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The Fourth Gospel Yesterday and Today:

An Analysis of Two Reformation and Two 20th-Century Commentaries on the Gospel According to St. John

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STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

In this paper a comparative study will be made of the work of four Johannine interpreters who are widely separated both in time and in theological approach: Philipp Melancthon (1497—1560), Luther's irenic associate, rightly designated the "preceptor of Germany";¹ Aegidius Hunnius (1550—1603), an uncompromising representative of early Lutheran confessional orthodoxy;² Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange

(1855—1938), one of the greatest Roman Catholic Biblical scholars of the twentieth century;³ and Charles Kingsley Barrett, an English Methodist, who since 1958 has served as professor of divinity at Durham University, and who is the author of a highly reputed commentary on the Greek text of the Fourth Gospel.⁴ Such an essay

¹ Philipp Melancthon, *Annotationes in Evangelium Ioannis*, in *Corpus Reformatorum*, XIV (1847), 1043—1220. Luther himself was responsible for the publication of this commentary, which originated in the lectures Melancthon delivered at Wittenberg in the winter of 1523. Luther was so pleased with the lectures that he sent them to the printer Nikolaus Gerbel with an accompanying letter which is reproduced in CR, XIV, 1043—1046. In this paper we shall concentrate on this Johannine commentary rather than on the *Enarratio in Evangelium Ioannis* (CR, XV [1848], 1—440), which, though a more detailed work, may well represent the combined labors of Melancthon and Kaspar Cruciger rather than the work of Melancthon alone.

² Aegidius Hunnius, *Commentarius in Evangelium de Iesu Christo, secundum Ioannem, perspicuis annotationibus illustratus* (Francoforti ad Moenum: Iohannes Spies, 1585), [18], 443 leaves. In the preparation of this paper I have been privileged to use the copy of Hunnius' *Commentarius* which once belonged to the great New Testament textual critic C. R. Gregory and which is now in the possession of the University of Chicago Library's Department of Special Collections.

³ Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 8th ed., reprint of the 5th ed. of 1936 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda et Cie, Éditeurs, 1948), cxcix, 559 pp. The growth of a strong Biblical movement in present-day European Roman Catholicism is regarded as stemming in large part from Fr. Lagrange's influence; Jean Levie, in his indispensable treatment of contemporary Roman Catholic Biblical exegesis, writes of Lagrange: "Since the foundation of the Biblical School in Jerusalem, through his own work, through the *Études bibliques* (studies of abiding value, coming one after another since 1902, forty of them by 1958; Paris, Gabalda), through the *Revue biblique*, which was from the start, and now in its sixty-eighth year still remains, the supreme Catholic review devoted to the Bible, he had been the principal master and the greatest benefactor of Catholic exegesis" (*The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men*, trans. S. H. Treman [New York: Kenedy, 1962], p. 128, et passim). M. Zerwick (*Verbum Domini* [Rome], XXXIV [1956], 49, 50) points out the interesting fact that Lagrange's work is the one Roman Catholic commentary specifically cited by C. K. Barrett in his work on the Fourth Gospel.

⁴ Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction, with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: S. P. C. K., 1960 [c. 1958]), xii, 531 pp. Vincent Taylor's high praise of Barrett's commen-

content demands immediate justification and on two counts: first, Why a study of Johannine interpretations? and second, Why the juxtaposition of these particular commentators, in view of their obvious dissimilarities?

The first question is readily answered. For those in the Lutheran tradition, the Fourth Gospel has always held a pre-eminent place. It was Luther's favorite Biblical book,⁵ and whenever he referred to it he did so in the most praiseworthy terms. The following remarks are typical:

John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and Saint Peter's first Epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They should justly be the first books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading make them as familiar as his daily bread. . . . John writes very little about the works of Christ but very much about His preaching, while the other Evangelists write much of His works and little of His preaching; therefore John's Gospel is the one, tender, true chief Gospel, far, far to be preferred

tary is worth quoting: "It may be said at once that Mr. Barrett's work is a very notable achievement. Among British commentaries on John it is without a parallel, and it is worthy to stand side by side with the great works of M.-J. Lagrange (1948) and R. Bultmann (1950)" (*Expository Times*, LXVII [1955—1956], 7). Barrett's work, incidentally, is the first English commentary on the Greek text of John to appear since J. H. Bernard's contribution to the International Critical Commentary series in 1928. Raymond T. Stamm writes of Barrett's work: "The pressing need for an up-to-date critical and theological commentary in English on the Greek text of the Gospel of John has now been met" (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXV [1956], 349).

⁵ Cf. Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 45.

to the other three and placed high above them.⁶

Matthew, together with the other two Evangelists, Mark and Luke, does not point his Gospel so much at the sublime article of Christ as St. John and St. Paul do. They, therefore, speak and exhort much concerning good works, as indeed should be done in Christendom; both should be taught, yet in such a way that each continues in its nature and dignity. First and foremost, faith in Christ should be taught and then also works.⁷

The key position accorded to the Fourth Gospel in Luther's thought provides ample reason to study significant commentaries on that Gospel. Added to this historical consideration one finds in present-day Biblical scholarship a keen revival of interest in John's Gospel. Thus Norman Sykes, in describing "some changes in theological thought since 1900 in respect of the quest of the historical Jesus," wrote in 1960:

During the last half-century much attention has been paid to that [the Fourth] Gospel, and recent scholars are ready to allow to it a more important status in their reconstruction and interpretation of the ministry of Jesus. The opinion has gained ground that this Gospel embodies a tradition of our Lord's ministry which is independent of the Synoptic accounts, that its tradition retains distinct marks of a Palestinian origin, and that in some important respects, notably in its placing the Last Supper on the eve of the Passover, its testimony on historical episodes

⁶ Preface to the New Testament (1522); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883—), *Deutsche Bibel*, VI, 10; freely translated. Hereafter this ed. of Luther's works will be referred to as *WA*.

⁷ *WA*, XXXII, 352, 353 (exposition of Matt. 5:16 in 1532).

is of greater authenticity than the Synoptic tradition. From another standpoint also the application of the methods of Form-Criticism to the Synoptists has lessened the gulf between them and the author of the Fourth Gospel, since the latter is recognized as presenting the ministry and teaching of Jesus in the *Sitz im Leben* of a later and different generation of Gentile Christians from those of the Synoptics. More attention will therefore have to be paid to the distinctive features and witness of the Fourth Gospel in the contemporary quest of the historical Jesus.⁸

Both in terms of Lutheran tradition and of contemporary scholarly interest there is every reason to add to the literature on the history of Johannine exegesis.

But why a combined treatment of such diverse interpreters as Melancthon, Hunnius, Lagrange, and Barrett? The choice of each of them could, of course, be defended on the basis of individual merit and historical significance, and the absence of English translations of the commentaries written by three of the four theologians would in itself provide sufficient ground for a careful analysis of these works; but such justification would still leave the question of combined treatment unanswered. The four commentaries have been chosen for unified study because they represent two different epochs of interpretation and two

different mind sets, and thereby provide an opportunity to cast doubt upon two commonly held generalizations with regard to the history of exegesis.

One of these generalizations is that the unbiased exegete of catholic tastes is preferable to the opinionated exegete bound by Biblicistic and confessional presuppositions.⁹ The other generalization (not entirely unconnected with the first) is that, other things being equal, a Biblical commentator of the modern period (i.e., the post-Astruc period) is preferable to the exegete who lived prior to the advent of documentary criticism.¹⁰ A corollary of this second generalization is the judgment that 17th-century Protestant orthodoxy contributed virtually nothing in a positive

⁹ The older works on Biblical hermeneutics invariably discuss the characteristics of the ideal interpreter, and among these one generally finds such phrases as "a sound, well-balanced mind," "imagination needed, but must be controlled," "sober judgment," "correctness and delicacy of taste" (Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2d ed., reprint [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, n. d.], pp. 151 ff.). Cf. the 1950 selection policy for religious books at the Enoch Pratt Free Library: "The Library . . . attempts to provide authoritative and objective presentations, avoiding inflammatory, extreme, or unfair statements and highly emotional treatments" (*Book Selection Policies and Procedures, Pt. I: Policies* [Baltimore: Enoch Pratt Free Library, 1950 (mimeographed)], pp. 55, 56); for the fallacies in this evaluative criterion of religious literature, see my article, "A Normative Approach to the Acquisition Problem in the Theological Seminary Library," *American Theological Library Association Proceedings*, XVI (1962), 65-95.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Harry Emerson Fosdick's *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), esp. pp. 10, 11. This widely held conviction is briefly treated in my editorial Introduction to *Chytraeus on Sacrifice: A Reformation Treatise in Biblical Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), pp. 26, 28, 29.

⁸ Norman Sykes, *Sixty Years Since: Some Changes in Theological Thought Since 1900 in Respect of the Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Montefiore Memorial Lectures, No. 3 (Southampton: University of Southampton, 1960), p. 16. We shall have more to say later on the question of Gentile vs. Jewish *Sitz im Leben* for the Fourth Gospel, and on the problem of the chronology of the Last Supper in John and in the Synoptics; it should not be assumed that we necessarily agree with the views presented by Sykes.

way to the history of Biblical exegesis.¹¹ Much light can be shed on each of these generalizations by a combined study of the above-mentioned Johannine interpreters, for both generalizations lead us to expect certain things—good and bad—of the four commentaries, and these expectations can be tested through inductive examination of the commentaries themselves.

