3.1
Ultimate Reality and Meaning in the Light of John’s Gospel

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a unique way the Gospel of John discusses ultimate reality and meaning. Wherever a search is going on for true being and meaningful existence, the topics and issues of deity and humanity, eternity and time, life and death, spirit and matter, good and evil, light and darkness, blindness and sight, hearing and knowing, word and deed will be pondered. Also the problem of particular election for a mission among all human beings cannot be avoided. The Gospel of John employs precisely these terms. It presupposes that the members of the opposite pairs are mutually exclusive – so much so that they resemble millstones between which mortals can be or are tragically crushed even when they seek to fulfill their destiny as did, once upon a time, Antigone and Oedipus. And yet this gospel contains the story of a victory gained. It affirms that the eternal has come into time and that light shines in the darkness, that blind eyes are opened, hard hearts are softened, and knowledge and confidence are given to persons such as we are. The Johannine gospel makes a contribution to the many philosophical and religious, theoretical-abstract and ethical/practical endeavors to face reality, discern its meaning and act responsibly. In the following, I intend to give an introduction to the peculiar substance and message of this part of the Christian churches’ canon.

1.1 Literary Character and Structure

John’s vocabulary is limited and simple. For example, he draws from a shepherd’s, farmer’s or wine-grower’s environment and experience, including their work in the open air and their pilgrimages to holy places, and not forgetting their acquaintance with disputes and trial-court scenes. Day-time and night, water and bread, the threatening wolf and the feeble sheep, dire want, hopeless infirmity, horrible death and the arrival of unexpected help in desperate situations provide the frame and the style in which the deepest things are discussed. It may well be that Jesus himself or the writer of the gospel is harking back – just as done by ancient myths and occasionally by authors such as Cicero and Ovid – to psychic archetypes and origins of culture, and that, therefore, he exploits the symbolic potential of seemingly trivial persons, things and events. Still, it may also be that he is less concerned with artful communication to sophisticated readers than with reaching an audience and readership living in a rural region.
The homeliness of John's language does not exclude extensive play on the double-meaning of some words. Sleep may stand for death, blindness for stupid obduracy, seeing for knowing, anew for being from above, going up for readiness to be crucified. Misapprehensions are met by clarifications. A positive affirmation made in one line is often followed by a negation in the following parallel line. When two words such as water and spirit, believing and knowing, hearing and keeping are combined by the simple conjunction 'and,' they are used almost as synonyms; the second serves to explain the first unmistakeably and does not add a totally new dimension or entirely different element.

Sometimes the Gospel of John is used as a primer for inductive Greek courses offered to beginners. Actually it requires much more than a superficial feel for language. The Greek of this document is strongly influenced by an (probably oral) Aramaic original of the traditions incorporated in it. Though the number of verbs and of nouns is about equal, the text shares with the Hebrew, Aramaic and other near- and far-eastern languages a preference for letting the verbs bear the main weight of a statement, and to use those nouns with preference which describe an action rather than a status or an abstraction. When John uses the noun *marturia* (testimony), he does it in the active and dynamic sense of the frequently employed verb *martreo* (to bear witness) and means the action of testifying. The nouns *martys* (witness) and *martyrion* (juridical evidence) are missing from his vocabulary. He just loves to speak of believing, knowing, seeing – but the nouns *faith* (*pistis*), *knowledge* (*gnosis*), and *vision* (*horasis, horama, theoria*) never occur. Not even truth is left to be a static, abstract or inaccessible entity (as Pontius Pilate suggests in Jn 18,38). It is revealed and present in Jesus Christ and has, so to speak, a head and a body, arms and feet; it comes and gives directions – and it has to be done (1,14,17; 3,21; 14,6; cf. 1 Jn 1,6; 3, 18).

Most frequently, the connection between a capital or a dependent clause with another is made by the conjunction ‘and’ or by the more stringent ‘just as ... so(also).’ Dependent clauses are in the majority of cases introduced by a relative pronoun (as ‘who’ or ‘where’), or by ‘in order that’ or ‘so that,’ at the expense of conjunctions that express a more subtle logical connection. Among the New Testament authors, it is mostly Luke and Paul and the author to the Hebrews who make use of a much richer variety of dependent clauses.

The style of both, the strictly narrative passages and the larger parts of the Prolog and the discourses which follow upon the reports on miraculous deeds, is hymnic, oracular, hieratic, at times even mystical and musical – totally different from the tone and structure of strictly rational argument. The hearer and reader of the gospel is made to listen to liturgical accounts, reflections and songs of wonder and praise. Instead of thoughts moving ahead on a straight line, there are spirals leading from one level to the next around the same axis and passing by earlier turns.

Most of the narrative parts of the gospel have parallels in the Gospel of Matthew, Luke, and/or Mark, the so-called Synoptics. The sequence of outstanding events is several times arranged in perplexing fashion. Interpreters have attempted to rearrange the parts of the gospel in a way that would make better sense historically and logically. If the gospel’s author or one of his pupils had submitted the gospel to a final redaction, using the criteria of rational penmanship, the same result might have been achieved. But
even if the gospel seems to be less than perfect in the form in which it was received into the New Testament canon, the text as it stands has a clear overall structure.

The Prolog anticipates and sums up the contents of the twenty-one chapters by introducing Jesus Christ as the eternal Word become flesh, as the creator and life giver, and as revealer and savior (1,1–18).

Part 1 (1,19–5,47) has the theme: Ample Attestation to the Appearance of the True Light. Testimony to the shining light is borne by as diverse human eyewitnesses as John the Baptist, chosen individual disciples, a high-standing and learned Jew, the despised Samaritans, the highest non-Jewish official, and by the deeds and words of Jesus and of the Father in heaven, as attested to by Israel’s holy Scriptures.

Part 2 (chs. 6–12) describes The Light in Conflict and Battle with Darkness. The miraculous signs given by Jesus create astonishment; they also provoke resentment or misunderstanding. Guardians of organized religion contradict him and people are split in their reaction. Jesus is accused of being a Samaritan, and as demon-possessed, in addition (8:48). He responds by giving more signs, by speaking now figuratively, now in plain diction of his divine origin and mission, and by announcing harsh judgments on his opponents.

