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Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel? Some Considerations

Samuel Wilson

"The strongest impression that one gains from reading the Fourth Gospel's treatment of the Jews is of its polemic attitude." /2 This is R.E. Brown's verdict on the subject and indeed he emphasizes it more strongly when he writes: "The bitter character of the polemics can easily be seen in passages like 8.44-47, 54-55. The disciples of Moses and the disciples of Jesus (9.28) are locked in struggle." /3

That such a judgment is not only possible but justifiable, and not only a matter of theological debate but even of practical and political significance, can be seen from the use made of the gospel in anti-jewish propaganda and prejudice eg by the Nazis. In an article in the Expository Times, the Rev F.A. Evelyn, dealing with the Nazi vilification of the Jews, wrote, "All do not know, and many may be shocked to learn that a favourite text-book of anti-jewish propaganda is the Gospel according to St John. Here, say the Nazis, is a piece of scripture that needs no editing to bring it into line with our views. In it Jesus and the Jews confront each other in antagonism and hatred. The feud between them brought him to death." /4 Even though he held this to be "a complete misconception of the Fourth Gospel" he could nevertheless write, "I believe that the atmosphere of bitter Jewish opposition to the nascent church in which the author wrote, has led him into a way of telling his story which, if not itself totally erroneous, gives ground - as recent events show - for really deadly error." /5 Scholarship and experience alike show that this estimate of the nature of the controversial attitude to the Jews in John's Gospel has truth in it. But does it represent the whole truth? A brief review of the various sayings and actions of Jesus, and the usage and outlook of the evangelist show another side to the debate.

In discussing the background of the thought of the Fourth Gospel Lindars highlights a shift in emphasis away from speculative Hellenistic philosophy as the main influence. He writes, "More recently attention has been turned to the Jewish background, especially in the work of Hoskyns and Barrett. This has received striking confirm- /

-ation from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls", and he is in no doubt about the correctness of this change for he accepts "that it is clear that the author derives his thought from the Jewish and Christian tradition." /6 The same conclusion is reached with regard to the language of the Gospel and its general characteristics. Dodd asserts that "the case for an underlying semitic idiom is irresistible." /7 and A.M. Hunter concludes that "the Gospel is in many ways redolent of Palestine." /8

It would be surprising if any account, however sketchy, of the life of Jesus coming from the pen of one of his Galilaean disciples did not have the general atmosphere and characteristics of Judaism and a certain dependence on it. Indeed the absence of such a feature would almost automatically provide a prima facie case for deciding that the witness is suspect and its reliability doubtful.

In support of his thesis that the Fourth Gospel is an appeal to Diaspora Jews "to believe", ie to accept Jesus as true Messiah, J.A.T. Robinson appeals to Gal 2.9 so that Paul may be called in as evidence that John's primary concern is "with the Jews." This verse makes it plain that "the reputed pillars" of the Jerusalem church, namely, James, Peter and John recognized the validity of the Pauline Gentile mission. While "they should go to the circumcised", Robinson, with justification, holds that it is clear "that at that time at any rate he was committed to evangelism among the Jews." /9 After seeking to substantiate his interpretation from the Gospel itself, he delivers his verdict on John: "He is not all things to all men but limits himself voluntarily as an apostle to the circumcision. Always he speaks as Jew and indeed like Jesus as a Jew of Palestine." /10 While Robinson may overstate his case and may build too much on a rather selective and subjective exegesis, it is nevertheless both salutary and necessary that the general truth of this background of John should be emphasized and appreciated. There is considerable evidence in the Gospel of an attitude towards the Jews that is both sympathetic and positive, despite, as Robinson puts it, "the statement which is constantly made that St. John's Gospel is the most anti-Jewish of the four." /11 To acknowledge this may give added thrust and importance to any hostility he may show toward the Jews.

Although the prologue can be so read as to imply that John saw the gospel and the new age in Christ as a creation de novo, there does not appear to be any effort on the part of the evangelist to imply or prove that all connexions with the past, and particularly with the Jewish hope and promise, should be, or had been, severed. Jesus is always presented as "The Christ" or "The Messiah" and, as has been seen, the purpose of the gospel is to bring the reader to acknowledge him in this way. Lindars makes the point strongly when he writes, "There is no Marcionite attempt to cut the church from its Jewish moorings," and in the same context, he speaks of the "Jewish matrix."

But it is not only the church which is not detached. The same is true also of Jesus himself. Robinson told that "It is fundamental to the Gospel that Jesus himself is a Jew"(4.9), that he should distinguish Jews from Samaritans as "we" (4.22). /12 The Prologue declares that he came to "his own" who did not receive him (1.11) and at the end Pilate identifies him with his accusers, "Your own people handed you over to me." (1.35) Throughout his examination he is addressed as "King of the Jews" and, as such, he is crucified. Throughout his life he is depicted as a faithful Jew who accepts voluntarily the obligation of attendance at synagogue and Temple and of taking part in various Feasts.