It has already been noted that the four commentators to be discussed represent two widely different time periods; but of equal significance is the fact that they represent different personality types as well. Melanchthon has been characterized by his most recent American biographer as "the quiet reformer,"¹² and such a characterization seems eminently just. Melanchthon said of himself: "Ego sum tranquilla avis," and "Non sum φιλόνηκος."¹³ Undoubtedly Neve went too far when he referred

to Melanchthon as "the feminine principle of the Reformation,"¹⁴ for, as the recent Melanchthon revival has emphasized, he was "in no sense a weakling."¹⁵ However, unlike Luther, Melanchthon was much concerned with mediation and the reconciliation of opposites; indeed, his tolerance and catholicity may be a factor in the present repristination of interest in him.¹⁶

Of a far different cast of mind was Aegidius Hunnius, the orthodox Lutheran controversialist. What Luther supposedly said of Melanchthon, Hunnius could also have said: "Philip can sting you too, but he does it with needles and pins. . . . I stab you with boar's spears."¹⁷ Hunnius' personality is manifest both in his life and in his writings.¹⁸ His career was largely

¹⁴ J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, I (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), 256.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Pauck, "Luther and Melanchthon," in Vilmos Vajta (ed.), *Luther and Melanchthon in the History and Theology of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 27.

¹⁶ Cf. Walter G. Tillmanns, *The World and Men About Luther* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), p. 106.

¹⁷ *WA (Tischreden)*, I, No. 348 (1532).

¹⁸ For biographical data on Hunnius see, as the basic primary source, Melchior Adam's sketch, based on Hutter's funeral oration for Hunnius: *Vitae Germanorum theologorum* (Haidelbergae: J. Rosa, 1620), pp. 723—731. Cf. also Pierre Bayle, *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, trans. J. P. Bernard et al., VI (London: G. Strahan et al., 1738), 318—322; Friedrich Wilhelm Strieder, *Grundlage zu einer hessischen Gelehrten und Schriftsteller Geschichte* (Cassel: Cramer, 1780—82), VI, 243 ff.; IX, 391; *Philipp's des Grossmütigen hessische Kirchenreformationsordnung*, ed. Karl August Credner (Giessen, 1852), passim; Alexander Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen* (Zürich, 1854—56), I, 529 ff., 568 ff.; and Gustav Frank, *Geschichte der protestanti-*

¹¹ Samuel Terrien writes: "Although the Protestant Reformation spurred in every land an unprecedented interest in the Bible, the dogmatic intolerance of the post-Reformation period was not favorable to the development of Biblical studies" ("History of the Interpretation of the Bible: III. Modern Period," *The Interpreter's Bible*, I [New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952], 127). Frederick W. Danker also dispenses with these exegetes in one paragraph with the comment: "The 17th-century commentaries are notable chiefly for their prolixity and for their curious-like display of what Spurgeon called 'intellectual crockery.' . . . Time which one may be inclined to spend on the works of these men who wrote *currente calamo* will be more wisely invested in the study of the patristic commentators who supplied much of their bulk. A gust of fresh air enters with Matthew Henry. . . ." (*Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1960], p. 257).

¹² Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon, the Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon, 1958).

¹³ *CR*, VI, 474 (epistle to Butzer, Aug. 28, 1544); 880 (epistle to Carlowitz, April 28, 1548).

spent in energetic opposition to Crypto-Calvinists, Flacians, and Romanists. In 1576, at age 26, he obtained a professorship at the University of Marburg and received his doctorate in theology from Tübingen; forthwith he entered upon a vigorous campaign of anti-Calvinist polemic. So successful was he that in 1592 he was invited into Saxony to reform the electorate.

In his position as chief professor of divinity at Wittenberg, minister of the castle church, and member of the Consistory, he so successfully cleared the country of Calvinists that he was invited to Silesia to perform a similar function there. At the end of his life he opposed the Jesuits Gretser and Tanner at the Regensburg colloquy (1601). In Hutter's funeral oration for him such statements as the following are typical:

In what strong as well as frequent contests he was forced to engage in Hesse, as well at Kassel as at Marburg, one moment against secret enemies, and another against open ones, who are called Sacramentarians by the Lutherans; what mighty combats he sustained, on account of that most holy article of the Christian faith, concerning the person of Christ and His adorable majesty sitting at the right hand of God — these things, I say, are known to God, who sees and judges all things, nor are they unknown to many pious and judicious men.¹⁹

The controversial nature of most of his publications is evident from such repre-

sentative titles as:²⁰ *Examen et refutatio assertionum jesuiticarum* Laur. Arturi Fauntei . . . de ordinatione ac vocatione ministrorum in Ecclesiis reformatis (Francoforti ad Moenum: J. Spies, 1591); *Calvinus judaizans* (Witebergae: M. Welac, 1595);²¹ *De indulgentiis et iubilaeo Romani pontificis tractatus, scriptus et oppositus duobus libris* R. Bellarmini Jesuitae (Francofurti: J. Saurius, 1599); *Antipareus, hoc est Invicta refutatio venenati scripti a D. Davide Pareo* (2 vols.; Witebergae: C. Berger, 1603);²² *Articuli Christianae religionis de lege et Evangelio . . . forma quaestionum ac responsionum pertractati, confutatis etiam pontificiorum, antinomorum, calvinianorum aliorumque novatorum erroribus* (Wittebergae: J. J. Porsius, 1606).

Hunnius' two most important and influential doctrinal writings were concerned with the central dogmas of the majesty and omnipresence of Christ as man (*Libelli IV. de persona Christi, ejusque ad dextram Dei*

²⁰ Copies of these works are held either by the British Museum or by the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), and citations have been obtained from the printed catalogs of their departments of printed books. A complete edition of Hunnius' Latin works was prepared by his son-in-law H. Garth(ius), and published in five volumes folio at Wittenberg, 1607—09; it is titled, *Tomus primus {—quintus} Operum Latinorum*.

²¹ Of this work Bayle says: "Calvin was there accused of so many heretical crimes, that he might have been afraid of being treated like Servetus, had he lain at Hunnius's mercy" (VI, 321).

²² David Pareus (1548—1622) was one of the most distinguished Calvinist theologians of the early 17th century; on him, see my *Seventeenth-Century View of European Libraries: Lomeier's "De bibliothecis," Chapter X* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 27, 28, 100, 101, 161.

schen Theologie, I (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1862), 248, 249, 257, 265, 275, 280, 343. The most accessible biographical article in English on Hunnius is that by Johannes Kunze in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, V, 409, 410.

¹⁹ Adam, p. 727.

sedentis divina Majestate [Wittebergae: B. Raab, 1612]), and the absolute authority of the Bible (*Tractatus de sacrosancta majestate, autoritate, fide ac certitudine Sacrae Scripturae* [Francofurti ad Moenum: J. Spies, 1590]). His exegetical labors included not only the commentary on the Fourth Gospel, but also works on Matthew, the Pauline epistles, and I John; and he wrote Biblical dramas (e. g., *Josephus, comoedia sacra*) as well.

To a certain extent the two modern Johannine interpreters to be discussed here parallel the two Reformation commentators. In Father Lagrange one sees an exegete firmly wedded to a powerful confessional tradition. Granted, Lagrange was no controversialist,²³ yet, like Hunnius, he was more frequently motivated by faithful adherence to a doctrinal tradition than by a Melanchthonian desire to reconcile opposites. W. F. Howard wrote of Lagrange and his John commentary:

When a fruitful and very absorbing ministry in South America prevented Père Calmes from bringing out the new edition of his excellent commentary, the duty of writing a new work devolved upon Père M.-J. Lagrange, whose unusual equipment on the linguistic side gives to all his discussions of grammar, especially on questions where a Semitic background is in dispute, an unsurpassed authority. It is unfortunate that the Biblical Commission of May 29, 1907, has prevented a really unbiased discussion of the critical points at issue, for the great learning and

sound judgment of this scholar, who lives in Palestine, would carry weight beyond that of any ecclesiastical committee. But the second sentence in the Introduction reads: "It is no longer a question of knowing if it had as author the Beloved Disciple, John, son of Zebedee. This point is fixed by ecclesiastical tradition."²⁴

It seems that Lagrange, no less than Hunnius, would be subject to modern criticism for representing what Burton and Goodspeed term the "dogmatic method, which assumes that the results of the interpretation of a certain body of literature must conform to the dogmas of an accepted body of doctrine or system of thought."²⁵ Moreover, like Hunnius, Lagrange held a very high view of the inspiration of Scripture, for he accepted without question the Roman position on inspiration and Biblical studies expressed not long after his death in the papal encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943): "What task can be more sublime than to study, interpret, expound to the faithful, and defend against unbelievers the very word of God given to men under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?"²⁶

In C. K. Barrett one finds a modern counterpart to the irenic Melanchthon. It is true that Melanchthon took a far more conservative view of the inspiration and

²⁴ Wilbert Francis Howard, *The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation*, 4th ed., ed. C. K. Barrett (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 88.

²⁵ Ernest DeWitt Burton and Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, "The Study of the New Testament," in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, ed. G. B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 176.

²⁶ Quoted in James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible: A Historical Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1958), p. 169.

²³ For a full bibliography with detailed subject index of M.-J. Lagrange's prolific exegetical writings, see F.-M. Braun, *L'oeuvre du Père Lagrange: Étude et bibliographie* (Fribourg en Suisse: L'Imprimerie St-Paul, 1943). Cf. also *Mémorial Lagrange* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre; J. Gabalda et Cie, Editeurs, 1940), pp. 1—11.

authority of the Bible than Barrett is able to maintain,²⁷ yet in their basic concern to present all sides of an issue they have much in common. Many critics of Barrett's commentary on John have pointed out the *media via* character of his approach. G. D. Kilpatrick writes: "Mr. Barrett's commentary belongs to the same kind as that of Dr. Vincent Taylor [on Mark]. It is a work of reference rather than a vehicle for a particular view or thesis about the Gospel."²⁸ E. Kenneth Lee notes Barrett's "mediating position" in such matters as John's sacramental teaching.²⁹ W. H. Cadman of Mansfield College, Oxford, states that "by the time they are through with it readers of this Commentary who are not new to the serious study of St. John will be reflecting that the author has taken a middle-of-the-road course with the problems which have to be faced in connexion with the Gospel."³⁰ The distinguished Roman Catholic theologian William Grosouw of the University of Nijmegen, author of *Revelation and Redemption, a Sketch of the Theology of St. John*,³¹ argues: "Of the three authors under discussion [Dodd, Barrett, Bultmann] Barrett is

the one who expresses himself in the most cautious terms about the question of the background of St. John, his whole work for that matter being distinguished by a great carefulness. For all its laudability this wariness does not unoften refrain the author from taking sides."³² In his reticence to "take sides," Barrett shows himself to be a kindred spirit with the Quiet Reformer.

