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Controversial Revelation in Deed and Word The Feeding of the Five Thousand and Jesus' Crossing of the Sea as a 'Prelude' to the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse*

Michael Labahn

The article explores the role of the feeding of the five thousand and the miraculous crossing of the Sea which the author of the Fourth Gospel took up from his tradition and formed with them a 'prelude' to the bread of life discourse. Both, deeds and words of Jesus are introduced as divine revelation which aims at belief in the one who is the bread of life because he provides bread and who saves out of danger. The refusal to believe of the different groups in John 6 is a dark foil for the confession of Peter in 6:68f to which the author will aim the reader by following the narrative line which he draws from the indirect reference to Peter in v.8. The author indicates that this belief is endangered and needs to be verified by remaining in Christ.

*In honour of Prof. Dr. John O'Neill on the occasion of his 70th
birthday*

I

How has the Fourth Evangelist incorporated the traditional miracles into the composition of his Gospel? An answer to this question is

* This paper is a revised, enlarged, and translated version of the last chapter of my study *Offenbarung in Zeichen und Wort. Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte von Joh 6,1–25a und seiner Rezeption in der Brotrede* (WUNT II/117; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). A German text of this study was read and discussed at the *Colloquium Johannique* in Strasbourg (10.3.–12.3.2000). I am thankful to the participants for the inspiring discussion and to the organisers (Prof. Dr. Michèle Morgen and PD Dr. Klaus Scholtissek) for their kind invitation. I am especially grateful to Prof. Dr. John C. O'Neill for improving my English and for further suggestions.

decisive if we are to uncover the meaning and the narrative role of the pre-Johannine miracle-sequence in the entire gospel narrative.

First, a brief statement of my own proposal for the reconstruction of the tradition used by the Fourth Evangelist.¹ There is no doubt that he has used traditions. The narrative seams, unexplained leaps and sudden breaks prove this. Note especially in John 6 that the crossing of the sea, 6:16–21, and the narrative of its discovery, 6:22–25a, do not play a major role in the following discourse and the semantic inventory of the chapter.² However, both the crossing of the sea and its discovery, together with the feeding of the five thousand, form a chronological and geographical unit, which argues for the conclusion that the narrator has simply taken over the whole as a unit from church tradition.

The narrator of the Fourth Gospel largely takes the narrative structure from tradition. The introduction in 6:1–4 is mostly his own

¹ For a reconstruction of the underlying tradition with a detailed discussion of literature see M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 81ff.187ff; a shorter version appears in id., *Jesus als Lebensspender. Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten* (BZNW 98; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1999) 272–280.284f.

² The marginal role in the narrative context is also taken as an indicator of the use of tradition by, e.g.: J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 1–10* (3rd ed.; ÖTBK 4/1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991) 228.234; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i–xii)* (AncB 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 252; cf. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (repr.; NCEB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 236f; J. Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah. The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1993) 266f; id., 'Tradition and Interpretation in John 6', *NTS* 35 (1989) 421–450, 430f; L.T. Witkamp, 'Some Specific Johannine Features in John 6.1–21', *JSNT* 40 (1990) 43–60, 51.

work.³ Only the double designation of the sea (ἡ θάλασσα τῆς Γαλιλαίας τῆς Τιβεριάδος; v.1) could be derived from the source; leaving this statement aside, the original introduction of the tradition is to be found in 6:5. At the very point in the miracle story where we would normally expect an explanation of the emergency that required the narrated miraculous event, there is a dialogue between

³ The ‘following’ of the people in v.2a is a doublet to the arrival of the people in v.5a; the motif of following prepares for the search for Jesus in v.24b,26 and leads accordingly to the entire text of the discourse of Jesus. V.2b presupposes the present literary context of the narration (cf. 4:46-54 and 5:1-9a; this connection is confirmed by the unusual term ἀσθενοῦντες and the plural form τὰ σημεῖα pointing to more than one healing miracle; cf., e.g., L. Schenke, ‘Das Szenarium von Joh 6,1–25’, *TThZ* 92 [1983] 191–203, 191; I. Dunderberg, *Johannes und die Synoptiker. Studien zu Joh 1–9* [AASF.DHL 69; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1994] 127.132.). V.2 is therefore part of the Evangelist’s narrative plot. This observation also counts against proposals to rearrange the Gospel narrative to produce a more original order of chapters in which John 6 follows chap. 4; cf. now, e.g., U. Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 5f.91f; D.M. Smith, *John* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 28.130.146; for a thorough critique of the rearrangement hypothesis cf., e.g., U. Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (London: SCM, 1998) 486f.