While there may be a certain polemical intent in 1.47 "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit," it is clear that, for Jesus, there are exceptions to the general denunciation. It would certainly appear that his use of "Israel" or "Israelite" is as a title of honour or respect and is a recognition of what is good in the character and traditions of his own people. The same acknowledgement would appear to be present in the conversation with Nicodemus and particularly in 3.10 where he is called "The Teacher of Israel". The Baptist makes or recognizes this distinction between Israel and Jews when in 1.31 he defines the purpose of his coming to manifest Jesus to Israel. Brown describes this usage as "a favourable term describing the real succession to the OT heritage." /13 Even more striking, however, is the cumulative and inescapable evidence of the widespread influence of the OT on the gospel and its writer. At face value there would/

appear to be less direct dependence on it than in the other gospels. Only about twenty quotations can be identified but as A.M. Hunter writes, "This is no measure of his debt to it" /14 since its language, thought forms and images permeate the whole book.

The opening words "in the beginning", as Hunter points out, take us back to Genesis 1.1 and set the tone for what follows. /15 Indeed Brown quotes Hoskyns as showing "how Genesis influenced John, even though John never explicitly cites it." The narrative of the first days of creation and of the first man and woman is the backbone of John 1.1-2.10, and the theme of mother Eve returns as Jesus hangs on the Cross in 19.25-30. There are references to Abraham (8.31ff), Isaac (3.16) and Jacob (4.5ff). It is generally agreed that 1.51 "You will see the heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." is a clear allusion to Jacob's dream of the ladder from earth to heaven in Genesis 28.12. To Brown the connection "seems convincing...especially if we recall the previous reference to Jacob-Israel in the national scene." /16

On the wider question of the OT quotations in the gospel Freed has shown that John not only used the traditional and commonly used proof texts but that he also includes quotations not used elsewhere in the NT and, in particular, he draws from the Psalms, Isaiah, Exodus and Numbers. He concludes that, on the basis of his study, "His method presupposes and reveals a thorough training in the Jewish scriptures and tradition and a thorough knowledge of their content." As well as having a detailed knowledge of the scriptures, Freed finds that John is not confined to any particular version of them. The LXX appears to be basic but he also seems to use the masoretic text and to be familiar with the tradition of the Targums, though he made an "original and creative use" of them. /17

Within this use of the OT attention can be drawn not only to his reverence for it but also to his treatment of the figures from it who appear in the gospel. Schnackenburg points to the fact that they are treated with respect even though the superiority of Jesus is constantly brought out. /18 His attitude of esteem for Abraham (8.58), Jacob (4.12) and Moses (1.17;9.28) is instanced./

Wilson, Antijudaism, IBS 1, January 1979

Perhaps even more impressive and convincing evidence of the basic outlook of John is provided by the constant echoes of themes and motifs which shape his thoughts and mould his expression from the OT. These can be found eg in the list of titles applied to Jesus in ch.1: he who comes (v27); Lamb of God (v29), Son of God (v34), Rabbi (v38), Messiah and Christ (v41), him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote (v45) and King of Israel (v47) - all of them "figures in the gallery of OT expectations." /19

Moses and the Exodus also occupy a large and important place in the gospel. Glasson examines the use of the Exodus and wilderness imagery as an important "key to the understanding of the Fourth Gospel", and finds direct use of this feature in Christ and the Torah (1.17), the Serpent in the wilderness (3.14), the Manna and the Bread of life (6.30f), the living water and the rock (7.37-39) and in other less obvious but equally important features. /20

Important OT ideas are present, too, in the Shepherd (ch10) the Vine (ch15)- the "ego eimi" sayings and also in the concepts from the Wisdom literature with which Schnackeburg finds "the strongest links" /21 and of which Brown writes: "We shall show...that the most decisive influence on the form and style of the discourses of Jesus in the FG comes from the speeches of divine wisdom in books like Proverbs, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon." /22

There is also an obvious familiarity with contemporary Rabbinic Judaism which shows itself in his knowledge of legal precepts and their rabbinic interpretation. Examples are found in 7.23f re circumcision on the Sabbath and in 7.51 on the regulations about hearing the accused. Lindars points out that "the discourse on ch6 turns on the Rabbinic equation of the Manna with the law given at Sinai, and also includes a specific Rabbinic argument (6.45)." /23 Schnackenburg, too, sees evidence of this knowledge and contact in eg the hidden Messiah (7.27); Rabbinic disputation technique (chs 3 and 8); interpretation of scripture (6.31ff; 8.56; 12,41) and takes this to show "a familiarity with the mentality of official Judaism." /24

Lindars draws attention to the "numerous topographical details of Jerusalem and its environs which suggest either personal acquaintance with the sites or at least very detailed information." /25 He mentions, too, the author's familiarity with the Jewish feasts and the ceremonies connected with them,

(7.37), ritual purification (2.6) and the Samaritans (4.20-25). From these it would appear that the evangelist had not only knowledge of scripture and traditions of Judaism but also an awareness of its contemporary expression in a real situation he, or his source, knew well.