On the ground of contemporary *ad hominem* argumentation, it would seem that the more "tolerant" commentators, Barrett and Melancthon, would be preferable to the more "opinionated" commentators, Lagrange and Hunnius. Moreover, on the present-day assumption that, other considerations being equal, modernity is a positive virtue, Barrett would be preferred to Melancthon, and Lagrange to Hunnius. And in light of the severe criticism directed today against the theologians and Biblical commentators of the 17th century, Hunnius would be certain to receive last place in an evaluative arrangement of these four Johannine interpreters. How well do these *ad hominem* evaluations stand up when the four commentators are studied inductively in the light of the Gospel they purport to interpret? That is the question to which we shall address ourselves. But in order to make the required comparison, it is necessary first to set forth briefly our conception of John's Gospel.

THE THRUST OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Rudolf Bultmann, one of the greatest contemporary interpreters of the Fourth Gospel, has raised the vital question, "Is exegesis without presuppositions pos-

²⁷ See, for example, Melancthon's "The Church and the Authority of the Word" (1539), in *Melancthon: Selected Writings*, trans. Charles Leander Hill (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), pp. 130—186. It is noteworthy, however, that Melancthon never stressed the doctrine of Scriptural authority as much as Hunnius did in his *Tractatus de sacrosancta maiestate, autoritate, fide ac certitudine Sacrae Scripturae*.

²⁸ *Theology* [London], LIX (1956), 369.

²⁹ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VIII (1955), 429, 430.

³⁰ *Hibbert Journal*, LIV (1955—1956), 294.

³¹ Trans. and ed. Martin W. Schoenberg (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1955).

³² "Three Books on the Fourth Gospel," *Novum Testamentum*, I (1956), 41.

sible?"³³ His answer is that although exegesis must not presuppose its results, it always presupposes the method of historical-critical research and requires an existential "life-relation" between the Biblical subject matter and the exegete himself. Thus there is a necessary "circularity" involved in all Biblical exegesis,³⁴ and no exegesis can be definitive in an absolute sense.

With certain elements of Bultmann's approach we readily agree: he is correct when he asserts, following Kant, that presuppositionless intellectual endeavor is impossible; and he is likewise correct that no exegesis can be absolutely definitive, for all exegesis involves the communication of a text to the historical situation of the exegete. However, when Bultmann argues that not only historical method³⁵ but also existen-

tial "life-relation" must be presupposed in exegesis, he blurs the aim of objectivity which is essential to all proper literary and historical study. Following Dilthey³⁶ as well as the general stream of philosophical existentialism, Bultmann attempts to "cut under the subject-object distinction";³⁷ he claims that "for historical understanding, the schema of subject and object that has validity for natural science is invalid."³⁸ But in fact the subject-object distinction is of crucial importance in history as well as in natural science, and only by aiming to discover the objective concern of the text (rather than blending it with the subjective concern of the exegete) can successful exegesis take place.

For us then, in analyzing John's Gospel there is only one valid question—not a multiplicity of existentially determined questions—to be put to the text, namely: What is the intended message of the book? Unless this question is objectively posed, exegesis will inevitably presuppose its results, regardless of Bultmann's strictures to the contrary. The "circularity" of exegesis must be broken by the subject-object distinction, or criteria for distinguishing

³³ "Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?" *Theologische Zeitschrift*, XIII (1957), 409—417; published in English trans. in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (New York: Meridian Living Age Books, 1960), pp. 289—296.

³⁴ Bultmann's circularity principle is well set forth and persuasively defended in Armin Henry Limper's thesis, "Hermeneutics and Eschatology: Rudolf Bultmann's Interpretation of John, Chapters 13—17," unpubl. Ph.D. diss. (Chicago, 1960).

³⁵ We readily agree that the canons of historical method must be presupposed in historical investigation, but such presuppositions are properly heuristic and do not limit freedom of inquiry. However, when Bultmann asserts that historical method requires us to "understand the whole historical process as a closed unity" and that "this closedness means that the continuum of historical happenings cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers and that therefore there is no 'miracle' in this sense of the word" (*Existence and Faith*, p. 292), he confuses historical method (empirical method applied to history) with historicism (rationalistic scientism operative in the historical realm).

³⁶ Bultmann's dependence on Dilthey in this respect is evident from Bultmann's essay, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," which appeared originally in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, XLVII (1950), 47—69; published in English trans. in Bultmann's *Essays, Philosophical and Theological*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 234—261.

³⁷ Tillich so describes this basic characteristic of existentialism in his "Existential Philosophy: Its Historical Meaning," first published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, V (January 1944), and republished in Tillich's *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 92.

³⁸ Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, p. 294.

sound from unsound interpretation will forever be rendered impossible.³⁹

A second methodological issue requiring clarification at the outset is the question of literary unity. Here we argue on the basis of Aristotle's dictum that the benefit of the doubt should be given to the work being studied, not arrogated by the interpreter to himself.⁴⁰ In practice this means that we regard as unproven all theories of textual displacement—e. g., the recent theory of MacGregor and Morton⁴¹—which cannot be supported by objective manuscript evidence.⁴² This is not to say that such theories *cannot* be true; we say only that subjective literary speculation and the "scissors and paste" method must not be allowed to substitute for patient exegesis of the text as determined by the objective canons of lower criticism.⁴³

³⁹ I have argued this point with reference to philosophy of history and have criticized Bultmann's approach in detail in my recent book, *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography*, in *History in Christian Perspective*, I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1962), esp. pp. 120—122.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *De arte poetica*, 1460b, 1461b. Cf. my article, "Some Comments on Paul's Use of Genesis in His Epistle to the Romans," *Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin*, IV (April 1961), 4—11.

⁴¹ G. H. C. MacGregor and A. Q. Morton, *The Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961).

⁴² The adulterous woman pericope (7:53—8:11) must be rejected on textual grounds; for a summary of the manuscript evidence see Nestle's text.

⁴³ "I conceive it to be the duty of an interpreter at least to see what can be done with the document as it has come down to us before attempting to improve upon it" (C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], p. 290).

The Johannine authorship problem must be faced by anyone who intends to interpret the Fourth Gospel. In applying the above stated Aristotelian principle of literary criticism to such passages as 19:35 ("he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true") we must agree with William Temple when he asserts in his *Readings in St. John's Gospel*: "I regard as self-condemned any theory about the origin of the Gospel which fails to find a very close connection between it and John the son of Zebedee. The combination of internal and external evidence is overwhelming on this point." How strong this evidence actually is may be seen in a detailed article by Hugo Odeberg which takes into account 20th-century papyrus discoveries.⁴⁴

The important issue is not whether the apostle John was the actual amanuensis of the Gospel that bears his name, but whether the Gospel represents the first-century apostolic witness; we find the affirmative arguments of Odeberg and Temple compelling in this regard. It follows, moreover, that if the Fourth Gospel is a product of the apostolic witness, and if the Synoptic Gospels were written even earlier—within a half-century of the death of our Lord, according to the best evidence—then the exegete should expect to find harmony rather than disharmony between John on the one hand and Matthew, Mark, and Luke on the other. So, for example, when faced with an issue such as the date of the Last Supper, where the Synoptics and John appear to disagree, sympathetic attention should be given to a reconciliation

⁴⁴ Hugo Odeberg, "The Authorship of Saint John's Gospel," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXII (April 1951), 246.

of the kind offered by Jaubert, who, by successfully demonstrating that two calendars (the official lunar and a Jubilees-Qumran) were employed at the time, provides a harmonization which does not do violence to any of the records.⁴⁵

Assuming, then, the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel and its source in the apostolic witness, what is its intended message? Obviously a direct statement of purpose within the book itself would carry maximum weight, and we are provided with such an assertion in 20:31: "ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ."

Here the writer stresses two elements: *belief* and the *object of belief*. He wishes to bring his readers to belief (and thus life), and he has in mind a specific content of belief, namely that Jesus is "the Messiah, viz., the Son of God." We can term these two foci of John's interest the "evangelical-apologetic" and the "testimony."

The former — John's aim to bring readers to belief — is evident in the prologue, where the author employs the λόγος concept familiar to Greeks, to Hellenistic Judaism, and even to Rabbinic Judaism, in an effort to show that all their hopes are fulfilled in the historic Jesus.⁴⁶ Concern for

an apologetic evangel is also seen in John's use of σημεῖα⁴⁷ and dialogues⁴⁸ to induce

ing balanced judgment: "Some critics, approaching it [the Fourth Gospel] from the side of Judaism, have pronounced it the most Jewish of the Gospels, while others, approaching it from the other side, see in it a thoroughly Hellenistic book. Nowhere more evidently than here does early Christianity take its place as the natural leader in new ways of thought, uniting in itself the main tendencies of the time, yet exercising authority over them by virtue of the creative impulse proceeding from its Founder." In spite of recent tendencies to understand the Fourth Gospel in thoroughgoing Jewish terms (Cf. Howard, pp. 158, 159), it is important to note that a "Greek" (i. e., non-Jewish) audience is not entirely removed from the purview of the author (note especially 12:20 ff.: "And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast . . . and they said, Sir, we would see Jesus"). As to the frequently debated question whether the Fourth Gospel was written for "believers" or "unbelievers" (cf. the debate on the reading πιστεύητε vs. πιστεύσῃτε in 20:31 — both of which have excellent manuscript support), two considerations render the argument superfluous: (1) "Believing" in the Fourth Gospel is consistently presented as a continuous, moment-by-moment experience, and therefore witness can be meaningfully directed to believers as well as to unbelievers (cf. the theological aphorism, "No Christian is more than one day old"); (2) As we shall see, the major focus of attention in John's Gospel is on the source and object of belief, not on the one believing or the one about to believe; John is concerned not with the psychology of belief but with its ontology.

