have any problems to see this singular Semitic expression as a part of the original composition of the prayer, Brown argues that it does not fit into the language of the prayer for this very reason. In addition, the whole of v.12b does disturb the order and outline of the prayer. As Becker points out[544], it explains something to the reader rather than being part of the reason for the petition. Becker continues that the καὶ ἐφύλαξα is a superfluous double-expression to ἐτήρουν. There is no other expression of one point through two synonymous verbs in John 17. Also there is no other allusion to a perspective of salvation history in this

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[539] Cf. UNTERGASSMAIR: *Im Namen Jesu*, 270-275. The German term '*Ruhe*' can be translated with 'calmness' as well as with 'peace', 'rest' and 'quietness'. The English translation of the EvVer uses 'rest' (Cf. EvVer 42, ROBINSON, *The Nag-Hammadi Library*, p.51).

[540] Ibid.

[541] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 73f; BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 616; SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium III*, 207, BROWN, *John 2*, 760.

[542] Cf. BROWN, *John 2*, 760, BARRETT, *John*, 508f.

[543] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 74.

[544] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 73f.

prayer, as it is expressed in the ἵνα ἡ γραφὴ πληρωθῇ[545]. Thus there is much evidence that 12b is a later insertion, trying to deal with the problem of Judas, the one who has been lost although Jesus of John 17 says that he has preserved his church during his earthly ministry. It is not impossible that this insertion reflects the problem of people leaving or betraying the church, which must be a significant theological problem for a community which sees itself in such a close relation to God as the Johannine does. Possibly, the division of the Johannine church, which is subject of 1 John, is already at the horizon here.

(3) Prayer for Sanctification (17:14-19)

Verse 14 continues the motif of the giving of the word from v.6-8. The church has been given the divine word, and therefore is not of the world anymore. Since, not being of the world but embodying the word and mission of Christ, the church is a challenge to the world, as Jesus was a challenge, the world must hate it. As the church has been described as left orphaned in the world in the previous petition, it is addressed as threatened by the world. The consequence of being hated and threatened by the world, and belonging elsewhere than in the world, would be to go away or to be taken away to the place where the church belongs, which is in unity with the Father and the Son outside the world. But this possibility is explicitly rejected. The church has to stay in the world, although it sees itself as a stranger here, and continue the mission of Jesus and bear witness to the unity of the Son with the Father and to the Son's truly being sent by the Father. What the church therefore needs is protection within the world. Next, Jesus asks for protection against the evil or the evil one. As Becker points out, although the genitive τοῦ πονηροῦ can be understood as a neuter, it is likely that it is grammatically mas-

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[545] Ibid.

culine and thus means the devil[546]. In the context of John 17, the devil cannot be a mythological figure, but it must be the metaphorical personification of evil, and a breaking away from the truth in particular. The church is not to be protected against the hatred of the world, but from falling into perdition because of the world's hatred. God is asked to preserve those he has chosen and given to the Son, so that they do not break away from the truth in face of the world[547]. This general understanding of the church within the world is repeated in v.16, which is a quotation of v.14b. It could be a secondary insertion as a doublet to v.14b, but it could also be that 14b and 16 form an inclusion around v.15 in order to underline the relevance of the rejection of taking the church out of the world but let it stay in the world but protected from the evil.

The petition itself follows in v.17. It explains also what the protection of the church from the evil means: holiness. Ἁγιάζω can mean 'to sanctify' as well as 'to consecrate' and 'to purify'. It is closely linked with v.19, where Jesus states that he sanctifies/consecrates himself so that the church will be sanctified/consecrated. In the context of this petition, this term must mean separation from the world, belonging to God rather than to the world. It is connected with being in the truth, because the sanctification/consecration takes place in the truth (v.17), which is God's word. Therefore, being holy is living in the word rather than in the world, and the cause for holiness is Jesus' departure from the world and return to the Father. As Jesus is speaking in the context of the hour, which is given in v.1b, the ἁγιάζειν of Jesus can only refer to his following Passion and return to the Father[548]. Through his departure, which is, at the same time, his sanctification/consecration, the church will be founded, because it causes the church to be holy, i.e. to be out of the world, separated from it and to be one with the Father

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[546] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 625f. Cf. Also BROWN, *John* 2, 761.

[547] Ibid.

[548] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 626-628.

and the Son. Therefore, the petition aims at the church being maintained in its state of otherworldliness, in its opposition to the world and being hated by the world, yet living in a state of divine joy.