The possibility of knowledge of, and contact with, a most important aspect of contemporary Judaism, namely Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls seems to be indicated and the evidence from the source anchors the evangelist more firmly than ever in a setting that was overwhelmingly Jewish of one form or another.

To recognize this sympathetic treatment, this debt to the scriptures and the past, and this interest in his own time and surroundings, will help to ensure a fair treatment of the subject of John's intention towards the Jews and will prevent a distorted picture being given either of him or of them.

It would be strange, however, if there were no traces of conflict "since Jesus addressed himself primarily to the people of Israel and tried to bring them to believe that the kingdom of God was present in his ministry", and the gospel must be expected to contain elements of this "either in the form of a missionary appeal to Israel or in terms of an apologetic to answer the Jewish rejection of Jesus. There are instances of this in Matthew, but in the setting up of the contrast between Christian and Jew, John may well be the strongest among the Gospels." /26 To sustain this hypothesis, Brown highlights some of the areas in which opposition arose, and then he comments, "Now, plausibly, some of this stems from Jesus' own outlook on his ministry, but why this emphasis in John?" /27

To attempt to give an answer to this question it is necessary to examine the main occasions and incidents in the Gospel where Jesus and the Jews confront one another so that an overall, yet detailed, picture of John's argument may be discovered and represented. One significant and widely recognized difference between John and the synoptic gospels is that in the synoptics hostility towards Jesus comes usually from particular parties. In John his opponents are simply the "Jews", and the term hoi Ioudaioi is used 71 times in the gospel against a total of 16 times in the synoptics (5 Mt and Lk; 6 Mk) with no attempt to explain what is meant. On many occasions/

there is no hostile motive involved; in 4.22 it is applied to Jesus himself, "a Jew" as distinct from a Samaritan, and it is used in a neutral sense where it refers to the feasts or customs of the "Jews" as in 2.6,13;7.2. It appears, too, especially in chs 11 and 12 that it has a local colouring and means "the inhabitants of Judaea." /28

Why then did John use what could be a relatively colourless term to convey so obviously a sense of hostility and opposition? Why does it appear so infrequently in the synoptics and why, on the other hand, do some of the distinctive and influential Jewish groups, so evident in the synoptics, not appear at all in John eg the Scribes, elders, and Sadducees? It is generally agreed that it cannot be a lack of knowledge or faulty memory on the part of John. /29 It is much more likely that "the evangelist is guided by a certain judgment he has formed on Judaism." /30 What is the nature of that judgment, how does he reveal it, and on what grounds did he form it? In the examination of the evidence, it has to be remembered that there may be occasions where polemic against the "Jews" is present even though they are not identified by name, just as we have seen, conversely, that the term does not inevitably involve a hostile attitude.

One such incident is, significantly, at the marriage feast in Cana, described in 2.11 as "the beginning of signs", and in which the historical circumstances seem to be subordinated to a very clear theological motive. At first glance the miracle appears to be an answer to human need in a way that is supernatural and abundant. It is, however, generally accepted that in John's intention, there is present a much deeper meaning, eg Jesus' words "my hour has not yet come" (2.4) is an "hour" implying usually passion and glorification; or the reference to the water jars as "according to the purification of the Jews" (v6) and, above all, in the comment of the evangelist that in this first miracle, "he manifested his glory and his disciples believed on him". This fits in with the declared purpose of John in 20.31 to bring about faith by his account of the life of Jesus. Bultmann recognizes this other significance when he states: "For the evangelist the meaning of the story is not simply in the miraculous event." /31 Brown, too, looks beneath the surface and finds that "The primary focus is, as in all Johannine stories, on Jesus as one sent by the Father to bring salvation to the/



world. What shines through is his glory, and the only reaction that is emphasized is the belief of the disciples"

/32 He quotes Schnackenburg as bringing out clearly "the centrality of christology in the Cana narrative." /33 Marsh makes the same point: "For the central issue is... the amazing thing which happens when he who is the bridegroom, the real, genuine bridegroom, attends the festival of a Jewish wedding, a marriage ceremony among the people of God, and transforms it." /34 From the variety of meanings that are possible, it seems that the evangelist wishes to stress this element of transformation, replacement or fulfilment. Lightfoot comments: "In the order which he gives, the Lord shows his readiness to make use of the old order, so far as may be; it is his purpose, whenever possible, not to destroy but to fulfil." /35 Lindars widens the argument when he contends that: "Here there is more emphasis on the inadequacy of the old." /36 In his comments on 2.3 ("They have no wine"), he sees the incident as a very pointed polemic - "This presumably represents the failure of the Jewish law which, in its turn, stands for the inadequacy of all religion before the coming of Christ." (Bultmann) /37 Bultmann indeed states: "their (ie the Jews) religion stands for all false or temporary s alvation beliefs." /38

Brown also argues for this when he writes: "In view of this consistent theme of replacement, it seems obvious that in introducing Cana as the first in a series of signs to follow, the evangelist intends to call attention to the replacement of the water prescribed for Jewish purification by the choicest of wines. The replacement is a sign of who Jesus is, namely, the one sent by the Father who is now the only way to the Father. All previous religions, institutions, customs and feasts lose meaning in his presence." /39

Just as Bultmann argued from John's viewpoint, so Brown takes the vantage-point of both the gospel reader and the disciples. For them "the symbols at Cana are familiar and meaningful symbols." The wedding in the OT eg Isa 54.4-8; 62.4-5 "symbolizes the messianic days" and is a picture on which Jesus drew on other occasions (Mt 8.11; Lk 22.16-18); cf new wine in old skins.