⁴⁷ Note, for example, John's apologetic use of the supreme σημεῖον, the Resurrection: "Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign [σημεῖον] shonest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of His body. When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (2:18-22). Cf. also J. H. Bernard's discussion of the "signs,"

⁴⁵ A. Jaubert, *La date de la Cène. Calendrier biblique et liturgie chrétienne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957). Cf. F. F. Bruce's excellent review of this work in the *Journal of Semitic Studies*, III (1958), 219—221.

⁴⁶ See Dodd, pp. 263—285, and my article, "Wisdom as Gift: The Wisdom Concept in Relation to Biblical Messianism," *Interpretation*, XVI (January 1962), 43—57. In his *Authority of the Bible*, rev. ed. (London: Nisbet, 1955), pp. 200, 201, Dodd presents the follow-

belief. E. C. Colwell is thus quite correct when he titles his interpretation, *John Defends the Gospel*.⁴⁹ But the Fourth Gospel is not simply a "Gospel of belief" in the traditional sense of a book which centers attention on the subjective production of faith. More important by far to John than the believer (or unbeliever) is the "ontology of belief," that is to say, the object—and source—of belief, Jesus the Messiah. This is evidenced especially by the prominence in the Gospel of the idea of "witness."⁵⁰

A word count reveals that the verb μαρτυρέω appears in only one verse in Matthew, in only two verses in Luke, and not at all in Mark, but in 33 verses in John; likewise, the noun μαρτυρία is found not at all in Matthew, in only three verses in Mark, and in just one verse in Luke, but in 14 verses in John.⁵¹

The writer of the Fourth Gospel introduces believers and unbelievers alike into the narrative in order to point to Jesus—and on occasion summarily dismisses them

in his *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. A. H. McNeile, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), I, clxxvi, clxxvii.

⁴⁸ A particularly clear example is the dialog with Nicodemus in chap. 3, where Jesus' object is to bring Nicodemus to a "new birth/birth from above" (ἄνωθεν). Vv. 14 ff. (probably representing John's comments on the incident) connect this transcendent birth with a believing relationship to Christ (πιστεύειν εἰς αὐτόν), who will be "lifted up" on the cross for man's salvation.

⁴⁹ Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1936.

⁵⁰ See Bernard, I, xc—xciii.

⁵¹ These word counts are derived from Moulton and Geden's *Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926), pp. 616, 617.

(e.g., Nicodemus) after they have served this function. The witness of unbelievers to Christ is often unconscious by way of double meanings, but it is no less real because of that; especially clear examples of such Johannine irony are provided by Caiaphas (11:49-52) and Pilate (19:19-22).⁵² Thus the thrust of the Fourth Gospel is in the most real sense Christocentric; Luther recognized this when in 1537 he commented as follows on John 14:5, 6:

The evangelist St. John is wont to write and to emphasize that all our doctrine and faith should center in Christ and should cling to this one Person alone, and that we, brushing aside all science and wisdom, should simply know nothing but the crucified Christ, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 1 and 2.⁵³

It is imperative to see, moreover, that the Christ on whom the Fourth Gospel centers attention is conceived *historically*, not just existentially. The Christ is viewed not primarily as a means to existential self-understanding (as Bultmann leads us to believe in his *Kommentar* and in his *Theology of the New Testament*),⁵⁴ but as the Divine in human flesh, whose historical

⁵² I am indebted for these latter two points to Dr. David Granskou of the Department of Theological Cooperation, National Lutheran Council.

⁵³ *WA*, XLV, 489.

⁵⁴ Thus Bultmann existentializes the Johannine concept of "true light" by defining it as "the state of having one's existence illumined, an illumination in and by which a man understands himself, achieves a self-understanding which opens up his 'way' to him, guides all his conduct, and gives him clarity and assurance" (*Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel [London: SCM Press, 1955], II, 18). In actuality the fourth evangelist, at the very outset of his Gospel, defines the "true light" as the "Word made flesh." (1:9-14)

reality provides the only proper focus for existential commitment.

The historicity of the Christ of John is seen particularly in the key verse of the prologue, 1:14 (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο); in the historical detail of the Passion account (Dodd, in approaching the Johannine Passion narrative, writes: "It is as though the evangelist, having sufficiently set forth the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ, turned to the reader and said, 'And now I will tell you what actually happened, and you will see that the facts themselves bear out my interpretation'");⁵⁵ and in the exceedingly great stress placed upon the facticity of Christ's resurrection—both through the preparatory miracle of the raising of Lazarus and through the "doubting Thomas" incident that climaxes the Gospel.⁵⁶ As Dr. Wright well says, John's Gospel "was a Gospel of God—he knew that there was no 'Gospel' at all unless it was God's own Gospel: but it was a Gospel of God incarnate in a real man."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 431, 432.

⁵⁶ "Thomas stops short at the glorious scars, and the book, as originally planned, ends with his adoration and the challenge to all readers to believe. The reader is bound to be left gazing with Thomas" (Barnabas Lindars, "The Fourth Gospel, an Act of Contemplation," *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. L. Cross [London: Mowbray, 1957], p. 35). On the historical significance of this Thomas incident, see my *Shape of the Past*, pp. 173–175. Bultmann greatly weakens the factual thrust of the Johannine resurrection accounts when he warns against "taking the Easter-stories for more than they are able to be: signs and pictures of the Easter faith—or, perhaps still better, confessions of faith in it" (*Theology of the New Testament*, II, 57).

⁵⁷ C. J. Wright, in Major, Manson, and Wright's *Mission and Message of Jesus* (New

THE COMMENTATORS COMPARED

The preceding inductive analysis of the message and approach of the Fourth Gospel will now be employed as a standard of comparison for the four Johannine commentators under discussion. In each case an attempt will be made to see how successfully the given commentator deals with such central hermeneutic issues as the purpose of the Fourth Gospel (with special reference to 20:31 and the prologue), the general function of the σημεία, the interpretation of a key discourse (the Nicodemus incident in chap. 3),⁵⁸ recognition

York: Dutton, 1938), p. 675; Wright's italics. Dodd makes the same point when he thus describes the Johannine theology: "The knowledge of God which is life eternal is mediated by an historical transaction. Only through the 'departure' and 'return' of Christ, that is, through His actual death on the cross and His actual resurrection, is the life He brings liberated for the life of the world." (*Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 423)

It will be noted that in the foregoing analysis of the basic message of John's Gospel we have not dealt with any of the "special" hermeneutic theories such as the allegorical (Loisy), the mystical (Von Hügel), the sacramental-liturgical (Cullmann), etc. This is not to say that we totally reject these emphases, but we believe that where applicable they must be regarded as subordinate and contributory to the central purpose of the Gospel as set forth in the direct and literal statements of its author. With regard to the "realized" vs. "futurist" eschatology issue, we reject Bultmann's argument that the Fourth Gospel is absolutely non-futurist; his claim that 5:28, 29, 6:54, and 12:48 are later additions to the book has no textual basis and actually represents the operation of exegetical presuppositionalism.

⁵⁸ Excellent precedent for the use of the Nicodemus dialogue in comparative exegesis has been provided by Barrett himself who, in his revision of Howard's *Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism* (pp. 243 ff.), examines the treatment of the Nicodemus episode given by Hoskyns, Bultmann, and Dodd.

of unconscious testimony to Christ and of the ironic use of double meanings (11:49-52; 19:19-22), the significance of the Lazarus story (11:1-44), and the treatment of alleged contradictions between the Johannine and Synoptic Passion chronologies.

Melanchthon

For Melanchthon the theme of the Fourth Gospel is the declaration of grace in Jesus Christ over against the old dispensation of Law as represented by Moses. The reformer introduces his commentary with a lengthy section entitled "*Legis et Evangelii differentia*,"⁵⁹ which forms the backdrop for his entire presentation. In his detailed discussion of the Johannine prologue he places particular stress on 1:17 ("The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"),⁶⁰ and the incarnation is viewed from the standpoint of the Law-Gospel distinction. Interestingly enough, Melanchthon makes no comment at all on 20:31.⁶¹

The Johannine "signs" are generally regarded as symbolic of the Gospel-vs.-Law issue. Thus the miracle at Cana (2:1-11) is interpreted allegorically (the six water-pots = the Law; wine = the Gospel; the governor of the feast = the apostles and preachers, who dispense the Word);⁶² and the feeding of the 5,000 (chap. 6) provides an opportunity to distinguish between the manna of the Israelites (i.e., justification by the Law), and the Bread of life (i.e., righteousness provided through Christ's Gospel).⁶³ The Nicodemus dialogue, typ-

ical of the other Johannine dialogues, is regarded from the same standpoint as the signs: Nicodemus represents "the wisdom and righteousness of the flesh" which seeks to be justified before God through the "external works of the Law," while Christ preaches justification through the Gospel of regeneration.⁶⁴ In discussing the raising of Lazarus, Melanchthon cautions against allegorical interpretation,⁶⁵ but then characteristically sees in Christ's admonitions to believe in Him as the Resurrection and the Life an opposition to reliance upon "good works," "human works."⁶⁶

In spite of his preoccupation with the Law-Gospel distinction, however, Melanchthon does not entirely lose sight of the testificatory emphasis of the Fourth Gospel. It is true that he does not catch the unconscious testimony and ironic double meaning in the superscription incident (19:19-22),⁶⁷ but he does see such a witness in Caiaphas' statement that "it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people" (11:49-52); indeed, Melanchthon parallels this testimony with that of Balaam's ass and with God's use of Pharaoh in the Old Testament.⁶⁸

Melanchthon does not of course deny the historicity of the picture of Christ pre-

⁶⁴ Ibid., cols. 1079, 1080.