In this state of holiness, the church continues Jesus' mission (v.18). As the Son has been sent by the Father, so the church is sent by the Son. Thus it bears witness to the unity of the Father and the Son and to its own unity with the Father and the Son. As Jesus drew those people to himself who have been given to him by the Father and, by means of the divine *logos*, enabled them to live out of the world in a state of joy and oneness, the church is now the divine messenger. It constitutes a scandal to the world, which must reject it. Only those, who have been given to Christ by the Father, will listen to the church proclaiming the unity of the Father and the Son and the sonship of Jesus, and accept the church's word, which is the same as the word of Jesus. It is important to recognise here that the church is not sent to the world, but exists only to continue Jesus' mission, which is to gather those belonging to him and give them the ὄνομα of the Father, so that they can participate in the communion with God and the state of joy[549]. In the same way the coming of Jesus Christ into the world has a different significance in John 17 than in the rest of the gospel[550]. The mission of the church means something different in the final prayer than in the rest of the gospel. In the Johannine writing earlier than John 17, the Christian mission is to make possible faith to the world through its proclamation. As Jesus has come into the world to proclaim the κρίσις to the whole world and make it event, so that the decision of belief and unbelief takes place. The theological thrust of the main body of the gospel is, as Becker has shown, positive toward mission[551]. John 17, on the other hand, does not have such a positive concept of

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[549] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 79f.

[550] Cf. above, p.188.

[551] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 216-221.

mission. The church appears to be more closed up in itself, the world is not the totality of humanity anymore, which is to be addressed, so that the κρίσις takes place. Rather, the world is just the crowd, from which the elect have to be gathered. The emphasis in the concept of mission has significantly changed toward a more dualistic perception of the world. Or, in other words, the world is only the place where the gathering of the elect happens and is not the object of divine love[552].

Although I have emphasised the differences between John 17 and the rest of John's Gospel, it must not be forgotten that John 17 is a part of John's Gospel and has been inserted into it purposefully. Therefore, it does not contradict the gospel, but it sets a different accent. The earlier traditions and approaches in John's Gospel are viewed positively by the author of John 17. Through the further development of Johannine thought, which led the Johannine community a direction dangerously close to Gnosticism, many aspects of Johannine theology are seen differently. Nevertheless, these new viewpoints are all a legitimate part of the Johannine tradition. Therefore, they can be inserted into John's Gospel, and produce a tension between the different approaches. The placing of John 17 within John's Gospel produces a tension within the gospel, a tension which shows that Christian proclamation and theology is not anything static, but a dynamic development, a *viva vox*, which speaks anew to each generation and is challenged by previous ways of speaking. No generation of Christians can see itself and its theology as absolute and binding for previous and later generations, but as a particular attempt, on the grounds of its tradition, to understand the Christian Gospel for its own context and thus as part of the *Struggle for Language*, which continues throughout

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[552] Cf. EvVer 21f (ROBINSON, *The Nag-Hammadi Library*, 42) Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 627, who implicitly argues against SCHOTTROFF, Luise; *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt: Beobachtungen zum gnostischen Dualismus und seiner Bedeutung für Paulus und das Johannesevangelium*, WMANT 37,

Christian history. The theologian has to cope with the tension of the different approaches towards Christianity, be challenged by it and define his or her own position without merely repeating what earlier generation have said, but to struggle for a language through which to express the Christian truth in his or her own world and context.

'What you have inherited from your fathers, acquire it to own it!'[553]

(4) Prayer for Unity and Perfection (17:20-end)

The final prayer continues with the fourth and last petition, that for the unity and perfection of the church. The subject of the unity of the church through the generations (v.20f) connects very well with my previous reflections. Nevertheless, I suppose that something different is envisaged here. The first four verses of the fourth petition (vv.20-23) deal with the unity of the church, both with the horizontal and the vertical unity, i.e. the unity of the church within one generation and through the generations. These verses are structured in complex parallelisms. Vv.20f and 22f consist of each one sentence, which is divided into a main clause and three ἵνα-clauses. The first ἵνα-clauses is expanded by a comparative καθώς-clause, the final one is supplemented by complementary ὅτι-clauses[554]. The structure becomes more clear through a synopsis of the two sentences[555]:

Neukirchen-Vluyn (Neukirchener Verlag) 1970, 283. Cf. also KÄSEMANN, Ernst; *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) ⁴1980, 135.

[553] GOETHE, Faust, 1. Scene: Night, v.682f.