It is more than a coincidence that this/

occurred at the beginning of the synoptic account of the ministry of Jesus (Mk 2.22), just as the same idea is used in John. Lindars holds that the headwaiter's statement, "You have kept the good wine until now", can be understood as the proclamation of the Messianic days." The abundance of wine, too, is "one of the consistent OT figures for eschatological joy (Amos 9.13-14; Hos 14.7; Jer 31.12)." /40

There is clear evidence, then, to support the thesis that the incident as presented and understood could be taken as a very clear judgment on the barrenness and inadequacy of Judaism. But it must also be seen as a fulfilment and not only as a replacement. It was "Jewish" water which became "Christian" wine through the action of Jesus. He did not dissociate himself from what he received and had gone before but acknowledged his debt to Judaism when it was properly understood and when it allowed itself to be given its full meaning by him.

If "there can be little doubt that he (John) meant to show the supersession of Judaism in the glory of Jesus" /41 at the beginning of the ministry in Galilee, there can be even less question of the intention of the evangelist, and of Jesus himself in the cleansing of the Temple after Cana at the start of his ministry. (2.13-22). Only a theological motive can dictate and explain the placing of the incident at the start of the gospel where the synoptics place it at the end. By its nature it would be more readily understandable at the climax than at the beginning of the ministry. /42 Lightfoot contends that one reason for the Johannine order "may be that it is part of his purpose to represent the judgment or discrimination effected by the presence and the work of the Lord among men as in operation from the outset of his activity, and the cleansing of the Temple, understood as a suitable means of calling attention to this aspect of his work." /43 In the action of Jesus there is no more "completion or perfection of the Jewish order...it is opposition to the old order and (in consequence of the attitude and future action of those who now accost him (2.19-20)) is destined to lead to its replacement." /44 Certainly there can be little doubt that, for the evangelist, this act "indicates a radical break with the religion of Judaism." /45

Once again, however, it is not only the action of Jesus which is important, but the understanding of it by the witnesses to it as well as by John and his readers. Barrett writes of Jesus in this context that "he reveals himself authoritatively in the Temple, but his authority appears even more clearly in the words attributed to him than his acts." /46 But even his actions appear to be explained by precedents for them. Jeremiah, eg, warned the priests that the Temple had become "a den of thieves" (Jer 7.11) and prophesied that God would destroy the Jerusalem sanctuary. Zechariah (14.21) foresees that on the Day of the Lord there would be no merchant in the Temple and Malachi (3.1) sees the Lord's intervention in the Temple, following a strong castigation of the abuses in Levitical worship, and Isaiah sets forth the prophetic ideal of the Temple being a perfect house of prayer for all nations. /47 Brown argues that on this basis the action of Jesus would have been perfectly understandable "in the light of the claim that he was a prophet, even Messiah." /48

And yet this is precisely what the "Jews" fail to understand. In 2.18 they demand a "sign". Lindars explains their demand in this way: "Jesus acts like the Messiah and they want convincing proof that he is the Messiah. The real point at issue is Jesus' authority for his action." /49 By their request they show they do not recognize him and do not understand the scriptures. They cannot even see that Jesus' action itself is "a sign, viz, of the coming destruction of the temple worship, and they presume to ask for that which, in truth, has just been granted." /50

And so, quickly and pointedly, the attack has been changed and it is the spiritual inadequacy of the Jews themselves, and not only of their worship, which is exposed. This is further revealed in their misunderstanding of the words of Jesus when he refuses to grant an authenticating sign. They interpret his words (2.19) in a material and superficial way (2.20). Barrett points out that such misunderstandings are very characteristic of John and are often, as here, more than a literary trick employed by a writer given to irony. They represent in miniature the total reaction of Judaism to Christ; the Jews perceived only what was superficially visible in Jesus and naturally rejected as absurd the suggestion that he is the Son of God; and if they