⁶⁵ "In historia resuscitati Lazari non quaeremus allegoriam, ut Lazari morte repraesentetur animae mors, et hoc genus alia. Sed factum ipsum considerandum est" (ibid., col. 1138). Unhappily, Melanchthon does not restrain himself from employing allegorical method elsewhere in the commentary, and here he does not see the *factum ipsum* of Lazarus' resurrection as a pointer to the *factum ipsum* of Christ's own resurrection.

⁶⁶ Ibid., col. 1139.

⁶⁷ Ibid., cols. 1213—1215.

⁶⁸ Ibid., cols. 1144, 1145.

⁵⁹ CR, XIV, 1047—1049.

⁶⁰ Ibid., cols. 1065, 1066.

⁶¹ Ibid., cols. 1216, 1217.

⁶² Ibid., col. 1078.

⁶³ Ibid., cols. 1099—1103.

sented in the Fourth Gospel, but his main concern is with doctrine rather than history, and thus it is not strange that he nowhere deals with the problem of reconciling the chronology of the Passion narratives—in spite of his willingness to include bits of factual *antiquaria* throughout the commentary.⁶⁹ His commentary becomes especially brief and sketchy when he reaches the Passion narrative, and this contrasts markedly with the detail at the beginning of the work—particularly in his section on the prologue, which, of course, provides much material for doctrinal exegesis.⁷⁰

In summary, then, one finds Melancthon's commentary to be *dogmacentric*—to suffer from an unfortunate tendency to force John's Gospel into the straitjacket of a single doctrinal motif—the proper distinction between Law and Gospel—which, though a sound doctrine per se, and possibly even a minor theme of the fourth evangelist, is unquestionably not the central concern of the Gospel writer.⁷¹

⁶⁹ For example: "*Altera die vidit, etc.* [1:29] *Altera die, i.e. alio die, quia graecismus est, ne urgeat esse sequenti die*" (ibid., col. 1071).

⁷⁰ Of the 169 columns of the commentary, 28 are spent on John 1. This is three and a half times the emphasis one would expect if equal stress were placed on each chapter of the Fourth Gospel. In contrast, only four columns are devoted to John 18 and only two columns each to chaps. 19 and 20; in the case of chap. 18 this is half what one would expect, and in the case of chaps. 19 and 20, it is but one fourth of the expected emphasis.

⁷¹ It was undoubtedly Luther's legitimate preoccupation with the Law-Gospel issue that caused him to look with such favor on Melancthon's commentary. It has also been suggested that Luther appreciated Melancthon's support of his position on free will over against Erasmus (ibid., cols. 1043, 1044). Luther himself saw the doctrine of justification in John's

Hunnius

It is a striking experience to pass from the somewhat flat, static, abbreviated, and doctrinally oriented commentary of Melancthon to the work of Aegidius Hunnius, whom Johann Gerhard called "der trefflichste unter allen neueren Theologen." Hunnius quite obviously reacted to the Gospel of John as J. B. Phillips did to the Pauline epistles: "Again and again the writer felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to 'turn the mains off.'" ⁷²—and this same dynamic reaction is conveyed to the reader of Hunnius' commentary. This characterization of Hunnius' work might seem exaggerated in the light of his use of a *loci communes* method of approach,⁷³ but in actuality his presentation gains in systematic effectiveness through the controlled use of this methodology. As I have pointed out elsewhere, it is manifestly unfair to condemn 17th-century writers for their concern with "system"; every writer employs some kind of system, and problems arise only when a given form is allowed to twist and pervert content.⁷⁴

Gospel (WA, XXXIII, 82—sermon on John 6:37-39 [1531]), but he clearly recognized that the focus of the Gospel was not on doctrine but on the source and object of doctrine, Christ Himself.

⁷² J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (London: Bles, 1947), p. xi.

⁷³ After presenting the general *argumentum* of a chapter, he divides the chapter into two or three major subject units or paragraphs; then he makes general explanatory comments on each unit; finally, he derives specific *loci* from the units. The approach is not greatly dissimilar to that employed in the *Interpreter's Bible*, where historical-philological comments form the background for theological-devotional insights.

⁷⁴ My *Chytraeus on Sacrifice*, loc. cit. It can be argued, in fact, that the concern for system in

In his prefatory section dealing with the *argumentum* of the whole Gospel, Hunnius begins with the title of the book: "the Gospel according to John," and underscores the two elements in it: the Gospel ("the joyous and salutary news of our Savior, the eternal Λόγος and Son of God, manifested in the flesh") and the eyewitness character of the testimony to it, which assures both its "historicity" and the "indubitable veracity of its doctrine." John 20:31 is then quoted, and Hunnius comments: "This Gospel sets forth the One who is the beginning and end of all our salvation, viz., Christ—in the knowledge of whom eternal felicity has its focal point, as Christ Himself said, 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.'"⁷⁵ Thus a thoroughgoing *Christo-centric* tone is set for the entire commentary to follow.

Mention was made earlier of Hunnius' important treatise, *De persona Christi*; indeed, he was "the most able representative of the Swabian theology of Brenz and consequently of the doctrine concerning the majesty and omnipresence of Christ as man."⁷⁶ Not unnaturally, then, one

the 17th century was the epoch's greatest strength and most permanent contribution; see my "Libraries of France at the Ascendancy of Mazarin: Louis Jacob's *Traité des plus belles bibliothèques*," unpubl. Ph.D. diss. (Chicago, 1962), Editorial Introduction.

⁷⁵ "Proponit enim eum, qui omnis salutis nostrae principium & finis est, Christum scilicet, in cuius cognitione cardo aeternae foelicitatis vertitur, dicente ipso Christo: Haec est vita aeterna, ut cognoscant te solum verum Deum, & quem misisti Iesum Christum [17:3]" (Hunnius, *Commentarius* . . . , fol. 3v).

⁷⁶ J. Kunze, "Hunnius, Nicolaus," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* V, 409.

finds a powerful treatment of the Incarnation in his comments on the Johannine prologue. The victorious majesty of the incarnate Word stands forth in spite of the blind ignorance of the world and rejection by His own people.

Hunnius regards the σημεῖα in the Fourth Gospel not as allegorical symbols of doctrinal truth, but as pointers to the Christ. At the conclusion of his discussion of the raising of Lazarus (which, incidentally, Hunnius recognizes as the crucial event that polarizes opposition to Christ and brings about the plan to kill Him),⁷⁷ Hunnius states the "purpose, fruit, and result of Christ's miracles, that by them men may be convicted in their own consciences with regard to faith toward Jesus. Thus the evangelist John testifies in chapter 20 that he has described these signs (among which the resurrection of Lazarus hardly receives last place) in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name."⁷⁸ Indeed, "all the miracles of Christ declare His divinity, inasmuch as He performed them by the power of divinity alone."⁷⁹

Hunnius' interpretation of the Nicodemus dialog is remarkable for its Christocentric emphasis. The verse upon which Hunnius concentrates most is 3:13 ("No

⁷⁷ Hunnius, *Commentarius* . . . , fol. 277r.

⁷⁸ Ibid., fols. 291v, 292r.

⁷⁹ Ibid., fol. 291v; the Latin reads: "Itaque omnia miracula Christi divinitatem eius astruunt, siquidem ex solius divinitatis potentia haec miracula fecit." (On the meaning of *astruo* here, see Baxter and Johnson's *Medieval Latin Word-List* [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], p. 34; and Alexander Souter's *Glossary of Later Latin* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957], p. 8.)

man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"), and he inserts two essays at this point to expand his treatment ("De descensu Filii hominis de coelo"; "De ascensione Filii hominis in coelum").⁸⁰ In this way the stress is placed not on Nicodemus (as representing the law, or as a potential believer, etc.), but on the Christ whose descent from and ascent to heaven provide the only basis for the birth "from above" (ἄνωθεν) which Nicodemus so desperately needs.

That Hunnius is well aware of the basic testificatory character of the fourth evangelist's message is also evidenced in his recognition of the ironic, *Doppeldentigkeit*⁸¹ character of the unconscious, unbelieving witness portrayed in it. Thus with reference to Pilate and the superscription (19:19-22), Hunnius says: "This title, composed by Pilate to dishonor Jesus, was so regulated by the overruling God that it redounded to the highest and everlasting glory of Christ."⁸² On Caiaphas' proposal to kill Jesus (11:49-52), Hunnius writes: "The words of Caiaphas have a double meaning [*duplicem sensum*]. One sense is that of Caiaphas himself, namely that Jesus be put to death for the peace and quiet of the Jewish nation. . . . But the other sense is that which the Holy Spirit intended, namely that Christ alone should die to save the people of the whole world, lest the

entire human race perish in eternal death."⁸³

Hunnus' concern with the historicity of the Johannine account is shown by his efforts to solve the apparent discrepancy between the Synoptic and Johannine chronologies of the Passion week. In commenting on 13:1, he asserts that Jesus and His disciples ate the Last Supper as a Passover meal,⁸⁴ and he reconciles this with 18:28 and 19:31 by stating that the (main) Passover meal (with the lamb) did not take place until after Jesus' crucifixion,⁸⁵ and that the Jews wished to remove the body from the cross "because of the coming high Sabbath, on which they customarily began the Passover celebration."⁸⁶ In other words, Hunnius regards the crucifixion as occurring on Friday, 14 Nisan, and the official Passover as beginning that evening with the onset of the Sabbath (15 Nisan); at the same time he holds that in a genuine sense the Last Supper was a Passover meal.