[554] Cf. APPOLD, Mark L.; *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 2/1, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) 1976, 157.

[555] Ibid.

| 20f.: | 22f.: |

20f.:   22f.:

Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ   Κἀγὼ τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι
   τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ,   δέδωκα αὐτοῖς,
ἵνα πάντες ἓν ὦσιν,   ἵνα ὦσιν ἓν
καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί,   καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἕν· ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί,
ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν,   ἵνα ὦσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἕν,
ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ   ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος
ὅτι σύ με ἀπέσταιλας.   ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς
                                            καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας.

This elaborate parallelism makes v.20f unlikely to be a later, redactional insertion. Becker assumes that the parallel structure of these two sentences is best explained by viewing v.20f as a doublet to 22f[556]. In my opinion, the very complex structure of a *parallelismus membrorum*, enlarged by paralleling not two short sentences, but enlarging the format into paralleling entire structures of thought[557] points at a very careful composition. This is definitely not the case with other redactional insertions into John 17. Even Becker has to acknowledge that there is no other doublet to be found in John's Gospel which shows such a careful and elaborate composition[558]. It is therefore more likely that v.20-23 is an elaborate composition of the author of c.17. In addition, Becker points out that the proclamation of the church is called *logos* nowhere else in John's Gospel[559]. This unique use of *logos* for the church's proclamation has to be seen in the light of v.18. Since the church continues Jesus' mission, it is, through the thought of v.18, possible to identify the church's proclamation with that of Jesus; it is essentially the same. Therefore v.18 introduces an extraordinary thought, which is carried out in

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[556] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 617 and "Aufbau" 74f. Cf. Also SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium III*, 214-216.

[557] Cf. APPOLD; *Oneness*, 158.

[558] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 617 and "Aufbau" 74f.

[559] Ibid.

v.20f. The same applies to Becker's third argument, that nowhere else in John 17 the second generation of disciples, those that come to faith, or better, are gathered, by the proclamation of Jesus' direct disciples, are addressed[560]. In fact, already in v.18 the coming to faith through the church's proclamation is envisaged, and v.20f carry out this motif. The aspect of unity of the church is addressed regarding the whole church, those that are present in the fictional setting of John 17 as well as those who will be part of the church. True unity is horizontal and vertical, so v.20f is necessary. Thus, the unity, of which v.22f speak, is the unity of all Christians of one generation and that of the church through the generations, from the first disciples to the Johannine community, to the church of the late twentieth century, of which we are a part, and, finally, of the church of all generations to come. This is the universal perspective in which the language of unity in John 17 is meant to be seen.

Jesus asks for the unity of the church, of the present and of the future church. The unity is not just the being-together and accepting-each-other of the church, but has a metaphysical quality. Unity, or better, as Appold translates, oneness, is caused by the δόξα, which the Father has given to the Son and the Son, in turn, has given to the church. Oneness of the church means to participate in the oneness of the Father and the Son, and this is perfection. Both sentences, 20f and 22f address the main aspects of the proclamation within John 17: oneness of the Son with the Father and believing or understanding that the Son is truly sent by the Father. Therefore, to believe and to have understood that the Son is sent by the Father means to be one in and with Father and Son, which is a oneness beyond loving communion, being metaphysical rather than sociological, it is the state of salvation rather than the loving communion of the church (cf. 13:34f).

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[560] Cf. BECKER, "Aufbau" 74f.

Appold points out the gnostic parallels to this concept of oneness[561]. He sums up his

findings through an assessment of gnostic literature:

> 'In the Gnostic context, however, the language of oneness receives its fullest
> and most specific function as the basic structural element intrinsic to a cos-
> mological and soteriological interpretation of man and the world. Here one-
> ness is explicated not as an abstract principle or in terms of personal trans-
> formation but as a soteriological state of being in separation from the world
> and in awareness of a given identity with the transcendent world.'[562]