The theme of Part 3 (chs. 13–17) is The Everlasting Power of the Light. In the so-called Farewell Discourses Jesus speaks, as it were, from a perspective attained no earlier than after his resurrection, of his death and the time following upon it. The crucifixion will crown and demonstrate his love, because it is suffering endured for his friends’ sake. His death is the apex of his glory, not the end or the adumbration of it. His crown is made of thorns; his rule is exerted from the cross; he remains present through his Spirit which leads those elected into all truth, however confused and timid they are. The attitude, the deeds and the sufferings of love will never be a thing of the past. On their way out into the world which they have to follow as much as Jesus himself has done, the disciples are carried and encouraged by the intercession of Jesus on their behalf before the Father, in which he asks for unity with him and among one another.

The concluding Part 4 (chs. 18–21) treats The Completion of Jesus’ Way by the Revelation of his Glory. Suffering and death are far from a defeat for they are the triumph of Jesus’ obedience to God and of his love for sinful humanity. By the (physical!) resurrection of Jesus the real incarnation of the eternal Son of God is confirmed and the way is opened to the conveyance of the Holy Spirit and the formation of a missionary community of people living by faith, forgiveness and love. Chapter 21 appears to be added by the author, some time after the completion of chs. 1–20. Its language and substance is the same as in the foregoing parts of the gospel.

To the lucid structure of the whole gospel corresponds the careful narrative build-up of the accounts of the signs given by Jesus, of his trial and execution, and of the successive appearances of the resurrected Lord. When compared with other New Testament miracle, passion and resurrection reports, a special interest in the material, physical, also the dramatical and symbolical character of the events can be observed. The Gospel of John, though since the late second century called ‘the spiritual gospel,’ is also the most materialistic among the four that were included in the canon of the church. In this gospel the Spirit (and a corresponding spirituality) is that which takes hold of the material world
and does not despise, condemn or totally exclude it. Here ‘spiritual’ is what the Holy Spirit does to and with matter. Idealistic interpreters of John are sometimes repelled by the material dimension of Jesus’ signs. Their naturalistic character seems to make the signs not only poor crutches and bridges to real faith, but actually dispensable. Still, as W. Bittner has shown, there is no reason to feel ashamed of them, or because of them of the Gospel of John. They fit well the proclamation of the Logos’ incarnation, and they do not reveal an omnipotent magician but glory found precisely in the love for persons in miserable conditions.

Is this known and true for the gospel author and readers ‘because the Bible tells me so?’ Certainly not! For the words which this gospel contains are unfoldings of the one Word which is eternally divine by nature and yet does not lose power and dignity by being incarnate and crucified. What is written down by John, is based on oral testimonies and confessions of eyewitnesses. Therefore the truth of the gospel does not depend on its own divine origin or infallible wording, but on Him who is the truth in person. Of the truth of the Gospel of John no one can speak except he or she be grasped by it. Truth is protected and further revealed by the Spirit who points and directs to Him to whom the Bible bears testimony, never by sheer letters. The literary character of the gospel can be described no better than by the term ‘testimony.’

1.2 Place, Date and Authorship
Unquestionable information or theories regarding the author, place and date of John’s gospel do not exist, nor is it established for certain for whom the scripture was destined. The history of interpretation offers widely varying opinions on the gospel’s origin and purpose. Especially the chapters (18–19) which describe Jesus’ trial and death, contain traces showing that the author or his informant(s) possessed detailed knowledge of the conditions prevailing in Jerusalem during the early thirties of the first century. Throughout the accounts of the public ministry of Jesus, the gospel may well rely on oral sources as old and trustworthy as those used by the Synoptics, especially Mark. And yet, among the critical biblical scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries, John’s gospel as a whole is but seldom considered a reliable record of the words and deeds of the historical Jesus. Highly controversial and sometimes mutually exclusive reasons are offered for explaining why so often it radically differs from the Synoptic Gospels. At this place, only a selection of flowers will be offered from the bouquet of location and date theories.

The oldest gospel fragment discovered up to the present contains the verses 33–35 and 37–38 from John 18. It is called Papyrus 52 and stems from early second century Egypt. It seems to support the gospel’s Egyptian origin for it seems to reflect a similarly watered-down Platonism as do other, partly contemporary, Egyptian groups of literature: the Hermetic Books with their mysticism and magic, and Philo of Alexandria’s writings with their religious philosophy and ethics. Hellenistic Jews as well as Christians resident in Egypt may have yielded to the influence of that literature or analogous streams of thought. In about 180, the church father Clement of Alexandria who in his own way was a late Platonist, expressed his special love for the ‘spiritual’ Gospel of John. So this gospel might have been written in Egypt.

However, Ephesus also has been proposed as its nativity place. The logos doctrine of
the Prolog may embody the heritage of Heraclitus of Ephesus. The interpretation of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in terms of rebirth and food for immortality may be endorsed by this gospel because it wanted to compete with Mystery Cults that also promised these benefits. Seemingly anti-Jewish passages may reflect the preference given by Gentile-born Christians to religious symbols and practices that were foreign and obnoxious to Pharisaically and rabbincally trained Jews. A legend of the tombs of two Johns in Ephesus, of whom one was assumed to be the gospel’s author, supports the claim of this city to being the place of the gospel’s origin.

Again, the soil and congregations of Syria recommend themselves for this honor because the Syrian Bishop Ignatius of Antioch (c. 50–110) most likely was the first to make allusions to John’s gospel in his writings. No more than a few decades after him, Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) and Irenaeus (130–202), who had been brought up in Asia Minor and flourished in Rome and Lyons respectively, quoted the gospel as holy scripture.

Finally, because it shares with the Qumran Literature a series of dualistic traits and an attitude critical of official Jerusalem priesthood and cultus, a Palestinian setting of the gospel’s author and addresses can by no means be excluded. Its stylistic dependence upon Aramaic vocabulary and syntax; the repeated mention of geographical details, the reproduction of subtle rabbincal discussions and precedential decisions suit best the possible birth of the gospel in Jerusalem, in Galilee, in Samaria, or in a region bordering on Israel’s holy land. For these and other reasons, the assumption of a Palestinian origin is gaining influence among modern scholars.

At present, there still exists a huge majority of critical interpreters agreeing on a late date of the gospel. The time between 90 and 110 is considered most likely—for reasons that include the following: The disputes with Judaism, as described in the gospel, appear to reflect a stage of estrangement between Christians and Jews that was reached only after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and after the reconstitution of synagogue worship and scholarly Biblical research in theological schools of Galilee after AD 90. The ‘high Christology,’ with its emphasis on divinity, pre-existence, omniscience and omnipotence of Jesus Christ, is considered the result of a development requiring many decades—after the low beginnings of the early prophet-servant Christology. It is assumed that Gnostic-dualistic elements permeate the gospel, and that the Iranian myth of the redeemed redeemer provided the pattern of the utterances about the descent and the ascent of the Son of Man who came to save souls out of their imprisonment in mortal bodies and lead them into heaven. The hope for a speedy return of Jesus had, so it is maintained, vanished and was replaced by pride and joy in the fulfillment which has taken place already in the present. ‘Realized eschatology’ had taken the place of futuristic expectation; the sacraments are supposedly explained and celebrated after the pattern of Mystery Religion liturgies.