There is some tension between Jesus’ two ascents on the mountain in v.3 and v.15 and the exact narrative relationship is still obscure in the present context. These observations lead to the assumption that two different hands were at work. The mountain is not an appropriate place for the feeding of such a big multitude.

Moreover, John 6:4 contains many parallels to other distinctive Johannine texts and has to be ascribed to the Evangelist (e.g., R.T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs. A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* [MSSNTS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970] 57; B. Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 238; U. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John. An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992] 100; F. Schnider/W. Stenger, *Johannes und die Synoptiker. Vergleich ihrer Parallelen* [BiH IX; München: Kösel, 1971] 144).

the miracle worker and his disciples (6:5b–9). The disciples who are mentioned in the dialogue (Philip [v.5,7], Andrew, the brother of Peter [v.8]) are part of the Johannine narrative world.⁴ For the analysis of the Johannine dialogue it is important to mention the tension between the amount of money that does not suffice to feed the people (v.7) and the reference to the actual food supply, carried by a boy, which is also insufficient (v.9). In deciding what is tradition and what is expansion, the addition of the amount of money as an element to heighten the miraculous account seems to be the more plausible option. Material from the tradition can be found again in v.8a: λέγει αὐτῷ εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ is part of the tradition,⁵ to which the Evangelist adds the name of Andrew. As in v.12, the disciples were originally mentioned here as a group. Therefore most of the actual dialogue seems to be Johannine in theology and style; only parts of vv.5,8,9 are traditional.

There is not much reason to find redactional traits in vv.10–13. Only v.13c looks secondary. The feeding itself, v.11, does not mention any eating of the multitude. However, ‘eating’ is a main issue in the question of the disciple, v.5 (Πόθεν ἀγοράσωμεν ἄρτους ἵνα φάγωσιν οὗτοι;), and in the bread of life discourse (6:[26,]31[bis],49,50,51a; see also 6:52,53,58). Therefore it seems probable that v.13c represents another link created by the narrator of chapter 6 between the feeding of the multitude and the bread of life discourse.

⁴ Apart from the call to discipleship (Philip: 1:43,44,45,46,48; Andrew: 1:40,44; see also Simon Peter: 1:40,41,42) the two disciples mentioned in 6:5–8 can also be found in 12:21,22. Johannine terminology and theological ideas are also to be adduced as evidence.

⁵ Cf. J. Konings, ‘The Dialogue of Jesus, Philip and Andrew in John 6,5–9’, in *John and the Synoptics* (ed. by A. Denaux; BETL 101; Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 523–534, 531.

Two different responses of the multitude to the miraculous feeding (vv.14f), each connected with a different christological title, are narrated at the end of the first miracle. The first one (v.14) is closely connected with the Johannine idea of the sending of the Son (cf. especially 11:27 and, among other texts, the sending formulas: 3:17; 1Joh 4:9,10,14). The second response, the offer of kingship, gets a negative interpretation in that Jesus resists the demand of the crowd by leaving them and climbing the mountain (v.15). Both reactions follow each other without a specific connection and they are related to each other not without tension. Therefore both reactions belong to different authors.⁶ Forcing Jesus to be king does not have any special cohesion with the immediate context of John 6. The title 'king' is not part of the christological or theological argumentation in the bread of life discourse whereas the title 'prophet' can possibly be read in connection with the Moses-Manna-complex in John 6:31ff.⁷ In contrast to the critical answer given by Jesus to the

⁶ Both titles are nowhere else joined together in the Gospel, although both titles are part of Johannine Christology. There is no comment on the first reaction but the second one has got a narrative refusal: Jesus' withdrawal. Therefore, the classical reference to the Jewish idea of a 'prophet-king' (W.A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King. Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* [NT. S 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967]) does not enable us to read both titles as a unity either on the level of tradition or on the level of the Johannine narrative.