This view of oneness in gnostic literature is, in fact, extremely close to the concept of

oneness in John 17. In both cases salvation is a state of being, which can be expressed

through the language of oneness[563]. This is paralleled by the concept of χαρά in v.13[564],

which is also seen as a soteriological state of the believer, in which to be is the aim of

salvation. We have seen in the discussion of v.13, that this concept of soteriological joy

is close to the gnostic concept of calmness[565]. Through these parallels we can see the

soteriological concept of John 17. Through having come to believe and having under-

stood that Jesus is truly sent by the Father, and that the Father and the Son are one,

which is only possible to those given to the Son by the Father, the believer reaches a

state of salvation, which can be expressed through the language of oneness or that of

joy. Thus, there is an important shift in the concept of salvation and the perception of

the being of the believer. In the main body of the gospel, the κρίσις is the main ele-

ment of the ministry of Jesus, and having faith in him, as the one who is lifted up at the

cross (3:14f), leads to salvation and true faith in God (cf.12:44f). This faith is possible

through the work of the Holy Spirit (3:6-8), which opens a loving communion between

God and the believer (cf. 14:21) and within the church (cf. 13:34f). The Spirit also

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[561] Cf. APPOLD; *Oneness*, 166-174, 189-193.

[562] APPOLD; *Oneness*, 174.

[563] Cf. EvVer 24f+29 (ROBINSON, *The Nag-Hammadi Library*, 43f, 45).

[564] Cf. above, p.199.

[565] Ibid.

teaches the church (16:13) and is the agent of Christ's glorification (16:14). All these elements are not excluded by the thought of John 17, but the stress is completely different. John 17 sees Jesus as the one who gathers his own by proclaiming that he is truly sent by the Father and that the Father and he are one. Believing and having understood this, the believer is in the state of salvation and in metaphysical communion which is a very different concept from that of the believer not being judged, but loved by God and guided by the Spirit. This is an important further development of the gnostic elements which we have found in the discussion of the Nicodemus-Discourse. The other elements of Johannine theology are left in the background and are not further developed, but they make space for the full development of the gnostic elements in Johannine theology.

How is the gnostic development of Johannine theology to be understood? Certainly, there was no such thing as a homogenous gnostic movement, but there is a certain way of thinking which can be found in different appearances[566]. This way of thinking had not been fully developed at the time when John's Gospel was written. Yet the different gnostic traditions were evolving, and the main elements and concepts of gnostic thought developed. In the same way, Christianity was not a unified movement at that time. The church as a defined group and discipline came about only after the gnostic crisis of the church. Before that there were many cross-links between Gnosticising and Christian thought[567]. Partly, both movements developed in a parallel way and took up elements from each other. In order to understand Christianity in their own context, the Johannine 'theologians' took up elements from the developing gnosis and interpreted their faith in these terms. That Johannine thought, as it is expressed in John 17, is still distinctly Christian has, I hope, become obvious in my investigations. Through the acceptance of

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[566] Cf. above, p.113ff.

earlier Johannine tradition and the linking of the final Prayer with the Passion of Christ by setting it in the hour, John 17 can clearly be identified as interpreting Jesus' cross and resurrection and as struggling for a language to understand it, although it is pushing forward the boundaries in Christian thought and finds a radical solution to the Christian *Struggle for Language.*

In v.21+23, it is said the church is to be one like the Father and the Son, so the world may believe (v.21) and understand (v.23) that Jesus is sent by the Father. This can mean either that the author of John 17 is trying to gain a universal perspective of Jesus' and the church's mission again, or that the world may be just the place where this displaying of the evidence that the Son is sent by the Father takes place. Are these clauses to be interpreted in the light of v.2 and v.9, or do they create a tension with the impetus of the rest of the prayer? Schnackenburg notes that it is hardly possible to harmonise the statements about the world in v.21+23 with the view of the world expressed in the rest of the prayer[568]. He assumes that in v.21+23 the world is seen from a different angle. In the rest of the prayer, the world is seen as the world that rejects Christ and the church, whereas in v.21+23 the Johannine community has not given up the hope for successful mission, despite its distance to the world and its dualistic understanding of the world. I suppose that Käsemann's solution to the problem[569] is acceptable: For Käsemann, the Johannine community has to continue the mission in the world in order to find those who are given to the Son by the Father, those who are elected to believe. But the community cannot know who they are and how many, and therefore the church is sent into the world but not to the world. It aims, however, only at those who belong to Christ, although everybody has to be addressed to find out whether or not he or she actually

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[567] Cf. APPOLD; *Oneness*, 190.

[568] SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium III*, 218.

[569] KÄSEMANN; *Jesu letzter Wille*, 135f.

belongs to Christ. Thus, the community has to show to the world that it is one, so that those that can understand, but are scattered all over the world, may see and join the church in its joy and oneness with the Father and the Son.