Disagreement with the sketched common opinion is still possible. On the basis of a variety of arguments, e.g. W.F. Albright (1956 and earlier), E.R. Goodenough (1945), R.M. Grant (1963, pp. 159–160), and J.A.T. Robinson (1976, pp. 254–320) decide in favor of a date between 45 and 70. The early date of the original (Aramaic?) gospel does
not exclude later redactional changes, as W. Wilckens has suggested. Indeed, together with others, three arguments speak in favor of an early date.

(1) The gospel reveals intimate knowledge of conditions and tensions among Palestinian Jews at the time of the birth of Christianity. For Gentile-born Christians in Egypt, Ephesus or Syria, the geographical, temporal, political and doctrinal details contained in the gospel would hardly have been of great interest.

(2) Jesus' public ministry and the instruction he gives to his disciples devolve in the frame of three or four journeys to festivals in Jerusalem and are spread over several years, while the Synoptic Gospels record only one year of public activity and one visit in Jerusalem. It is probable that just as the apostle Paul, so also the first readers of the gospel still made pilgrimages to the Jewish festivals. If so then, unlike Paul they were tempted to fall victim to the festival splendor of the great celebrations and to regret the smallness of the flock of Christians, and to yearn for what they had enjoyed as Jews before they were expelled from the synagogues because of their confession of Jesus Christ. Again and again the gospel appeals to the hearers and readers to stay and remain with Jesus, to keep his words, to stick to the confessed faith in Jesus Christ. Facing and fighting the same temptation of relapsing into admiration of the temple cult, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews conveys practically the same message. Before the fall of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, the urgent appeals made by John and in Hebrews made good sense. After the city and its glorious religious center were reduced to ruins, falling into one or another form of paganism, but no longer returning to Jewish ways of temple worship were an acute temptation.

(3) The high Christology is hardly the result of 50 or more years of doctrinal development which step by step goes forward, 'nearer my God to Thee.' For the same high praises of Jesus Christ are also found in the Christ-hymns and confessions which Paul quotes in his letters and on which he grounds his own proclamation of the crucified and raised Lord (e.g. Rom 1,3–4; Phil 2,6–11; Col 1,15–20; 1 Tm 3,16). And the same high Christology is also found in one of the oral or written sources, the so-called 'Q,' which was supposedly used for the composition of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (see e.g., Mt 11,19,25–29; Lk 7,35; 10,21–22; 11,49). Since the hymns and confessions, together with 'Q,' are usually dated around the middle of the first century AD, the Christology of John by no means proves that this gospel was composed no earlier than half a century later.

The gospel bears the name 'According to John,' in the best Greek texts. Indeed, early church tradition weighs heavy in favor of an author who was among Jesus' disciples, especially of a son of Zebedee by that name who may or may not have been the 'beloved disciple' mentioned only in this gospel. The Johannine origin of the script is not dependent upon the early date of its formation; for the disciple John might have written down his account as a rather young or as a very old man. No certainty exists in regard to the relation of this John to the author or authors of the three 'Epistles of John' and of the book of Revelation. In substance, especially the Prolog of the gospel and the Farewell Discourses (chs. 13–17) stand very near the message of the Epistles. However, instead of a man called John, a few interpreters have suggested another friend of Jesus — even
Lazarus whose resurrection is recorded in Jn 11–12. In present-day scholarship, the assumption is gaining the upper-hand, that the gospel owes its origin to a ‘Johannine School’ or ‘Circle,’ which fostered and cultivated concerns similar to the cult-critical stance of the Hellenist Stephen and the author of Hebrews, and perhaps also of congregations in Samaria (O. Cullmann, 1976).

The unsolved problems of authorship are acknowledged when, because of its place in the New Testament canon, historical-critical expositors speak of the ‘Fourth Gospel,’ rather than of the ‘Gospel of John.’ In view of the gospel’s possible early origin, the nomenclature ‘First Gospel’ might also be taken into consideration.

It is obvious that the Old Testament was used when the gospel was written. It is quoted in a version that is used nowhere else in the New Testament, and that might be the author’s own. Have also other sources been at hand? In question are personal recollections, oral (local, person-related, thematical) traditions, perhaps pieces of the Synoptic Gospels and of other written documents. Some individual interpreters before R. Bultmann, and many in his wake have distinguished four elements among the other resource materials: (a) a Book of Signs (miracles) which fosters faith based on extraordinary events; (b) a collection of Gnostic, but earlier or later Christianized, Revelation Discourses; (c) it seems to connect signs and speeches, and comments to repudiate misinterpretations; they are considered the work of the so-called Evangelist who among other things wanted to fight miracle-faith in favor of a faith relying solely upon hearing and believing the preached word; and (d) sacramentalistic and eschatological additions, stemming from the hand of one or several redactors and made in order to adapt the gospel to accepted church beliefs and practices. C.H. Dodd (1963), however, is not alone when he prefers to assume that the sources most frequently used by the author were oral.

Together with conservative expositors, C. Goodwin (1954, pp. 61–75) is very skeptical in regard to the hunt for sources. Most pointed are B.H. Streeter’s remarks (1951, pp. 377, 392). He calls the attempt to unravel the process of the gospel’s formation ‘grotesque’ and the reconstruction of sources ‘chimerical’; for ‘as well hope to start with a string of sausages and reconstruct the pig.’ Careful linguistic studies by other interpreters (int. al. E. Schweizer, 1939) have shown that even in the minutest details of the sign narratives and the revelation discourses the language and diction of the gospel are exactly the same, while only the employment of a different vocabulary and style could buttress and verify the assumption of various written sources.

At any rate, the history of interpretation is not restricted to formation of theories about author, place, date and sources. More important are the proposals made for placing the gospel in the mainstreams of ancient spiritual movements and adventures, and for discerning John’s intention in joining, correcting or opposing them.

1.3 Samples from the History of Interpretation
Among the attempts at understanding the gospel as a whole and to convey its message to later generations, some contradict and mutually exclude one another, others are complementary and reveal aspects of the same issue from different angles. A selection will suffice to show how rich are the possibilities of comprehending, communicating
and using the gospel's substance and thrust, and how far away several of them are from an unprejudiced appreciation.