⁸³ Ibid., fol. 293v. Hunnius makes this point very strongly; see the entire discussion, fols. 293v, 294r.

⁸⁴ Ibid., fols. 320v, 321r. Hunnius writes: "Ante festum, id est, sub [= just before] eam ipsam vesperam, qua & Pascha comedit cum discipulis, & abrogatis veteris Testamenti sacris typicis, Sacramentum novi Testamenti Coenam Domini instituit." On resolving the problem involved in the phrase "before the feast of the Passover," cf. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), pp. 153, 154.

⁸⁵ Ibid., fols. 395v, 396r.

⁸⁶ Ibid., fol. 414r. Strack and Billerbeck note that "if this Sabbath was 15 Nisan, as the Fourth Gospel supposes, then it could be called 'high' since it was simultaneously the first festival day of the Passover" (*Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II [München, 1924], 581).

⁸⁰ Hunnius, *Commentarius* . . . , fols. 63r to 67r.

⁸¹ To be distinguished sharply from *Zweideutigkeit* (ambiguity), as Oscar Cullmann correctly points out.

⁸² "Hic titulus in ignominiam Iesu à Pilato scriptus à Deo gubernante sic temperabatur, aut [sic: ut] ad summam ac sempiternam Christi gloriam vergeret" (ibid., fol. 408r).

This harmonization accords beautifully with Jaubert's recent researches,⁸⁷ and it may even be possible that Hunnius also was thinking in terms of two calendars, since (as we shall see forthwith) he employs analogous reasoning in the "third hour-sixth hour" problem (19:14). Be that as it may, Hunnius' attempt certainly demonstrates a praiseworthy concern for the historicity of the key events in our Lord's earthly ministry; for him (unlike Melancthon) the historical element in the Fourth Gospel could not be subordinated to the doctrinal.

Hunnius attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction between John 19:14 ("about the sixth hour" Jesus is sentenced to be crucified) and Mark 15:25 (He goes to the cross at "the third hour") by arguing that the Jews divided the day both into twelve hours and into four quarters (the latter consisting of the period from dawn to the third hour; the period from the third to the sixth hour; the period from the sixth to the ninth hour; and the period from the ninth hour to sunset) — as is indicated by the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16. Since the whole period from the third to the sixth hour was cus-

tomarily called the third hour, Mark, in speaking of the third hour as the time of the crucifixion, is referring to the quarter of the day between the third and sixth hours. And John informs us precisely that the third hour had almost passed, for he tells us that Jesus was crucified about the sixth hour, i. e., about noon.⁸⁸

This is the same type of harmonization that one finds in the master exegete of the Reformation, John Calvin;⁸⁹ and an analogous method, involving two schemes of time reckoning, has been persuasively argued by the modern Johannine expert Westcott.⁹⁰ Here again, one may not agree

⁸⁸ Hunnius, *Commentarius* . . . , fol. 404v.

⁸⁹ Calvin writes: "This [the alleged contradiction] may be easily explained. It is plain enough from other passages that the day was at that time divided into four parts, as the night also contained four watches; in consequence of which, the Evangelists sometimes allot not more than four hours to each day, and extend each hour to three, and, at the same time, reckon the space of an hour, which was drawing to a close, as belonging to the next part. According to this calculation, John relates that Christ was condemned *about the sixth hour*, because the time of the day was drawing towards *the sixth hour*, or towards the second part of the day. Hence we infer that Christ was crucified at or about *the sixth hour*; for, as the Evangelist afterwards mentions (v. 20), *the place was near to the city*. *The darkness* began between the sixth and ninth hour, and lasted till the ninth hour, at which time Christ died" (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, reprinted, II [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956], 224).

⁹⁰ B. F. Westcott (*The Gospel According to St. John; the Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, reprint ed. [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1954]) reasons on the basis of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* that our present-day mid-night-to-noon, noon-to-midnight hour-reckoning system was in use in Asia Minor when the Fourth Gospel was written, and that John is therefore saying that Pilate sentenced Jesus at about 6 A.M. Consistency is thus established with Mark, who, following the Jewish system,

⁸⁷ Jaubert (op. cit.) effectively argues that the Last Supper was eaten as a Passover meal (but without the lamb) on Tuesday evening, in accord with the Jubilees-Qumran calendar; that the arrest took place that evening; that on Wednesday, 12 Nisan, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin; that on Thursday morning the Sanhedrin, following the Mishnaic rules, promulgated their verdict, and took Jesus to Pilate, who referred Him to Herod Antipas (Thursday afternoon); that on Friday, 14 Nisan, Jesus was returned to Pilate and summarily crucified; and that on Friday afternoon the Passover lambs were sacrificed in the Temple, thus ushering in the official Passover meal that evening (15 Nisan, the Sabbath) for those who followed the lunar calendar.

with the specifics of Hunnius' answer, but respect should be accorded him for perceiving that the historical details of Messiah's earthly life are not unimportant as compared with His "theology"; indeed, as Hunnius well recognized, at the heart of the Johannine theology is the affirmation that the Word became *flesh*.

Lagrange

In many respects Lagrange appears as a Hunnius *redivivus*. It is true that in the last section of the introduction to his commentary he lays great stress on the concept of unity and on the verse so popular today in ecumenical discussion, "that they may be one" (17:22), and he makes the inevitable Romanist connection with the need for a united Christendom under a single papal shepherd.⁹¹ But in practice he tacitly admits that unity is not the fourth evangelist's central theme, for he makes no attempt to relate each event in the Gospel to it.⁹² Moreover, he flatly states that "we do not have to conjecture about the author's purpose; it is written at the end of the book (20:30-31)."⁹³ His comments on these verses evidence his sensitivity to the testificatory and evangelical aims of the Fourth Gospel and to their focus on the Christ Himself:

The author's purpose was not to recount all the signs Jesus did; the σημεῖα are not

states that the crucifixion itself began at 9 A. M. ("the third hour").

⁹¹ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, pp. clxxxiv, clxxxv.

⁹² In point of fact it is difficult to find the unity concept presented explicitly in the Fourth Gospel except in the high-priestly prayer, John 17.

⁹³ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, p. lxx.

miracles which simply astonish or console or lift a burden, but which at the same time point out something; they have been performed before all the people and the Christ has publicly set forth their lesson. If John then says here that the signs have been done before the disciples, the point is that they alone have understood that lesson and are charged with transmitting it to others. . . . The evangelist made a selection, stressing what was most appropriate for engendering and nourishing faith. The present πιστεύετε (N, B, Θ) is much better suited than the aorist πιστεύσθε to indicate progress rather than genesis of faith. John addresses those who already believe, but who need to believe to a greater extent, as has so often been indicated even by the aorist directed to those who were already disciples (cf. 1:50; 2:11, 22; 4:50, 53; 13:19; 14:29). The object of faith is the belief that Jesus is the Christ, that is to say, the Messiah promised by the Scriptures, and that He is at the same time the Son of God, in the particular sense always affirmed by the evangelist, i. e., truly God, as Thomas has just confessed.⁹⁴

One might object to Lagrange's preoccupation with those who are already disciples (cf. his unity theme mentioned above), but he does not fail to see the wider audience of unbelievers and the need for reaching them with the Christian message, viz., the message about Christ.

It will be noted that Lagrange has interpreted the σημεῖα *Christocentrically*;⁹⁵ the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 519.

⁹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 60 (discussion of the miracle at Cana): "In John the σημεῖον is used in its proper sense of sign; it is a miracle supernaturally pointing in a special way to the person of Jesus (c'est un miracle contenant une indication surnaturelle spécialement sur la personne de Jésus)."

same is true of his treatment of the prologue and of such a typical dialogue as the Nicodemus incident. In the contrast between Nicodemus' salutation, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God" (3:2), and Jesus' rebuke, "Art thou the teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?" (3:10), Lagrange sees "incontestablement une pointe d'ironie,"⁹⁶ for Jesus shows Himself to be the only One who can reveal heavenly things.⁹⁷ Moreover, with reference to 3:13, John was "not able to forget the first page of his Gospel. The Son of man is thus the Word incarnate, in the reality of His human nature, which does not prevent Him from still being in heaven as the Word."⁹⁸

As for the prologue itself, Lagrange sees it as "a most solemn preface which sketches in a few words the person of Jesus Christ and the nature of His mission."⁹⁹ The prologue has a "conclusion historique," expressed in 1:16-18. The material relating to John the Baptist must not be viewed as the work of a redactor, as Loisy claims; and Bultmann's conjecture that the entire prologue, except for verses 6-8 and 15

(17), were borrowed from a baptismal text in praise of the Baptist need not be regarded seriously. Actually the Baptist's testimony is integral to the prologue, for "the splendor of the light [i.e., from the Word] produces its effect on John, who reflects back its rays. . . . If one considers the prologue as a poem, the two references to John can figure as antistrophes which allow the thought to reecho."

In the light of the strong testificatory character of Lagrange's general treatment, it is disappointing to find him weak in the recognition of unconscious testimony to Christ in the Fourth Gospel. He fails entirely to grasp the high irony of Pilate's superscription, and instead devotes himself to somewhat irrelevant obiter dicta (e.g., "Palestine still today has three official languages, English, Arabic, and Hebrew"!).¹⁰⁰ He sees the double meaning in Caiaphas' words in 11:49-52, but the powerful witness to Christ is obscured by Lagrange's painstaking discussion of such questionable arguments as whether Caiaphas needed a special anointing of the Spirit to say what he did, and whether Urim and Thummim were involved!¹⁰¹

Here one encounters examples illustrating the chief failing of the commentary: a tendency to lose thematic perspective through preoccupation with antiquarian and philological details. As has been previously noted, Lagrange's detailed mastery of Semitics greatly enhances the value of his commentary; but it is well to see that its strength is not totally unrelated to its weakness.