had penetrated beneath the surface they would have seen its truth." /51

The evangelist himself clearly shows some of what is under the surface by his additions to, and changes in, the narrative as compared with the syn. account. By his appeal to scripture in Ps 69(v17) which he introduces to show that zeal for the temple will destroy Jesus and bring about his death; by the expulsion of the sheep and cattle (v16) as an imperfect sacrifice; and by his reference in v19 to "three days" John brings the death and resurrection of Jesus into this context. Lightfoot supports this view. He writes "John has already brought the Lord's cleansing of the Temple into connection with his death. The self-oblation of the true Paschal Lamb must precede his resurrection " /52 There does not however appear to be any suggestion of self-oblation in the narrative. Indeed Lightfoot on the previous page (113), commenting on 2.19 writes that "the ambiguous answer conveys the truth that the Jews, in their unbelief, will themselves become the instruments in bringing about the sign which the Lord now offers them; for it is they who will 'lift up' the Son of Man (8.28). Thus the sign given will also be their judgment and their condemnation." Thus we have the first head-on encounter of Jesus and the "Jews". It is also the first example of what is typical of the gospel that those who meet Jesus, ipso facto come also into judgement; by their attitude to him, their words and works, they pass judgement on themselves, whether of acquittal or condemnation. We can agree that: "To speak generally...the final attitude seems to be implicit from the outset." /53

In the narrative, then, there is a number of meanings and interpretations. It is an act of condemnation of the methods and practices of Jewish worship, and a declaration that they are now superseded by a new order. It is, by implication at least, a revelation of the blindness and ignorance of the "Jews" of their own tradition and scripture and a pointed challenge to them that, in their unbelief, and their clinging to externals of religion, they will miss the glory in their midst and so will be responsible for the death of him whom God sent.

In his comments on the incident, John appears to make another polemical point. He writes "his disciples remembered" (2.17) and "When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered."(22) The disciples, too, could not

understand at the time the significance of what was happening and could not do so until after the Cross and Resurrection. Till then they were in the same position as the Jews. Marsh states that "as with the record of the miracle at Cana of Galilee, John is deliberately writing his story, not as seen from the beginning, but as seen from the end. For only in this way can the story have proper telling." /54 This is undoubtedly true of the understanding of the person and work of Jesus and of the scripture that bears witness to him. "The Jews who do not accept this key to understanding therefore cannot know either him or the Scriptures at all."

As at Cana, the incident ends with faith - "and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus spoke." (2.22) Once again the person of Jesus, not only his authority, is the vital factor in the evangelist's understanding, and the response or lack of it to the scriptures and to him is the distinguishing feature between "Jews" and "disciples."

The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus (3.1-21) might appear to be of a more conciliatory and positive nature. But this appearance is misleading for, while John "finds a representative of Judaism at its best...he cannot but expose his fateful inadequacy." /55 Lindars believes that "He represents official Judaism in a situation of openness before the claims of Christ. He may thus stand for the sort of response which was still possible in some Jewish circles when John wrote the first edition of his book." /56 It would seem that, in the context of the gospel, and as Nicodemus himself explains his visit, he represents the position of those mentioned in 2.23: "Many believed in his name, seeing the miracles he did," those who were "ready to believe in Jesus' name, yet really incapable as a Jew of full commitment of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God." /57

In John's account there is no clear predisposition to be prejudiced against Nicodemus, although he was "a ruler of the Jews." He appears in a good light in 7.50f and in 19.39 he is counted among the disciples.

In this nocturnal visit, however, he appears to have more/

of a representative than a personal role. He comes to Jesus with the ultimate question about salvation, and yet there are indications eg in the use of "we" (v11) that "the dialogue is really being conducted between the Church and the Synagogue." /58 Nevertheless, the favourable treatment serves only to highlight the telling points made against him by Jesus and the evangelist. It is eg of more than temporal significance that Nicodemus came by night (3.2). Brown reminds us that he consistently recalls this detail because of its symbolic import. Darkness and light symbolize the realm of evil, untruth and ignorance (cf 9.14;11.10)." /59 Both he and Lightfoot contrast Nicodemus, coming from darkness into light, with Judas who in 13.30 "finally forsakes the Lord in order to join the Jews and thus identifies himself with night."

This origin is reflected in his inability to understand<sup>760</sup> what Jesus is saying and his misunderstandings, so typical of the "Jews", are used by Jesus to give a full explanation of the truth. His coming to Jesus is an acknowledgement that he, a teacher, can learn from Jesus and that in him there is an answer he cannot find in Judaism. His question "How can this be?" (3.9) is a confession on the part of the "Jews" leader that he needs instruction, and the reply of Jesus emphasizes this. Lindars, commenting on Jesus' reply, "Are you a teacher of Israel and you do not know this?" (3.10), says "Jesus' reply is ironical; as a well-instructed Rabbi Nicodemus should have been in possession of the facts to enable him to understand Jesus' teaching and to acknowledge its authenticity. The fact that he does not, or perhaps will not, believe illustrates the failure of the Old Law." /61

Bultmann makes the same point even more sharply when he writes: "Jesus' answer makes it clear that the teachers of Israel can give no answer. They necessarily fail when they are faced with decisive questions." /62

The subject under discussion, too, would appear to be of more than conversational value. This is the first dialogue in the gospel; its first words are "Except a man is born from above....", especially when addressed to a man of Nicodemus' stature and background are a demand for "something more than an improvement in man; it means that man receives a new origin." Since, for John, the origin determines the goal, it follows that if a man, Nicodemus, is to find salvation, "he must start from another point...He must be reborn." /63

If this is true for Nicodemus, it is also true for the Judaism he represents even at its best. Once again we have a declaration that if Judaism is to find its true nature, it will not be through its own teachers who refuse to accept the true witness of Jesus because they cannot even judge "earthly things", never mind "heavenly things". It is only Jesus to whom Nicodemus comes who has the answer, yet Nicodemus disappears from the light and fails to recognize the one who, when lifted up like the serpent in the desert, (does John imply that even in the promised land, the Jews are really still there?) will bring eternal life to believers.