1.3.1 Anti-Judaism
This document is considered an anti-Judaistic blast, perhaps a specimen of the perennial worldwide anti-Semitism which befouls nations and churches alike. For, so it is being said and written, John demonstrates the radical break-away of Jesus and his early followers from what is dubbed the legalism, ceremonialism, institutionalism and self-justification of organized Jewish religion. If this view be accurate, then the Holy Land, Jerusalem, the temple, the Sinaitic Law and its learned interpretation and application in the tradition of the Elders and the Rabbis, as well as the concerns and activities of the priests are now replaced by the person of Jesus Christ and his proclamation and demonstration of inner freedom and spiritual religion. Universalism, individualism and mysticism are then at the core of the gospel's message.

1.3.2 Gnosticizing Anti-Gnosticism
Again the gospel is understood as a vain attempt to resist and fight Gnosticism. It is admitted that John seeks to oppose Gnostic thought patterns by emphasizing the historical rather than mythical character of the Son of God's coming, activity and death, and by calling for ever new ethical decisions, foremost for love not for a world-denying asceticism or an immoral libertinism. At the same time, however, John is seen, if not deplored, as a victim of the Gnostic opponent. For the evangelist emphasizes the saving essence and function of knowledge, at the side of the indispensibility of faith; he uses terms of the Gnostic Redeemer Myth for describing and proclaiming the way and work and effect of God's messenger; and he thrives on the deterministic dualism represented by spirit and matter ('flesh'), light and darkness, election and reprobation, initiated insiders and ignorant or doomed outsiders. For these reasons it is considered the task of a true interpreter to 'demythologize' large parts of the gospel, that is, to handle the mythical elements as symbols and instruments of genuine human self-understanding within a fallen world. 'Eschatological existence,' even endorsement of the tenets of existentialism, is the ultimate intention and meaning of John's gospel, according to e.g. R. Bultmann (1955, pp. 75–92; cf. H. Jonas, 1963, pp. 320–340). Following E. Kaesemann (1968), Jesus as depicted in this gospel is totally and exclusively divine, hardly ever touching with his feet the earth, which would mean that the so-called 'docetic Christology' which since the 2nd century was developed among Christian Gnostics, was anticipated and planted by this gospel. These views are still finding imitation – irrespective of the fact that careful studies of Gnosticism have come to the result that the full-blown Gnostic myth was composed no earlier than toward the end of the 3rd century, by the Persian Mani.

1.3.3 Sacramental Symbolism
Furthermore another school of thought praises John's gospel for the dominant role played in it by symbols and imagery. Jesus proclaims his identity and work by pictures
chosen from the created world, such as light and way, shepherd and bread. His acts of helping, healing and raising are called signs, not miracles (except in 4:48), for their meaning lies far above the palpable: they point to eternal truth and can thereby reveal that the reality of the symbol’s substance is much greater than that of things and events in the material world. Also, it has been suggested that in this gospel the symbolical-sacramental act of baptism and the common meal are understood either as extensions of the Logos’ incarnation or as regular continuations of the miracles. In summary, it is assumed that true religion is here introduced as both a combination and interaction of spoken and enacted symbols as they are found wherever devotion is deep and art is given a free hand to help find and manifest it.

1.3.4 Static Dogmatization
Finally, John’s gospel is being radically separated from its Jewish, Hellenistic, Gnostic mystery-cultic religious environment and the pertinent literature, and is treated and respected as a bulwark of the orthodox faith which has been formulated and confessed in the great creeds of Christendom during the 4th and 5th centuries. John then proclaims the singularity of true revelation, the manifestation of the triune God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the true divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the atoning character of his death, the physical reality of his resurrection, and the continuity of the Spirit’s working on, in and through the Christians. If so, then the gospel is strictly a church book, safeguarded by seven seals from genuine understanding and appreciation by outsiders.

So much for the history of interpretation. The best recent commentary on John is that by R.E. Brown (1966–1970). In it, various ways, options and errors of historical exposition are discussed and alternatives are offered. Among earlier modern commentaries, E.C. Hoskyns’ and F.N. Davies’ work (1940) is outstanding because it elaborates carefully on the gospel’s theological message.

2. GOD IN SEARCH OF MAN (THE ULTIMATE IN SEARCH OF NON-ULTIMATES)

2.1 A Report on Jesus Christ
The gospel has the form and contents of a narrative and is, therefore, totally unlike an Aristotelian tract for example. For its author, history — that is, interpretative telling of selected events that happened in space and time — counts more than speculation and formation of theories by piling up arguments. For definition of terms, induction to a highest principle, or logical deductions from it are neither his intention nor his method. He does no more than tell of one person who stood in a very particular relation to God the Father and the Spirit, to contemporary individuals and crowds not only, but also to persons and events of the past, to expectations regarding the future, to sacral and profane institutions, and to natural elements and powers.

Jesus Christ is this person. His story is unfolded from his eternal origin and descent upon earth, to the gathering of most diverse disciples, to the giving of miraculous signs, and through hefty conflicts with religious leaders to the suffering of death and to glorious resurrection. The report on Jesus’ life is interrupted by the recording of lengthy speeches
and pointed dialogues which may, except for the abundant use of figurative diction, remind one of Socrates’ mode of teaching. Both the signs given and the speeches held evoke misunderstandings which then are fought and, if possible, removed. Again and again, Jesus announces and explains the events connected with his mission, calls for faith in God and himself, and prepares the way for the Spirit’s future operation. Still, the heart and core of all he says is ultimately but one: He himself. The formula ‘I am’ which resembles the name of God (‘I am who I am’) revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3,14), is the key to the gospel’s message and contains its summary.

In Jesus’ discourses, as much as in his actions, his crucifixion and his reappearance among the living, the themes of light and darkness, truth and lie and the other above mentioned pairs are spread out and elaborated upon. Attention, however, is not fixed on this or that ‘It’ or on a multiplicity of things, concepts or ideas, not to speak of a plurality of truths. Neither is a ‘Thou’ in the center which might be discovered in any inter-human encounter. Rather the gospel affirms that He, Jesus Christ, is in person reality, communication and meaning at the same time. Logos is the first term by which the gospel describes Him – a rich and multifaceted noun which might be rendered, as J. W. Goethe suggests in the first part of his Faust (863–883), by word, meaning, power, or deed. Jesus Christ is, as the gospel intends to make known, life and resurrection; he is way and door and truth, he is the giver of bread and the true bread itself. John wants to say that the highest and deepest yearning and ideas, values and directives should not be sought in abstractions, be it negations or supererogations of palpable or spiritual reality. He does not propose to explain them as archetypes, as results or postulates of pure or practical reasoning, of individual or collective emotional experience, or of concentrated mystic meditation in which the soul proves capable of merging into the universe. The gospel’s orientation and information is strictly Christocentric. It intends to convey the information that whatever is a worthy It, as are indeed life and light, bread and truth, is found in Christ, unseparable from him, and ultimately identical with his person. This Christ is distinct from a Platonic idea, because he has come and trod the earth, he has died and has been raised, while yet being and living in eternity.