Lagrange was particularly concerned

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 78. Hunnius is also aware of the relation between 3:2 and 3:10 — see his *Commentarius* . . . , fol. 62r. Unhappily, neither interpreter brings out the full ironic force of the anarthrous διδάσκαλος in 3:2 vs. the articular ὁ διδάσκαλος in 3:10; the AV, it will be noted, completely misses the point by translating the same word "teacher" in 3:2 and "master" in 3:10, and by using the *indefinite* article in the second instance.

⁹⁷ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, p. 80.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 1. Lagrange's frequent emphasis on "la personne de Jésus-Christ" reminds one of the personalistic concern of a number of *avant-garde* contemporary Roman Catholic scholars, particularly in Europe; see my *Chytraeus on Sacrifice*, pp. 120, 121, note 281.

¹⁰⁰ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, p. 490.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 315, 316.

with the facticity of the Johannine narrative. He had no patience with the critical-psychological method of Goguel, which claimed to prove the purely human character of the religion of Jesus but actually presupposed it.¹⁰² Loisy's modernist-allegorical interpretation of the Fourth Gospel comes under heavy criticism throughout Lagrange's commentary.¹⁰³ Renan's criticism of the Johannine discourses, and his famous assertion that "because the Gospels relate miracles they are legends" come under heavy fire in Lagrange's book dealing with Renan's *Life of Jesus*.¹⁰⁴ Lagrange's position on the historicity of the Fourth Gospel has been well summarized by Vénard:

P. Lagrange does not dispute the symbolical character John gives to his accounts, but he insists on their probability. "Solidly fixed on the ground," anchored in a geographical, historical, well-determined chronological framework which can be checked, they are anything but transpositions of an idea under the guise of history. . . . The theologian, then, meaning by this the author of the fourth gospel, has not swallowed up the witness, either in the discourses he records, or in the facts which he relates.¹⁰⁵

It should not be surprising, consequently, that Lagrange defends the historicity of

the Lazarus episode and the possibility of harmonizing the Passion chronologies. He argues the facticity of the raising of Lazarus on the ground that the story is not purely "theological" — for along with the picture of the divine Christ appear the most touching human details (e.g., "Jesus wept," 11:35)¹⁰⁶ — and on the ground that the story has a position of "bold relief" in the structure of the Fourth Gospel.¹⁰⁷ He recognizes that to John the Lazarus event provided the backdrop for Christ's own resurrection, for he suggests that the Synoptic writers, in their regard for catechumens, may have omitted the raising of Lazarus for fear that attention would be distracted from the "great and decisive" miracle of Christ's resurrection.¹⁰⁸

The Passion chronology problems are handled by Lagrange much as Hunnius deals with them. He considers the Fourth Gospel to provide a more precise chronology than the Synoptics, but this does not mean that the Synoptics are in error: John "wished to correct the inexact affirmations which would erroneously have been able to be derived from their text."¹⁰⁹ Thus Lagrange maintains the validity of the 14 Nisan crucifixion and 15 Nisan Passover, but holds that in some genuine sense the Last Supper must have been a Passover meal; "it does not seem to us impossible," he writes, "that a given group celebrated the Passover on the eve of the official

¹⁰² See Lagrange's review of Goguel's *Life of Jesus*, in *Revue biblique*, XLI (1932), 598 to 614.

¹⁰³ Cf. Lagrange, *Monsieur Loisy et le modernisme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1932).

¹⁰⁴ See Lagrange, *Christ and Renan: A Commentary on Ernest Renan's "The Life of Jesus,"* trans. Maisie Ward (New York: Benziger, 1928), p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ Vénard, in *Père Lagrange and the Scriptures*, trans. Richard T. Murphy (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1946), pp. 80, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, p. 312.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 310, 311.

¹⁰⁹ "Il a . . . voulu corriger les affirmations inexactes qu'on aurait pu tirer à tort de leur texte" (*ibid.*, p. cxxvii).

day."¹¹⁰ Considering the fact that Lagrange did not have the benefit of Jaubert's researches, this tentative solution must be regarded with admiration.

In the matter of the "third hour" vs. the "sixth hour" (Mark 15:25 and John 19:14), Lagrange holds that "John wished to designate the time more precisely. He attached a great importance to that moment because it marks the end of Judaism, which condemned itself in condemning Jesus. In this entire passage the pursuit of historical accuracy is too patent for us to settle on a symbolic explanation, e.g., noon as the midpoint of history."¹¹¹

As for Mark, Lagrange writes in his commentary on that book: "He seems to have conceived a time-scheme which skips in three-hour intervals: morning (15:1), the third hour, the sixth hour (15:33), and the ninth hour (15:34). Consequently, there is good reason to take these numbers as approximate and to think that John is nearer to reality. Mark, who makes things move rapidly, could thus speak of the third hour as the time of the crucifixion."¹¹² Again the parallel with Hunnius' harmonization is very close.

Barrett

It has been pointed out earlier that Barrett's commentary is noted for its "cautious," "careful," "mediating," "middle-of-the-road" approach, and that it is regarded as a valuable reference work because of this characteristic. Here we shall look at the other side of the same coin—the dis-

advantages which result from Barrett's "wariness." A. Viard suggests the problem when he asks, "Perhaps Barrett is at times too prudent, too reasonable?"¹¹³ C. Kenneth Sansbury touches the nerve of this issue with the following witty remark: "Sometimes even a Cambridge man may find Mr. Barrett's Cambridge caution a little excessive—there is *something* to be said for the Oxford willingness to take a plunge, if only because it provides another Oxford man with an occasion for writing another book to point out how wrong the plunge was!"¹¹⁴ In a work of reference the "unwillingness to take a plunge" may have real value, but in a commentary attempting to catch the spirit of a Biblical book which, from its opening sentence to its concluding event, takes the greatest plunge of all—by asserting that the divine Word actually became flesh—mediating caution (we might call it *medenaganocentrism*!)¹¹⁵ can do more harm than good.

Barrett's discussion of the purpose of the Fourth Gospel provides a concrete illustration of the weakness of his approach. He begins by quoting 20:31, but then, instead of proceeding directly to its testificatory and evangelical-apologetic foci, centering on the Christ, he offers the following equivocating statement which (perhaps in line with his Methodist orientation) suggests that man's faith rather than the source and object of faith is the major

¹¹³ *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XL (1956), 146.

¹¹⁴ *Church Quarterly Review*, CLVII (1956), 18.

¹¹⁵ Coined from μηδὲν ἄγαν ("nothing too much"), the Greek expression for the Golden Mean.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 471; cf. also pp. 319, 350, 469 f., 497 f., 504.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 487.

¹¹² Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc*, 4th ed. (Paris: Gabalda, 1947), p. 429.

concern of the fourth evangelist. "It is not always observed that this verse, important as it is, raises more questions than it answers, and provides no more than a starting point for a discussion of the purpose of the gospel; for merely to say that John was written in the interests of faith is to say nothing at all, beyond that it is a Christian book, which is hardly in dispute."¹¹⁶ Barrett then goes on to make the amazing assertions: "It would be a mistake to press too far the question of the purpose of the gospel. . . . It is easy, when we read the gospel, to believe that John, though doubtless aware of the necessity of strengthening Christians and converting the heathen, wrote primarily to satisfy himself. His gospel must be written: it was no concern of his whether it was also read."¹¹⁷

In spite of the utility of the material Barrett thereupon supplies with reference to the Johannine problems of eschatology, gnosticism, and authority, it would seem that the quoted statements tell us far more about the commentator himself than about the author of 20:31—a verse which the evangelist certainly regarded as the unequivocal climax rather than a vague "starting point" in his Gospel.

The same lack of decisive Christocentricity is manifested in Barrett's treatment of the prologue, the σημεῖα, and the exemplary Nicodemus dialogue. Instead of seeing the prologue as a witness to God's incarnational victory over the ignorance and unbelief of sinful man, Barrett misses the ironic paradox of apparent, penultimate defeat and ultimate, actual victory which is so characteristic of the Biblical "tragic

vision";¹¹⁸ he describes the Johannine account of incarnation as "a coming which was an almost unmitigated failure. Even those who were most privileged did not believe when they saw the light; though John is careful to note and allow for the few who heard, believed, and received, and so constituted the Church, whose spokesman he was."¹¹⁹

In discussing the Johannine σημεῖα, Barrett correctly notes that "the miracles of this gospel are a function of its Christology"¹²⁰ and that even though the death and resurrection are not so designated in the Gospel, they are "the supreme σημεῖον" and in them alone "sign and its meaning coincide."¹²¹ But he appreciably weakens the Johannine thrust by making the signs relative to faith rather than objective testimonies to the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus: "to those who do believe, the miracles are signs which feed their faith; to those who do not, signs may be multiplied indefinitely without producing faith (12:37)."¹²²

But the doubting Thomas incident at the climax of the Gospel belies this interpretation, for Thomas is compelled by the objective "supreme σημεῖον" of the risen Christ; and even 12:37, taken in context,

¹¹⁸ Cf. Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "Biblical Faith and the Idea of Tragedy," in *The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith*, ed. Nathan Scott (New York: Association Press, 1957), pp. 23 to 55.

¹¹⁹ Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, p. 125.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 64. Cf. Bultmann's assertion that the Johannine miracles "are ambiguous signs whose meaning can only be found in faith" (*Theology of the New Testament*, II, 60).

¹¹⁶ Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, p. 114.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115.

explains unbelief not in terms of a supposedly ambiguous character of the σημεῖα, but as a result of the blinding and hardening action of the sovereign God (12:38-41, concluding with the Christocentric verse: "These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him").