The prayer is concluded with the final section v.24-26. That the prayer comes to its conclusion is indicated by the invocation 'Father' at the beginning of v.24. Here we find the fourth petition itself, expressed not through an imperative like the previous three, but through the phrase θέλω ἵνα, which is, as Bultmann puts it, an 'extremely bold expression'[570]. Jesus is demanding from the Father, he is openly speaking as the glorified, the fictional setting of the prayer is left behind. Jesus already talks in the authority of his divine glory[571]. Most interpreters see the petition of v.24 as referring to the union with Christ after the physical death of the believer[572]. After the previous considerations about the view of faith and unity with Christ the author of John 17 presents, it seems not to be likely that the postmortal destiny of the believer is envisaged here. According to John 17, the believers are already in a state of salvation, they are one with the Father and the Son and in a state of joy. In these expressions, it is implied that the believer already sees the divine glory of Christ. Thus, a part of the state of salvation, of oneness and joy, is to see the glory, which, in turn, includes oneness and joy. So the seeing of the divine glory in oneness with God is the state in which the church finds itself already in this life. It is an expression of its not being from the world but belonging to the divine realm. The mystical oneness or union with the Father and the Son leads to seeing the glory, which leads to joy. Finally, the interaction with gnostic thought has led Johannine theology into a kind of mysticism, where salvation consists of oneness with the divine (20-23),

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[570] BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 397, fn.5.

[571] Cf. above, p.184.

[572] Cf. BECKER, *Johannesevangelium*, 630, BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 397-399, SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium III*, 222f.

seeing divine glory (v.24) and having part in it (v.22) and living in a state of supernatural joy or, to use the parallel term, rest[573]. Yet it must not be forgotten, that the theology of John 17 is still distinctly Christian. The oneness with God can only be achieved through faith in the Son, only through believing that Jesus is truly sent by the Father, and that his death on the cross is a part of his mission, for the author of John 17 it is the fulfilment of the mission and return to the Father. The glory which the church sees, is, in fact, a particularly christological glory, it is that of Jesus Christ, which has been given to him by the Father, before the creation of the world as an expression of his love. It must not be forgotten that this Jesus Christ is saying this prayer in the hour, facing his passion.

The last sentence (v.25f) starts again with an invocation of the Father, this time addressing him as righteous Father. Here, the epistemology of John 17 is described. Not the holy Spirit or Paraclete makes the church understand Christ and the Father; rather it is Jesus' revelatory ministry and task as the messenger. The world cannot understand or get to know God; this is, before the background of Hellenistic religious thought, not surprising. God is entirely transcendent and inaccessible to human minds. This is, in my opinion, one of the presuppositions of the whole Gospel, which can first be observed in the prologue, where the Philonic *logos*-concept is introduced, which bridges God's transcendence and the immanence of world and humanity. For the author of John 17, and presumably also the community in which he was writing, Jesus has understood God, he knows God, and he is sent to make him known to the church. The church is the church because it recognises and believes that Jesus is the messenger, that what he reveals about God is true. Through Jesus' revelation the church has been given God's ὄνομα. In V.26 a parallel structure between these two elements, the aorist ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου and the future γνωρίσω, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ᾖ κἀγὼ ἐν

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[573] Cf. above, p.200, fn.539.

αὐτοῖς, can be observed. Through this parallelism Jesus says that the name he has given the disciples is, as they will see in the passion of Christ, that they are included in the love with which the Father loved the Son from the beginning. Through their union with Christ they are loved by God, through Christ's passion they, and the whole church through all generations with them, are the object of God's love. Humanity cannot achieve this love by any means. It is a free gift which God gives to those who do not deserve it. And so the author of John 17 arrives at the focal point of all Johannine theology: God is love.

3. Conclusion

Through the analysis of John 17, I have shown how the author took up the language which is traditional in the Johannine community, combined it with language he could take from his environment in order to express the Christian *kerygma* for the particular situation of the Johannine church at the end of the first century. The approach he took is, without doubt, extremely daring. The author takes up many elements from an inceptive Gnosticism and combines them with Johannine thought, so achieving a new understanding of what Christ means for the church in its particular historical and spiritual environment. In doing so, he makes the Christian *kerygma* relevant for his fellow-Christians in their world. He does not change the essence of the Christian proclamation, but translates the *kerygma* in order to make it heard and understood by his contemporaries. He gains the legitimacy for this theological work from the presence of the Spirit, who interprets and mediates the word of God to the church[574].