Once again the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus is stressed. The OT allusion is introduced to support and verify his claim and the Jewish teacher is pictured as one who misunderstands and does not respond to God's love and who in the position of judgment prefers the darkness to the light. Because it is Nicodemus who is involved the condemnation is even more severe.

The failure of Judaism is once more brought out. It cannot provide the answers to the ultimate questions or even to understand them when they are given. Once again even "a teacher of the Jews" cannot believe in spite of all his privileges and training. Not only is the truth of Jesus set forth but the necessity of faith as a prerequisite for knowing him and receiving him is clearly expressed.

In the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman by the well at Sychar (4.1-12), we move out of Jewish territory and, one would imagine, out of the realm of controversy with Judaism. Yet the theme is continued, partly because of the common ancestry of Jews and Samaritans, but chiefly because of the continuation of the leading ideas in the evangelist's mind. Barrett see the link with the previous sections in the idea "that in Jesus Judaism and the OT find their fulfilment ...and by the use of the term 'water'" (65

Another element calls for prior comment. While it may be arguable whether Jesus ever conducted a ministry in Samaria John is no more concerned only with historical 'facts' in this instance than he is in other places. Rather he presents Jesus as refusing to allow ceremonial and traditional regulations on contact with the Samaritan woman "to place a barrier between himself and the outcasts of society." /66 Whether we translate sunchrōntai (v9) as "have/

dealings with' or, as Daube suggests, "use in common", it is clear that Jesus was going beyond accepted Jewish attitudes and practice towards the Samaritans and was stepping outside the normal pattern of thought and behaviour. This is of particular significance, especially when in 4.22 he identifies himself with the Jews, and expresses a conventional Jewish opinion of the Samaritans viz that they don't know what they are worshipping, and in any case salvation is from the Jews - they are God's chosen people.

Bultmann comments on 4.7: "Jesus' request for water signified an abandonment of the Jewish viewpoint." /67 On 4.10 he writes: "The old distinction between Jews and Samaritans has lost its force in the light of the revelation which confronts man in Jesus." /68 John and his readers must have been conscious that this meeting was an attack on Jewish exclusiveness and privilege, and this seems more in keeping with the purpose of the gospel and its tone so far than the view of Lindars who argues: "Jesus affirms the Jewish attitude to the Samaritans at the same time as claiming to supersede both (vss 21-23). If John has Jewish readers in mind, it would never do to give the impression that Jesus sided with the Samaritans (cf 8.48), nor do the synoptic Gospels suggest that he did so. So the woman has to be shown to be morally inferior to the Jews, and to this extent she is a representative of how they felt about all Samaritans," /69 His hypothetical question on the destination of the Gospel begs the question! How much more would this incident prejudice his contact with, and influence on, the Jews than for example the cleansing of the temple? Indeed, rather than showing the woman to be "morally inferior" he seems to put her on a higher plane than most of the Jews encountered so far, in that she listens to Jesus, recognizes him and shares her knowledge with others so that her testimony became the basis of their faith. Once again pisteuein (believe) occurs as the end product or requirement of recognizing Jesus and it is found in the Samaritans where it was lacking in the Jews. /70 The interview serves also to advance some of the arguments already encountered. There is the contrast between the old order and the new - once again as at Cana water is involved. In 4.10-15 there is a double contrast between the "living water" of the spring and the "water of life" Jesus gives; and between Jacob and Jesus as givers of water. /71 Jesus thus establishes the/



superiority of the gift which he offers and evokes from her a recognition that he is the source of true life. What comes from the well cannot be compared with what he gives. Ironically in the question of 4.12 - and in expectation of a negative reply ("Are you greater than our Father, Jacob?") - the woman inadvertently recognizes the point which the evangelist seeks to convey, namely, that Jesus is "greater than Jacob" both in the quality and quantity of his gift to men.