The narrative, didactic, and emotional personification of grace and truth, meaning and communication, life and light, revelation and response to revelation (by saying Amen) has nothing to do with the identification of e.g. Zeus with universal fatherhood, Aphrodite with love, Ares with war, Hermes with messengership and interpretation (‘hermeneutics’). Even when these gods or halfgods interfere in history and assume human shape, they are still mythical abstractions. Nearer the gospel’s thought-pattern are the roles played in ancient western philosophy by the historic person of Socrates, and in the East by Gautama-Buddha. As these persons are respected as the essence and epitome, even as the sum-total of wisdom and devotion, so even more Jesus Christ is the center and sum of John’s message. When genuine poets and wise counsellors speak of romance, sexuality, love and marriage, they tell the stories of great lovers and can do without statistics, depth-psychological information or guesses, and moralistic rules of behavior. The Gospel of John is not at all inferior to them: it depicts Jesus Christ as the one wisdom incorporated, its paragon and paradigm. For he reveals what he is, he does what he teaches, he seeks not his own best but affects and involves those whom he meets, by his judgment and by his love.
2.2 One Dynamic Center

When young people sing, 'Love makes the world go round,' and when they scribble on walls, 'Make love, not war,' they express their conviction of having found the one center of the universe which is stronger than all divisions and can overcome them. However onesided and simplistic their discovery and appeal, they must not be despised or condemned when they praise but one single power, attitude and action. In this regard they resemble the simple and one-sided, and intolerant as it may appear, message of Jesus as communicated through the Gospel of John: 'All who came before me are thieves and robbers ... I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved ... but who ever does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, is a thief and robber ... No one comes to the Father but by me ... Whatever has seen me has seen the Father' (10,8–9; 14,6,9). A sign of exclusivity is frequently given when negative parallel sentences clarify and inculcate the preceding positive affirmation. Between light and darkness, truth and lie, life and death, sin and forgiveness there is no middle ground, no compromise, no mixture. They are related to one another -- by a one-way street. They grapple in a fierce fight, but the outcome is not mutual acceptance or armistice, but clear victory of one side.

The gospel's either-or pattern of thought is hardly the result of the influence of Iranian dualism upon exilic and post-exilic Judaism, or of Gnosticism. Most likely the Johannine either-or has a much older historic origin and Sitz im Leben: the old-testamental and intertestamental priestly theology, soteriology and cultic practice to which in the gospel Jesus' Highpriestly Prayer (Jn 17) particularly alludes. 'Father ... sanctify them (the disciples) in the truth ... For their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in truth' (17,17,19). Light, holiness, purity, obedience, life are so radiant and strong that only a blind fool could consider a human being free to choose and to prefer, for instance, staying in darkness, filth, rebellion or death. Freedom in this gospel is to choose that for which you have been chosen by the good Lord, not to make a selection between basically equals as did Heracles at the crossroads. The coincidence of opposites (see 2.4) does certainly not mean that everything goes. Following the gospel, at the expense of his own life Jesus is carrying out the sanctification for which he has been sent out. By staking and losing his life, he gives and saves life. This way is not a compromise but an amazing and unique deed and event which creates and forms a connection between death and life.

Jesus' attitude is most polemical and intolerant when he speaks of the 'ruler of this world' and of the 'devil.' Does this antagonist possess the quality of anti-matter to which ontological reality and factual existence cannot be denied? Jesus attributes to the devil no greater dignity than that of a lie; the prince of the world is no more than the factual, though hopeless, negation of God's dominion and grace. His history and fate are this: to be 'thrown out' (8,44; 12,31; 14,30; 16,11). Such teaching is the opposite of transcendental or deterministic, tragical or existential dualism. Light and truth dispel and dissolve darkness and lie; they do not tolerate, preserve and sanctify their opposites.

In order to underline the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the images used in the self-revelation speeches are repeatedly qualified by attributes which distinguish him from other instruments, mediators, teachers, leaders or saviors. When he is called the
Lamb, then it is added that he is the Lamb of God that carries the sin of the world. When he uses the term shepherd he adds the adjective ‘good’ because he gives his life in order to save his flock. He is bread that does not perish neither permit the eaters later to die. There may be many kinds of sacrificial lambs, pioneers, chiefs and seducers, and many sorts of regular or miraculous foodstuffs, yet Jesus Christ is not one among many. Rather he is depicted as the one certain reality and presence of that which reconciles, leads to life and keeps alive. In both Plato’s philosophy and John’s gospel what is good, true, beautiful in essence and eternity, is distinct from shadowy outlines or imperfect copies as they are found in the created world. Still, there is also a difference between the doctrine of the ideas and the message of this gospel. John proclaims that the one and real archetype has entered time and space, and has taken on human shape. He who is the light and life in person, has been heard and seen and touched physically. In his Confessions (7,9), the church father Augustine freely admits that in Platonic writings he has read many fine and deep things but has not found information on the humility, the incarnation and the sacrificial death of him who is the Word of God.

Is it therefore necessary or proper to speak of the absoluteness or superiority of Christendom over other faiths? The answer can only be strictly negative. For according to the testimony given by John, Jesus Christ is never absolute but always relative. He is dependent upon the Father who sends him and validates his work, and upon the Spirit who rests upon him and whom he gives to the disciples in order that they do greater works than he has done. Jesus Christ is far from being absolute because he fulfills a function in regard to all created things and especially to human society and its individual members. He has a history not only within the total cosmic, natural and human history, but he calls into being very specific historic events in nature and in the life of persons.

The relativity of Jesus Christ and his message becomes obvious when at least three co-inherent elements are observed which are characteristic of the symbolic speeches introduced by the words ‘I am.’ (a) The discourses describe (‘objectively’) the nature of Jesus Christ by calling him the bread, the door, the shepherd, the vine, etc. (b) They proclaim (‘functionally’) the work he performs in obedience to the father for the benefit of humanity. (c) They call for the appropriate (‘subjective’) human response of hearing and believing, eating and drinking, following and witnessing. The faith of the followers of Jesus Christ consists of their relation to him, its sincerity, its persuasiveness, its unselfishness – but it is never absolute and it cannot be combined with high claims.