The author is, however, not only writing to his community. His language is comprehensible to the whole church, as it has been proven by the 'canonisation' of John's Gospel

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[574] Cf. above, p.185, fn.503.

including John 17[575]. What he offers to the church is a view of the Gospel, shaped by the particular environment and circumstances in which he wrote. In his situation he developed a particular language to understand the Gospel for himself and his community, a language which eventually was accepted by the wider church as an authentic interpretation of Christianity. Today the interpreter's task is to understand the particularities of this language which grew out of the authors' environment and is an offering to the whole church. Or, as Rudolf Bultmann puts it, 'the main task of exegesis is to identify the ways of talking which are possible for the author within the tradition in which he finds himself.'[576] Another way of talking is not possible for the author, and therefore we have, in order to take him seriously, to accept that he is writing from a certain perspective and envisaging a particular audience. Then, however, we can truly understand this text in its context and appreciate his particular contribution to the Christian *Struggle for Language*. Only then can the particular text help us to find a language by means of which to proclaim the same truth as the author of John 17.

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[575] The final canonisation of John's Gospel indeed shows that its language was acceptable to main stream Christianity. The fact, however, that Gnostics estimated it highly as well shows that it is on the borderline between orthodox Christianity and heresy.

[576]Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannesevangelium*, 6 (own translation).

Epilegomena

In the course of this thesis I have developed a hermeneutic of the New Testament, which takes seriously that the New Testament is both a historical document and the sacred scripture of Christianity. This approach has been developed starting with a discussion of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann's respective presuppositions which led them to their different positions. In the discussion of the Barth-Bultmann debate, usually only the differences on the surface are discussed, so that Barth's approach is described as 'theological' and Bultmann's either as 'existentialist' or even as merely 'technical'. Yet at the bottom of this argument there is a fundamental disagreement about the relation between the transcendent and the immanent with important implications for their distinct hermeneutical approaches. In short, Karl Barth assumes that the text cannot contain the meaning to which it refers; the text can only point at its meaning. Thus the interpreter has to reach to the meaning through the text, in order to arrive at 'the Word behind the words'. Rudolf Bultmann, on the contrary, holds that the text itself can carry the meaning and is thus to be found in the words of the text rather than behind them. Further, we have discussed the epistemological foundations of the existentialist interpretation and have seen that Bultmann's hermeneutical approach does not dissolve theology into anthropology but that it is a possible way of understanding the world non-objectifyingly.

On the grounds of the critical evaluation of both positions, I chose to follow the approach proposed by Rudolf Bultmann, yet only to embark on a critical discussion of his hermeneutics. Although Bultmann's existentialist interpretation provides, in my opinion, an indispensable basis for biblical interpretation, it is necessary to address two main problems of his theology. First, Bultmann does not take seriously that language is the bearer of meaning. Therefore, contrary to his assumptions, it is not possible to find the

kerygma in the New Testament and then reformulate it in another, presumably innocent language, without loss of meaning. Second, Bultmann reduces the subject of theology, and thus the meaning of the *kerygma*, to the isolated human self *coram deo*. He does not consider that humanity is always part of the world, part of creation, so that a perception of the world as fallen and redeemed creation must fall within the perspective of theological hermeneutics as well.

Having considered these points we set out on 'The long Path to Language' in order to find a theory of language which takes seriously the insights of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation and yet solves the two main problems of this approach. In the course of the conversation with the later Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur we arrived at the concept of the *Struggle for Language*, which fulfils these demands. It consists basically of understanding the New Testament as a reflection of the early Christian development of a language of faith. Earliest Christianity, as well as every successive generation of Christians, had to find a language through which the new faith could be understood and communicated. Taking up terms and concepts from other religious languages and transforming their meaning Christianity developed a language of faith. Yet as the earliest church before the gnostic crisis was not a monolithic organisation but a heterogeneous group of churches with hardly any overarching organisation[577], many different approaches towards Christianity developed and led to different writings each having its distinct character. Thus, the different currents within early Christianity led to a plurality of theologies within the canon of the New Testament. Therefore, I agreed with Käsemann's famous statement that the New Testament does not found the unity of the church but a plurality of denominations[578]. It is the interpreter's task to understand the processes through which the authors of the New Testament adopted and

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[577] Cf. above, "Excursus: Johannine Christianity and Gnosis" p.113ff.

transformed elements from other religious languages and so to use them for their understanding of the Christian *euangelion*. Having understood how the early church struggled for a language to understand the Christian faith, it is the interpreter's task to find a language to understand and communicate the truth of Christianity. The interpreter's endeavours to formulate the Christian *kerygma* for his or her own situation and environment must then be based on the interaction with the same movement taking place in the canonical (and non-canonical) writings and with that of the tradition of the church. In order to understand the text, the interpreter must make the subject matter of the text relevant for him- or herself in the framework of his or her environment.