At the outset of his analysis of the Nicodemus incident, Barrett recognizes that as the discourse proceeds Nicodemus "is quickly forgotten"; one expects that this insight will lead to a focusing of attention on Christ Himself, who is the source of the "new birth/birth from above." But such a personalistic Christocentrism does not appear; rather, says Barrett, "we are made to hear not a conversation between two persons but the dialogue of Church and Synagogue."¹²³ It is noteworthy also that Barrett completely misses the irony in the contrast between διδάσκαλος (3:2) and ὁ διδάσκαλος (3:10)¹²⁴—a contrast which especially heightens the distinction between Nicodemus (who should have known the highest spiritual truths but did not) and Jesus, who could reveal the true nature of spiritual life because He alone "came down from heaven." This unawareness of irony, however, does not extend throughout the commentary; Barrett clearly brings out the ironically unconscious testimony of Caiaphas (11:49-52) and of Pilate (19:19-22).¹²⁵ But unhappily he seems to view such irony as no more than a "consummate dramatic touch of the evangelist's";¹²⁶ that much it is, of course, but the central function of the evangelist's

ironic technique is to affirm God's victory in Christ, to which all men must testify, whether they consciously believe in Him or not.

In the matter of the facticity of the Fourth Gospel one finds Barrett at his weakest. It would seem from his assertions on the Johannine conception of authority that Barrett would stanchly maintain the specific accuracy of the apostolic testimony in the Gospel:

[John] 21:24 . . . emphasizes the importance of the testimony of a veracious eyewitness, and adds "we know that his witness is true"—the Church sets its seal upon the veracity of its spokesman. The Church itself is thus the heir of the apostles and of their authority. It is clear that if this statement were left unqualified a door would be left open to a worse anarchy than that of gnosticism; but it is not left unqualified. The Church is the Church—the authoritative, apostolic Church—so far as it rests upon the word of the apostles (17:20).¹²⁷

But in evaluating the ostensive "word of the apostles," Barrett in fact manifests "skepticism and minimism . . . in the question of the historical authority (not general, but particular) of the Fourth Gospel."¹²⁸ Thus Barrett suggests that the Lazarus story may be a "miracle" which developed out of a parable, or a narrative which John drew "from tradition, where of course it may already have been modified."¹²⁹

J. N. Sanders, in his review of Barrett's commentary, very properly questions the

¹²³ Barrett, p. 169.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 171, 176.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 337, 457.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 457; see also p. 454.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 119.

¹²⁸ M. Zerwick, *Verbum Domini* [Rome], XXXIV (1956), 50.

¹²⁹ Barrett, p. 323.

consistency and validity of such an approach:

It is a nice question how far one can go in maintaining both that John asserted the primacy of history and that one cannot place any reliance on his historical details. In the Commentary, as each incident comes up for consideration, Dr. Barrett gives the impression of such hesitancy in affirming anything to be historical that his brave words about John's concern for history in the Introduction ring a little hollow. . . . A general impression of inconclusiveness remains.¹³⁰

Predictably, Barrett gives possible explanations for the "third hour" (Mark 15:25) — "sixth hour" (John 19:14) crucifixion problem, but does not commit himself to a solution.¹³¹ With reference to the date of the Passover in the Synoptics and in John, he flatly asserts: "Here again is a real contradiction; it is impossible to reconcile the dates (for example by the hypothesis that in the time of Jesus two different modes of reckoning the Passover dates were in use); one must be preferred to the other."¹³² Granted, Barrett's work was published prior to Jaubert's, and so he did not have the benefit of the latter's research, but it is noteworthy that Barrett absolutely closes the door to harmonization, rather than giving the benefit of doubt to the evangelists, as Hunnius and Lagrange do.

Barrett prefers the "Marcan chronology," and says of John: "On his dating Jesus

died on the cross at the moment when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple. This may not be good history; but it does seem to be Johannine theology."¹³³ To this assertion, which shows better than any other how little Barrett understands the central message of John, that ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (1:14), D. M. Stanley properly retorts: "It is an essential consequence of the truth of the Incarnation that Christianity is *de natura sua* an historical religion. There can be no 'good theology' which may at the same time be dubbed 'bad history.'"¹³⁴

"DOGMATISM" VS. "IMPARTIALITY" IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The foregoing study of two Reformation and two 20th-century commentaries on the Fourth Gospel has brought us to a surprising conclusion. The high value placed today on impartiality and modernity suggested that the four commentators to be analyzed could be ranged axiologically thus:

1. Barrett — impartial, modern
2. Melancthon — impartial, premodern
3. Lagrange — dogmatic, modern
4. Hunnius — dogmatic, pre-modern

But in fact our detailed investigation of the commentaries leads to a reversal of value judgment and to a reversal of axiological order:

1. Hunnius — Christocentric
2. Lagrange — Christocentric (qualified)
3. Melancthon — dogmacentric
4. Barrett — medenaganocentric¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹³⁴ *Theological Studies*, XVII (1956), 250.

¹³⁵ It should be emphasized that we are not depreciating the value of Barrett's com-

¹³⁰ *New Testament Studies*, III (1956 to 1957), 75. Sanders illustrates his point with reference to Barrett's treatment of the Cana miracle (*The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 157), the Samaritan woman incident (ibid., p. 191), and Jesus' trial before the high priest (ibid., p. 438).

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 454.

¹³² Ibid., p. 39.

Such a result offers three exegetical warnings: First, one should be wary of all attempts to prejudge a commentator on the basis of *ad hominem*, a priori reasoning. Second, a commentator's historical epoch should not be held against him and employed as a criterion of prejudgment. Third, a commentator's theological temperament likewise is no proper basis for a priori negative evaluation of his work.

But how can we explain the peculiar results of the present investigation? How could Barrett and Melancthon, two mediating commentators, achieve less satisfactory exegetical insights than the "opinionated" theologians Hunnius and Lagrange? And how could the orthodox controversialist Hunnius possibly find the heart of the Fourth Gospel? I suggest that the "impartiality" of Barrett and Melancthon is a singularly inappropriate cast of mind for interpreting such Biblical books as John's Gospel, for there one finds absolute and unqualified commitment to a God who, beyond question, revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Thus a Barrett, who remains warily cautious, misses the essential teaching of the book; and a Melancthon, whose *media via* approach is felt even by him to be experientially unsatisfying,¹³⁶ tends toward an exegetical instability which can result in hyperpreoccupation with a single doctrine. Moreover, Barrett (and to some extent Lagrange)

mentary as a reference work (in this respect it is of paramount significance); we are saying, however, that it is less successful at penetrating to the heart of John's message than even Melancthon's commentary with its preoccupation with Gospel and Law.

¹³⁶ Cf. the revealing *pecca fortiter* advice which Luther found it necessary to give to Melancthon.

suffer from the ill effects (as well as benefit from the unquestionable values) of modernity; W. H. Cooper has perspicaciously observed that "items of literary and historical criticism . . . fascinate and often sidetrack the modern investigator" and prevent him from getting to the heart of Biblical teaching.¹³⁷

In the case of Hunnius it seems possible to argue that his radical commitment to the Scriptural Christ gave him the theological stabilization necessary to create a classic commentary on John. Like Chesterton's fictional detective Father Brown, his unshakable confidence in "heavenly things" kept him from aberrational judgments in "earthly things."¹³⁸ For Hunnius the Johannine proclamation of the Incarnation—the historical facticity of the Word—was not to be questioned but to be testified to; and in taking this position, he aligned himself completely with the fourth evangelist himself.¹³⁹ If Menoud was correct when he

¹³⁷ W. H. Cooper, "Martin Chemnitz on Justification; with Special Reference to His Use of the Old Testament," part II, *Northwestern Seminary Bulletin*, XXXV (January 1960), 8.

¹³⁸ Anthony Boucher writes of Father Brown: "It is not so much the crime as the appearance of the crime that is fantastic; and it is the credulity of modern man, 'emancipated' from religion and failing to comprehend the science which has 'replaced' it, which turns the commonplace into the fantastically miraculous. (See, for example, 'The Hammer of God,' in which Father Brown, who can discount the supernatural because he knows it exists, meets a 'miracle' and finds a simple and most literally down-to-earth explanation.)" (Anthony Boucher, Introduction to G. K. Chesterton's *Ten Adventures of Father Brown* [New York: Dell Publishing Co., Chapel Books, 1961], p. 11).

¹³⁹ Maurice F. Wiles makes a point worth pondering when he says: "There are some books of the Bible whose interpretation has been so completely revolutionised by modern critical

wrote in 1958, "the works of the last ten years have not solved the enigma which is the Fourth Gospel,"¹⁴⁰ perhaps the failure

methods that the exegesis of earlier centuries is unlikely to add much of value to our understanding of them. There is probably no book of which this is less true than the Fourth Gospel. It is of such a nature that it seems to reveal its secrets not so much to the skilful probings of the analyst as to a certain intuitive sympathy of understanding. We need not, therefore, despair of finding amongst such early interpreters significant examples of a true insight into the meaning of the Gospel" (*The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960], p. 1).

¹⁴⁰ Philippe H. Menoud, "Les études johanniques de Bultmann à Barrett," in *L'évangile de*

lies in not standing where Hunnius stood. The opening sentence of his commentary leaves no doubt concerning his starting point, and suggests the root strength of his approach: "Author Evangelicae huius historiae est Spiritus Sanctus."¹⁴¹

Jean: Études et problèmes, Recherches bibliques, No. 3 (Louvain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), p. 30.

¹⁴¹ Hunnius, *Commentarius* . . . , fol. 1r. For a faithful and sympathetic treatment of the doctrine of inspiration held by Hunnius and other major orthodox Lutheran theologians of the time, see Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture* . . . (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957).

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