Several times the gospel underlines the fact that only by his death Jesus can fulfill his function; for instance, only by giving himself to be made sacrificial meat and blood, he is that bread which is even better than the heavenly manna given to Israel’s fathers in the wilderness because of his death for the sheep he is the good shepherd (Jn 10) because of his death for the sheep he is the good shepherd (Jn 6), and only after falling into the earth and dying the grain of wheat can grow and bear much fruit (12,24). A light that would not spend itself in lighting up the darkness would not really be light. In his speeches Jesus raises no claim other than that he is God’s sent-out servant and has to fulfill his mission to the bitter end. His glory is as great as his willing submission to suffering for the sake of sinners.

His death is the result of the rejection by cooperating Christians, Jews and Gentiles:
all of them prove hostile to his nature, his function and his call. This death is not a basis and foundation for raising claims in favor of a better religion. Imperialism and triumphalism but poorly fit the image of the crucified Lord; they are a perversion of true testimony to him and to eternal life. Actually they deny and belie the dynamic center and the energy radiating from it.

2.3 Knowledge by Grace

The Christocentrism of John’s gospel by no means forecloses other intensive human search and labor for grasping reality and gaining understanding. But it invites the gospel’s readers to become aware that to encounter reality, to perceive a glimpse of meaning, and to follow and to do the truth are gifts that come to humankind as it were from outside. Neither reality nor meaning are extensions of a human disposition and capability; certainly they ought to be something better, higher and more solid than yearning or moods of the soul, sparks of light hidden deep in one’s self, or projections of thoughts, emotions and hopes upon clouds in the sky.

Can or do human beings transcend themselves in their meditation, their awareness of moral responsibility, their feelings, their wise words or their outcries? The gospel’s answer is amazing but unambiguous: the person who transcends his/her own self by going out of his habitat and into a seemingly far-away and qualitatively totally different world in order to meet and accept strange conditions, is God himself. God is proclaimed as laying his heart bare, going out of himself, making himself known, being present and being seen in the face of Jesus Christ who was crucified. This way he reveals his uniqueness and glory, and gains rather than loses dignity. For he is not a shut-in of his majesty, incapable of touching upon and suffering under the reality of created conditions and mortal humanity. In this gospel, transcendence is a downward movement – from God who is Word and Spirit in essence, into the realm of matter, historicity, sin, flesh and death. ‘The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not mastered it.’ ‘The word became flesh; he came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory’ – and this because he was incarnate and crucified. ‘When your Advocate has come, whom I will send you from the Father – the Spirit that issues from the Father – he will bear witness to me. And you are also my witnesses.’ ‘When he comes who is the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth’ (1,5,18; 15,26; 16,13).

Knowledge of truth is here declared a gift. To follow and to do the truth is the result of election from above. Only thanks to revelation, not because of their allegedly sun-like eyes, finite beings are enabled to face and appreciate reality. Wisdom is to know that we don’t know, according to Socrates; yet the Gospel of John leads even deeper into truth: it proclaims that human beings can have certain knowledge for one reason only – because they are known by God. Grace is the mystery and the means of knowledge. The encounter with the Son and the Spirit whom God has sent, is better than the intellectual or emotional acceptance of this or that timeless and impersonal idea, and it prevails over deep experiences made without him at earthly sanctuaries, by the use of holy water, or in unfolding learnedness. Because the truth is one – even He, Jesus Christ – and can be found in him only, the plural truths or verities, not to speak of realities, never occurs in
the gospel. 'I am the truth,' said Jesus Christ, and, 'the truth will make you free' (14,6: 8,32).

The truth is to be done, and is being learned by doing (3,21; 7,17). Though it looks paradoxical, it is not unreasonable. While it solves neither the natural sciences' riddles nor the politicians' or any individual's day-to-day problems, and while it does not lead to personal perfection in detachment from daily sorrows, it is ethical and social, and calls for obedience from the depth of the heart.

In this gospel, just as e.g. in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, enlightenment and knowledge received by grace are identified with faith, even with confident faithfulness to God and steadfast love of brothers and sisters. Knowledge of truth is demonstrated by willing submission to the light, the power, the meaning that have invaded the world when Jesus Christ was born.

2.4 The Coincidence of Opposites
Long before the late medieval philosopher and statesman Nicholas of Cusa spoke of the coincidence of opposites, the Gospel of John has borne testimony to the gathering and comprehension in one person of what appeared to be mutually exclusive poles and forces. In contradistinction from Nicholas, the gospel does not intend to prepare the way for a general holistic worldview, but wants to describe exclusively what happened when Jesus Christ came.

The same person who appeared and was hailed as the Son of God, who was equipped with God's full power, who had eternal life in himself and promised to give it to others, who was never alone and at a loss concerning the meaning of his life — this person was also the son of the Jewish girl Mary, walking on country lanes and city streets, weeping and angry at the power of death, trembling in agony in Gethsemane, forsaken by all his friends except one and some few devoted women, dying a miserable death. The frequently used title 'Son of Man' may as well denote a glorious heavenly being as a miserable human individual; when the term occurs in the mouth of Jesus Christ, it indicates his way down into the predicament of sinners and his return up to the glory to which he was, is and always will be entitled. He is not just a personality like others but he is 'God's only Son' and 'Behold the Man' (1,18; 19,5). By his death he gives life, as especially the blood and water spouting from his dead body are meant to show (19,34–35). If there be any terminology by which John's message can be summed up, the phrases 'humanity of God' and 'theoanthropology,' as used in some later writings of Karl Barth, are most fitting.

The coincidence of divinity and humanity, as much as the way to life through death, cannot help sounding and looking paradoxical. As shown by the lack of comprehension, the opposition and defection of Jesus' learned contemporaries and most of his disciples (6,60–67; 16,1), already these people felt the sting and were unwilling to accept and bear it. Equally the interpretation of Jesus' shameful death as a triumph of his love and manifestation of his glory must at all times to all persons look absurd and scandalous. Indeed, the apostle Paul spoke of the 'scandal of the cross' (Gal. 5,11; cf. 1 Cor. 1,23), and later theologians, among them Tertullian, Pascal and Kierkegaard, have elaborated
upon the difference of Christ-centered theology from the wisdom of Athenian and later philosophers. Also the emphasis which John lays on the physical nature of the signs given by Jesus and on the resurrection of both Lazarus and the Lord, hurts tender religious feelings. The material world appears to be taken far too seriously for a religious book.