This perception of the task of biblical interpretation crosses the traditional borderline between the different theological disciplines. The study of the New Testament is not a merely descriptive task, but part of the theological process of understanding Christianity and formulating it responsibly in the present context. In order to make the text relevant for the presence, the interpreter has to be part of the debate taking place in contemporary theology, history of doctrine and church-history as well as of the discourse taking place with the neighbouring subjects like philosophy, sociology, history, politics etc. Yet, unfortunately, this is too voluminous a task for one person, so that a practical division between biblical studies and contemporary theology will be unavoidable. Yet the ideal is that there is one process of understanding which embraces the biblical text and the contemporary debate. In this process, the Christian heritage is received through the dialogue with scripture and tradition, translated so that it is a meaningful contribution to the present discourse. Taken seriously, this will make the borders between the theological subjects open to the participation of students of a particular theological discipline in the discourse taking place in other disciplines and subjects.

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[578] KÄSEMANN, Ernst; "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?" 221.

In the second part of the thesis I have applied the hermeneutical insights gained in the first part to selected passages from John's Gospel. Here we have seen that the concept of the *Struggle for Language* is a useful tool to understand the New Testament, in this instance John's Gospel, as sacred scripture as well as a historical document. At the same time we have taken seriously the demand that the literary dimension of the New Testament has to be recognised[579]. Yet not alien literary theories have been applied to the text, but it has been read as ancient literature, the type of literature from which it originates. Taking seriously the antiquity of the New Testament implies that it is necessary to see it within its contemporary context. Therefore, e.g., the usage and meaning of a term in antiquity has to be considered in order to find out the particular way in which the author used the term and so the meaning which it carries. The same applies to the concepts underlying the thoughts which are developed in the text. We can sum up in Bultmann's words: 'The main task of exegesis is to identify the ways of talking which are possible for the author within the tradition in which he finds himself.'[580]

The importance of the exegetical part of this thesis lies not in new exegetical insights into John's Gospel which may be presented here, but in the application of the methodology which follows from the concept of the *Struggle for Language*. It shows how the integrity of the biblical text as a piece of ancient literature can be maintained and, at the same time, the New Testament can be understood as sacred scripture of Christianity. As this thesis is concerned mainly with hermeneutical questions, the guiding principles of the interpretation of the texts from John's Gospel were hermeneutical considerations. Yet the texts can speak in a much wider range of contexts. They way John's Gospel has been approached from a hermeneutical viewpoint in this thesis, it can also be interpreted in the light of any other theological question. Yet it is crucial that there is no

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[579] Cf. above, p. 12.

pretended immediate understanding but to distance the text and alienate it by exploring its horizon and world, and then, in the tension between text and interpreter, let understanding take place. Different biblical texts have different view of every kind of issues. Already within John's Gospel we have seen that some questions are approached in different ways. Hence, in order to understand a theological issue, the student has to interact not only with one biblical text, but with a whole range of different texts. Understanding them within their own context then leads to a theological understanding of the issue. There will always be more than one possible answer, for the New Testament itself is offering a multitude of approaches. Based on the insights which have evolved in interaction with the Bible, however, the interpreter can partake in the discussion of this issue. A struggle of conflicting interpretation cannot be avoided and replaced by any kind of orthodoxy prescribed by a *Church Dogmatic*.

The approach to the New Testament proposed in this thesis has far-reaching implications. If the notion is taken seriously that the authors of the New Testament were struggling to understand the Christian faith through language and the interpreter is to take part in that struggle for language in order to understand Christian faith through the language of the Bible and then formulate it in a way that it is relevant for the present situation, the relation between interpretation and theology must be reconsidered. The task of theology is then to understand Christian faith through language and to formulate in a way that it is relevant in the present situation. The step is made from theological hermeneutics to a hermeneutical theology. This type of theology is not restricted to the church or the theological faculty, but it can take part in the interdisciplinary discourse and in the inter-faith dialogue from a distinctly Christian position. New Testament scholarship, for instance, can enter and profit from a discussion with classicists and historians of antiq-

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[580] Cf. BULTMANN; *Johannesevangelium*, 6 (own translation).