In this, as in previous chapters, John has made it clear that Jesus surpassed and displaced Jewish worship and what Judaism could give. Now he shows that he transcends the Samaritan worship also. True worship cannot be confined to the locality or the traditions of either Jerusalem or Gerizim, but will be "in spirit and in truth" (v23). Marsh reveals the deeper and surely polemical intent in these words when he writes: "But now the evangelist makes it uncompromisingly and unmistakably clear that the transcendence of all that has gone before, and of all that survives of what has gone before, is taking place in the very person and presence of Jesus himself, Son of Man, among men. The three words "and now is" (kai nun estin) can have no other implication than that in virtue of the presence of Jesus himself, the "future fulfilment" of Jewish and Samaritan (and Hellenistic) religion is taking place in an historic human life. Jesus Christ is the "place" where men of any time or place, can at last be free of "place" in their worship of God..." /72 The exclusivism of the Jews (and of the Samaritans) has been replaced by the exclusivism of Jesus which yet includes all who will recognize him. The old trappings are dispensed with, and a true spiritual relationship is established between God and man in Jesus. Lindars sees this as "tantamount to a messianic claim and a demand for personal allegiance to himself", and he believes, on the basis of 4.25, that the purpose of the discourse "is to draw the listeners to fix their gaze on Jesus who is the giver of the water of life and the agent of the true worship in the Spirit." /73 Even his admission to being the Messiah, and his use of the phrase ego eimi is, therefore, an invitation to the reader to pass beyond the flesh of Jesus to his origin in God and to understand his work and person in the light of it," /74 Thus elements already noted are present and Jesus' centrality for salvation for all men. The use of

Messianic revelation formula demands a decision on his nature and person, Again, too, the result of the words and actions of Jesus is faith. "Many believed" (v39) and "We believe for we ourselves have heard and know that this man is truly the Saviour of the world." In this concluding section 4.39-42, John clearly distinguishes between the faith which depends on the testimony of others - "because of the word of the woman who bore testimony" (v39) - and was therefore imperfect, and that which was based on the word of Jesus himself - "because of his word" (v41) and was therefore sure (We have heard and know). But in the context of the Gospel it surely has the additional point that those who were prepared to listen could and did come to faith and recognized that Jesus was the sole source and the substance of their faith. Brown believes that John is even more critical in his conclusion. "We can scarcely believe", he writes, "that the evangelist did not mean for us to contrast the unsatisfactory faith of the Jews in 2.23-25, based on the superficial admiration of miracles with the deeper faith of the Samaritans based on the word of Jesus. Nicodemus, the Rabbi of Jerusalem, could not understand Jesus' message that God had sent the Son into the world so that the world might be saved through him (3.19), yet the peasants of Samaria readily came to know Jesus as Saviour of the world."

/75 There could scarcely be a more damning indictment of the blindness and prejudice of the Jews than this, nor a stronger statement of the universal significance of Jesus. Lindars sums up the aim of the evangelist in these words: "He is anxious to show that the new life in Christ inevitably breaks out of its Jewish setting, and is as universal as the light that enlightens every man (1.9)". /76

There is a sharp division of opinion as to the significance of the healing of the official's son in 4.46-54. Brown and Bultmann hold that it is not meant to contain any reference to the Gentile mission, though Brown does concede "However, even though John's story has nothing specific to do with the salvation of the Gentiles, we shall see that this theme may be represented by subtle allusions." /77 He believes that theological reasons have dictated the position of the story and he sees its purpose to be the presentation of a different type of faith from that of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. /78

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Barrett /79 and Lightfoot /80 take the view that the official is a Gentile and that the narrative is intended to indicate the spread of the influence of Jesus and the nature of the faith of the Gentile. Perhaps the strongest advocate of this position is Marsh who argues cogently for his interpretation. For him the incident shows that "the farther Jesus moves from Jerusalem the farther he goes from the typical Jew, the more he seems to receive the sort of response he seeks. This fact disclosed not so much in words as in the actual progression of the gospel story, is John's equivalent to the synoptic estimate of the centurion at Capernaum: Jesus said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." (Lk 7.9 and par). /81 Indeed he even seems to see it as the Johannine version of the synoptic miracle.

Marsh believes also that it is important to recognize that this miracle takes place at Cana where Jesus had already shown the inadequacy of Judaism and on this occasion he was proclaiming that "even a Gentile may share...in the life that Jesus brings and gives." He sees close parallels with the healing of the widow's son at Zarephath by Elijah (1 Kings 17), and especially with the words of Elijah there (v23): "See, your son lives." Marsh argues that just as Jesus has already been declared to be greater than Jacob, so this incident declares, "greater than Elijah is here." /82 Such a meaning would not be foreign to the intention of the evangelist as we have discovered it so far.

It does appear certain that the main function of the narrative is to show the faith of the official and possibly even to contrast it with the Jewish setting of the first miracle in the same town. There is no demand for a sign. He trusted Jesus and his word and the result of his son's restoration is: "and he believed and all his house." (53) Two comments can be made on this. Firstly on the use of pisteuō (believe) which here apparently indicates "full conversion." Marsh contends: "The absolute use of 'believed' is deliberate and significant. The Gentile had achieved what neither the Jew nor the Samaritan had gained." /83 Secondly, on the use of "and his whole house." This phrase is reminiscent of the Gentile mission of the early church (cf Acts 11.14) /

16.15,31;18.8) and this allusion could give support to Marsh's view.