And yet the gospel’s author insists on hammering out that the oneness and togetherness of deity and humanity, of shame and glory, of the Spirit and miserable human beings have happened and appeared in history. According to John, in this paradox and scandal lies the sum and apex of all wisdom; here the gaps torn open by pessimistic dualistic systems and worldviews are not only bridged but filled in. To follow Jesus and to learn faith and love from him, means to find meaning and courage.

2.5 The Presence of Eternity

The Gospel of John does not offer a timeless definition of history, neither does it conceptualize eternity, as if, for instance, it could be equated with the infinite addition or prolongation of eons. The references made to eternal life, speak of the life which is the Father’s, which also is in the Son, and which is mediated through the One Sent by God, even his words and his Spirit (e.g., 1,4; 6,57,63,68; 11,25–26). In this gospel, eternity is a quality of life rather than a quantity, as C.H. Dodd has shown in his comments on the pertinent passages. Resurrection, for this reason, is never explained as entrance into a ‘life after death’ which would have once more the restrictions of existence in time. In fact, it is the triumph of life over death by the final and total revelation of God’s being and love. Eternal is what God is and does; eternity is his gift; it is communion with him.

Under the influence of the teaching of the Pharisees, at the time of Jesus pious Jews met the shock caused by untimely death not only with grief but also by the hope for resurrection ‘on the last day.’ They hoped for the future coming of the hour of redemption (Jn 11,24). Jesus affirms the trust in life’s victory but adds a distinctive qualification: during all phases of his ministry, he proclaims that the hour fervently expected has come and is now (4,23; 5,25; 12,31; 13,1; 17,1,5; 19,30). History, out of its own dynamics and potentials, does not produce this hour. Only when Jesus is present and active, then it has come. ‘I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live’ – so Jesus responds to the expression of grief and hope, and then he raises a dead man from the grave (11,25–44). Resurrection Now – this means, now is the judgment of this world (12,31).

When, according to the last two chapters of the gospel, Jesus himself is raised from his biologically, juridically and administratively ascertained death on the cross, and when he re-appears on successive Sundays, again an act of God is described that makes history in the midst of and despite the normal development of other historical events. His resurrection and appearance made the disciples understand what had sounded and looked incomprehensible during Jesus earthly ministry (2,22, etc). Because he was raised from the dead, his own message and the witness to him went out into the world, and the Gospel of John was written. Without the resurrection, uncounted people would have succumbed to despair; but resurrection gave them confidence in forgiveness of their sins and energy to begin a new life and to work for spiritual and material change in the lives of oppressed
brothers and sisters. From the NOW preached in the gospel they have learned that even their own time is God's time, and that their own lives can make good sense.

For a time, rationalistic scholars considered resurrection accounts and faith in resurrection a product and expression of an old-fashioned world-view which included reliance on myths. Mythology was supposedly reflected in miracle stories, in the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death, and in the resurrection reports. A responsible modern interpreter had to apply to the Johannine texts the hermeneutical method of 'de-mythologizing' in order to do justice to John's true intention. Yet though the concern of this school looks good to many, its program and results are problematic. For precisely what might have been mythological or magical in the nature and the accounts of miracles, of sacrifice and resurrection, has been cast and renewed and thereby completely changed by Jesus Christ himself, according to John's gospel. The miracles are signs for something much greater than is inherent in supernatural happenings, the death on the cross is a demonstration of total love, and the resurrection is confirmed by the eyes, the hands, the inspiration and the faith of surprised women and sceptical men. Resuscitations in myths do not have eyewitnesses. But what has happened now, by the coming of Jesus Christ, is the end of mythological fantasy, tragedy or victory. It has brought more than only a glimpse of eternity into time: a share in eternal life itself, communion with God himself.

The proclamation of the presence of eternity neither belittles nor nullifies expectations given to Israel at earlier times. Also it is not limited to fulfilling only Jewish hopes. Therefore a narrow concept of 'realized eschatology' fails to do justice to all the gospel has to say. Mentioned are also ultimate events which are still in the process of realization and wait for completion on a coming day. C.H. Dodd (1954, p.449, fn. 1) has explicitly acknowledged this when, unlike R. Bultmann, he does not attribute to a late redactor the passages speaking of the future judgment, the future resurrection, and the future (second) coming of Jesus Christ (5,25–27; 6,39, 54; 21, 22–23, etc). As yet unfulfilled promises hang over the already completed manifestation of glory. What is already now, has not exhausted the living God's faithfulness as if God could now go into retirement. Rather the fulfillment includes in it events that have not yet taken place. History has not ended with Jesus Christ's death and resurrection; there is a subsequent holy history under the aegis of the Holy Spirit which stretches to the day of Jesus Christ's return. The message of the gospel invites us to wakefulness and watchfulness, not to the sleep of saturated religious possessors on comfortable pillows.

3. A DESTRUCTIVE AND A CONSTRUCTIVE IMPACT 
ON NON-ULTIMATES

3.1 Crisis of Religion

The coming, work and word of Jesus Christ found heavy opposition which culminated in the crucifixion. 'He came into his own, and his own people did not accept him' (1,11). The gospel amazes its readers by insisting that resistance to God's messenger, the Son, arose from sources and forces other than lofty or cheap philosophy, priests in the service of idols, pagan official cults, secret mystery societies, or sober juridical and political considerations. Also immorality or materialism are but rarely denoted as the grounds of
opposition. Those who said, ‘We have a law, and by that law he ought to die’ (19,7; cf. 8,5), refer to the law given by God through Moses, and they care for the survival of God’s chosen people which depends on obeisance to the law (1,17; 7,17; 11,50–53). Established and organized religion with its claim upon divine revelation, election and institution, rather than a form of secularism or atheism feels attacked and threatened by the appearance, the actions and the pronouncements of Jesus Christ. It is this religion that hits back at him with all weapons at its disposal. Holy Writ and splendid Jerusalem festivals, tradition-sanctioned Bible interpretation and high hopes, expert discernment of good and evil, clever management of critical situations, by such means the guardians of the ancestors’ piety and devotion seek to repel the impact of Jesus on ‘the crowd who do not know the law’ and who are condemned as being ‘accursed’ (7:49).