uity, for all these subjects are involved in the study and interpretation of ancient texts. Yet the student of the New Testament is likely to share the faith which finds its expression in the biblical writings. Yet this does not influence directly the methods of exegesis. The theologian involved in systematic or contemporary theology, to present another example, will have to engage in a dialogue with philosophy and social sciences, for he or she will have to respond to questions which are raised in these disciplines and find a way to formulate a position which expresses the same faith as the authors of the New Testament in the contemporary context. In order to do so, the theologian will have to take up terms and concepts from languages of other disciplines but transform them in a way that what they say is distinctly Christian and represents at the same time a contribution to the interdisciplinary discourse. In sum, theology understood as hermeneutical theology can and must participate in the interdisciplinary discourse as a critical participant and partake in the conflict of the different interpretations of the world.

This perception of theology meets the criticism Watson directs against historical-critical scholarship. Watson criticised that theology and biblical scholarship are, as he perceives it, separated and that there is no theological interest in biblical interpretation[581]. Yet as I have already pointed out in the Prolegomena, Watson's solution to this problem is, in my opinion, not satisfying, for it makes theology rule over against exegesis which, as a servant, easily becomes eisegesis. Therefore I prefer the approach proposed in this thesis which fulfils Watson's demands, yet turns around Watson's approach by defining the whole task of theology as hermeneutics and making the hermeneutical question the key-question of theology. This approach takes up Ebeling's demand, made as early as 1950, that the insights of the historical-critical method must be radically applied in the whole

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[581] Cf. WATSON, *Text, Church and World*, 1f.

theological discourse and not only in biblical scholarship[582]. In fact, the recent attempts like Watson's to make dogmatic theology rule biblical interpretation affirm, even forty-seven years after his analysis, Gerhard Ebeling's depressing verdict:

> 'The critical historical method is certainly recognized in principle, except by a few outsiders. But in practice it is widely felt in ecclesiastical and theological circles to be really a tedious nuisance. Its results may perhaps be noted, but then they are left aside after all instead of being worked through. And where the critical historical method is seriously applied today, it remains a matter for the individual historical disciplines, and does not have an effect on theology as a whole, still less on the church-or when there is any visible sign of consequences of such a kind, it is pronounced to be rationalism and liberalism, or even rouses the cry of heresy. The path which theology has to tread in this situation for the church's sake is certainly full of unsolved problem, but there is no doubt as to the direction it must take.'[583]

This thesis is only a first stage on the path onto which Ebeling has led us. It shows, however, that it is possible to take seriously the insights of historical-critical research and understand the New Testament as sacred scripture of Christianity, to accept the integrity of the text as an ancient document and yet read it with theological concern. This path leads theology out of self-inflicted isolation and the ghetto protected by the *Church Dogmatics* into a position from which it can partake in the struggle of the conflicting interpretations of the world and enter the interdisciplinary discourse and ecumenical dialogue as an equal partner.

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[582] Cf. EBELING, Gerhard; "Die Bedeutung der historisch-kritischen Mehode for die protestantische Theologie und Kirche" in: *Wort und Glaube*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) ³1967, 1-49, 46-49 (English: "The Significance of the critical historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism" in: EBELING, Gerhard; *Word and Faith*, London (SCM) 1963, 17 -61, 57-61).

[583] Ibid. 49 (Engl. 61).

III. Abbreviations

CR   Corpus Reformatorum, Halle et.al. 1834ff.

EWNT   BALZ, Horst and SCHNEIDER, Gerhard (ed.); *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, (Kohlhammer) [2]1992.

K&M   BARTSCH, Hans-Werner (ed.); *Kerygma und Mythos. Ein theologisches Gespräch;* 6 vols. with supplements, Hamburg (Reich & Heidrich) 1948ff.

KD   BARTH, Karl; *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols. 13 parts and Register, Zürich (TVZ) 1932-1970.

RGG[3]   GALLING, Kurt et.al. (eds.); *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, Tübingen (Mohr-Siebeck) [3]1957ff.

THAT   JENNI, Ernst, WESTERMANN, Claus; *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Gütersloh (Chr. Kaiser) [4]1993.

ThWNT KITTEL, Gerhard, FRIEDRICH, Gerhard et.al. (ed.); *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer) 1933ff.

WA   LUTHER, Martin; *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar 1883ff.

Periodicals are quoted by the abbreviations used by the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, except one journal that is not included in the instruction for contributors of the *JBL*:

NZSTh *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*

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