All the commentators agree that in this section John once again brings together "belief" and "life" and, notably in v50, "Go your way; your son lives. The man trusted the word Jesus spoke to him and went his way." Marsh comments on the verse, "and so it is that the two great theme of the story are clothed in significant incident, belief and life...two of the dominant themes of the whole gospel." /84 They are also "dominant themes" in all the incidents of polemic so far examined and whether they refer here to Gentiles or not, they certainly do, once again, present the absolute centrality of Jesus in both spheres. Marsh sums it up in this way: "He made it abundantly plain that the whole issue of life or death...hangs upon the attitude to Christ of those who meet him; if they believe in his name, they receive the gift of life, but if they do not believe then they place themselves under the condemnation which is death." /85 Any other basis for faith or life is thereby repudiated.

It may be Marsh makes too much of the possible identification of the "official" with the centurion of Lk 7, but it is equally possible that Brown and Bultmann make too little of it. Whether the man was Jew or Gentile, it would seem that John had some reason for calling him "the official". If he was not a Gentile, he was at least an official of king Herod which could be the next worst thing. Herod was still regarded as a renegade. He had committed adultery and executed the Baptist and according to Lk 9.1, he had tried to kill Jesus. At his "trial" he allowed and probably encouraged the mockery and beating to which he was subjected. John must have been aware of this and yet he holds out this servant of such an unworthy master as an example of true faith in Jesus. It is unlikely that the orthodox Jesus would have missed the point he was making to their own disadvantage.

We may note, then, that the writer does not disown his Jewish roots in the OT. He is convinced in his evangelistic task of winning over Jews to faith in Jesus that Judaism is inadequate, driving home his point whether in the miracle of new wine at Cana, or new birth for Nicodemus, ruler of the "Jews", or in the contrast of old (false?) worship and new (true). The hostility of the "Jews" is bound up with their rejection of Jesus but "Jews" is not always a hostile term. Is this really anti-judaism?

Notes

1. This paper is part of a Dissertation presented to Queen's University, Belfast for a Master of Theology degree in June 1978
2. R.E. Brown, John, Vol 1, Lxx (1971)
3. *ibid*, Lxxi
4. F.A. Evelyn, ET, Vol 49, 419
5. *op.cit.* 420
6. B. Lindars, John, London 1972, 35
7. Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 1960, 75
8. According to John, London 1968,23
9. Twelve NT Studies, London 1962, 119
10. *op.cit.* 122
11. *op.cit.* 108
12. *op.cit.*109
13. *op.cit.* Lxxiif
14. *op.cit.*25
15. *op.cit.*26
16. *op.cit.*90f
17. E.D. Freed, OT Quotns in Jn, Leiden 1965, 129
18. R. Schnackenburg, John, London 1968, Vol.1, 124
19. Brown, *op.cit.* Lx
20. T.F. Glasson, Moses in Fourth Gospel, London,10
21. *op.cit.* 124
22. *op.cit.*Lxi
23. *op.cit.* 37
24. *op.cit.*127
25. *op.cit.* 36f
26. Lindars, 36f
27. *op.cit.* Lxx
28. *ibid*, Lxxi
29. *ibid*, Lxxii
30. Schnackenburg, 165
31. John, Oxford, 1971, 119
32. *op.cit.* 103f
33. *ibid*, 104
34. J. Marsh, John 1974, 142
35. R.H. Lightfoot, John, Oxford 1960,101
36. *op.cit.* 125
37. *ibid*, 128
38. *op.cit.* 120, N2

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Notes (Contd)

39. Brown, pp104,5  
40. op.cit  
41. C.K. Barrett, John, London 1956, 158  
42. op.cit. 163  
43. op.cit.112  
44. op.cit. 111  
45. Lindars, 133  
46. ibid 163  
47. Cf Brown, 121  
48. op.cit. 121f  
49. ibid 141  
50. Lightfoot, op.cit 113f  
51. op.cit.166f  
52. op.cit. 114  
53. ibid  
54. op.cit. 162  
55. ibid 173  
56. op.cit. 149  
57. Marsh, 173; Brown 137  
58. Barrett, 169; Brown, 132  
59. op.cit. 130  
60. Lightfoot, 116  
61 Lindars, 154  
62. op.cit., 144  
63. ibid 137 - in agreement with Calvin  
64. Bultmann, op.cit. 138; cf Marsh, op.cit. 181  
65. op.cit. 190  
66. Lindars, 180f  
67. op.cit., 178  
68. ibid, 179  
69. op.cit. 178  
70. Cf Marsh, 209  
71. Cf Barrett, 191  
72. op.cit. 217f  
73. op.cit. 190  
74. ibid, 191  
75. op.cit. 185  
76. op.cit. 192  
77. op.cit. 192  
78. op.cit. 195f  
79. op.cit. 205

Notes (Contd)

80. op.cit.128

81. ibid 226

82. ibid 238

83. ibid 241

84. ibid 238; cf Lightfoot, 156

85. ibid 239