The gospel depicts Jesus as a frequent participant in temple festivals; on the temple precincts his conflicts with the juridical, theological and cultical hierarchy reach their peak. Jesus himself speaks of a crisis which comes with him; not in vain those listening to him are split into groups of believers and unbelievers. Because the subtle or passionate opponents are identified as Jews, leaders of the Jews, Pharisees or Highpriests, and crowds in Jerusalem, the gospel has been labeled anti-Judaistic. In fact, however, throughout Israel’s history, it has been and is the recognition mark of a true prophet that he is a sharper critic of his own people, its temple and perversions of its worship, than of pagan nations, their idolatry and immorality. The narrations of Jesus’ interaction with the official religious cult, and of the rejection of this messenger by the leaders of his people, is a continuation and summit of many stories told in the Old Testament (cf. Acts 7:9–53). The intention of John’s gospel is most aptly unfolded in F. Dostoevsky’s ‘The Great Inquisitor’ in The Brothers Karamazov. Of all people the high-ranking representative of Christendom and churchmanship has neither room nor use for Jesus Christ. When religion replaces faith and love, it will and does always reject the crucified Lord – while in actuality speaking its own judgment.

Among the many forms of religion, one has proven specifically enticing to the Christian churches: the elevation of symbolism to the level of an efficient and unfailing instrument of salvation. The Gospel of John, for instance, has been used to prove that the eternal Logos’ and Son’s incarnation is extended and prolonged into the church sacraments, and that the one mediator of truth and salvation, Jesus Christ, must be and is being complemented by several additional ‘means of grace,’ especially baptism and communion. In following a lead given by Albert Schweitzer (1931, ch. 13) and in company with and with the applause of numerous Roman-Catholic interpreters, though without enhancing the role of ‘sacramental mysticism,’ Oscar Cullman (1953 and 1956) has found on almost every page of John’s gospel references to the sacraments. Every mention of water and bread, of eating and drinking was understood to indicate that the Holy Spirit does come, even in the time of the church, in, over, through and with the material elements, if only they are used the right way and received by the correct faith. The sacraments were therefore understood to provide powerful and effective actualization and application of the Christ event and its meaning. This way the church, its tradition, its orthodox faith, its clerics have been made the actual guardians and mediators of grace.

And yet, the message of John does not culminate in ecclesiasticism and its hidden or
plain basis: sacramentalism. For in this gospel Jesus Christ is the only visible word and effective sign. He alone fully reveals what he is and effects; and he calls into being and produces what he signifies. Here the incarnate, crucified, raised and Spirit-spending Son of God is the one and only sacrament. The complete and perfect work of Jesus Christ is not in need of crutches and other supplements, least of all of an almost magical combination or transformation of Spirit and matter by clerical and liturgical manipulation. This gospel is all in favor of devout service, but the worship at which it aims consists of prayer and preaching, of praise and acts of love (4,20–24; 13,1–17; 6,63; 21,15–18). The Jewish people of the time of Jesus did expect the advent of a redeemer anointed by God, though their specific expectations varied widely. They did not place their trust upon a past, present or future sacramental combination of time and eternity, earthly matter and heavenly substance. Certainly Jesus Christ did not come to provide them with mysterious cultic exercises.

3.2 Affirmation of Israel's Mission
The gospel's highly critical reports and remarks about the negative reaction of many of the foremost and most prominent Jews have already been mentioned. Are they seeds and signs of a definite distinction and separation, perhaps also of a necessary or unavoidable animosity and enmity between the Christian churches and Judaism? During a pointed dispute Jesus calls the devil the Jews' father, instead of supporting their self-conscious claim to be Abraham's children (8, 39–44), and there are many other moments of sharp conflict. But the dramatic antithetical passages do not prevent John from stating clearly, even in their contexts, that many of the crowd, and even many of the rulers believed in Jesus (2,23; 7,31; 8,30–31; 10,42; 11,45; 12,11,42). The fact that by his words and deeds Jesus caused dissent and schism (7,43; 9,16; 10,19), reveals that there was no unanimity against or in favor of Jesus. Only a part of Israel is depicted as blind and deaf, obdurate and willing to have the man from Nazareth killed. More important in Jewish history than erring and criminal official leaders and than maddening crowds who give them their applause, has always been the minority of a remnant. For the remnant's sake, in the end, the whole people is often saved from disaster, and for a new demonstration of grace.

Jesus finds among the Jews a Galilean who is 'an Israelite in whom there is no guile' (1:47), and from Israel's citizens he selects his twelve disciples. Though by night and in one case only after Jesus' death, two members of the highest Jewish council find their way to him. The festival crowd which hollers in Jerusalem for his crucifixion, seems to quench the voices of an earlier crowd which had enthusiastically hailed Jesus, when he entered Jerusalem, as 'the King of Israel,' coming in the name of the Lord (12,13; 1:47). According to the inscription on the cross, Jesus died because he was the 'King of the Jews.' If Jewish leaders did not like this title, the pagan Pontius Pilate still insisted on letting it stand.

In summary, it is one of the intentions of John to show that when the eternal word became incarnate, it chose the body and appearance of a Jew. Jesus was a Jew: this is the real, by far not yet exhausted mystery of the 'historical Jesus.' Jesus helped his disciples to realize that the Hebrew Scriptures gave testimony to him, and he went as far as to declare to an almost pagan Samaritan woman that 'salvation is from the Jews' (1,11;
5, 39, 45–47: 4, 22). Though some self-styled and prominent ‘children of Abraham’ have chosen the devil’s negative attitude toward him (8:44) and make a plot to have him killed, they cannot help to fulfill the Scriptures and exert a prophetic function: it was God’s will that Jesus should die for his own people and for many dispersed children of God (11, 47–53). According to the chapters 18–19 of John’s gospel, the Roman Pontius Pilate, and the Christians represented by Judas, Peter and the fleeing disciples, are as guilty as the Jews of the rejection and execution of Jesus.

A statement ascribed to an 18th century rationalist avers that the Jews are the only proof of God’s existence. Indeed, following John’s gospel neither pious church members nor any other persons can find truth without acknowledging and accepting solidarity with the Jews. Among all humankind, this people was created and maintained through millennia in order to give evidence that the creator of heaven and earth acts in history and shapes history to his will, that he overcomes human sin by his grace, that he gives meaning to life and a good sense to daily existence. A true testimony to the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ has often to be paid for by suffering. The particular contribution which Jesus made to the history of Israel was that through his death he has made ‘sheep not from this stable,’ even Samaritans and Gentiles, join in Israel’s election, worship, history and destiny. There is nothing better than becoming a witness to the gracious judgment of God, to the wisdom of his ways toward humankind and the whole creation, and to the gift of love for him and among one another. Israel’s mission among the nations has its crown and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Because the Gospel of John reveals this clearly, it cannot be considered a specimen of anti-Judaistic literature.

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