⁷ For the idea of a coming eschatological prophet like Moses in ancient Judaism cf., e.g., F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel. Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (5th ed.; UTB 1873; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 359f. Apart from the prophets mentioned by Josephus (cf. J.J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995] 196–199; M. Hengel, *The Zelots. Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* [repr.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997] 229–245; R.A. Horsley, "Like One of the Prophets of Old": Two Types of Popular Prophets at the Time of Jesus', *CBQ* 47 [1985] 435–463. 454–461; K.-S. Krieger, 'Die Zeichenpropheten – eine Hilfe zum Verständnis des Wirkens Jesu?', in *Von Jesus zum*

acclamation of him as king in his withdrawal from the multitude (v.15), the title 'king' is normally used quite positively in the Fourth Gospel (apart from John 1:49; 12,13,15, note especially the passion narrative, which elaborates in what sense Jesus is the real βασιλεύς⁸); the negative statement still remains strange, although one may say that the negative reaction of Jesus is a theological comment to underline that he is not king in an earthly and political way (cf. 18:36). Therefore, the title 'king' belongs to the tradition

Christus. Christologische Studien. Festgabe für P. Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag [ed. by R. Hoppe, U. Busse; BZNW 93; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1998] 175–188, 180ff), important examples of this conception can be found in the Qumran Scrolls: 4Q 175 Test; 4Q 375 Frgm 1 I line 1–3; 4Q 377 Frgm 2 II line 5; 11Q13 Melch II,18(?); CD 7,18–21; see also 4Q174 Flor III,11–12; 4Q521 Frgm 2 line 1f; cf. F. García Martínez, 'Messianic Hopes in the Qumran Writings', in id./J. Treballe Barrera, *The People of the Scrolls. Their Writings, Beliefs and Practices* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1995) 186–189; J. Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran. Königliche, priesterliche und prophetische Messiasvorstellungen in den Schriftfunden von Qumran* (WUNT II/104; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 312–417 (cf. my short review in *ThBeitr* 31 [2000] 163f).

⁸ For Jesus as 'king' in the Gospel of John cf., e.g., E. Stegemann/W. Stegemann, 'König Israels, nicht König der Juden? Jesus als König im Johannesevangelium', in *Messias-Vorstellungen bei Juden und Christen* (ed. by E. Stegemann; Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1993) 41–56; M. Hengel, 'Reich Christi, Reich Gottes und Weltreich im Johannesevangelium', in *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt* (ed. by id./A.M. Schwemer; WUNT 55; Tübingen: Mohr – Siebeck, 1991) 163–184, 165; D.M. Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 89; T. Söding, 'Die Macht der Wahrheit und das Reich der Freiheit. Zur johanneischen Deutung des Pilatus-Prozesses (Joh 18,28–19,16)', *ZThK* 93 (1996) 35–58, 44–47.

and the title 'prophet' is added by the Fourth Evangelist.⁹ This argument is supported by the philological and theological data of v.14.¹⁰ If the title ὁ προφήτης does refer to Deut 18:15,18, it is preparing the Moses-Manna-theme in John 6:31ff and shows once again that the narrator is retelling his tradition as part of the overall context.

Jesus' 'crossing' of the sea is taken over from the tradition nearly without change.¹¹ However, the double designation of time in v.16f remains strange and seems to go back to different authors; ὀψία ἐγένετο (v.16a), which has some parallel in Mark 6:47 par Matth 14:23, can be read as a preparation for the double designation of time in v.22. Therefore it belongs to the same layer of tradition as the ascertainment of the miraculous crossing of the sea, 6:22–25a, which was later added to the miracle stories. The remark in v.17 that Jesus had not yet come to his disciples belongs to the same layer. It underlines that the disciples were really alone in the boat on the sea and as well it prepares for the crowds' finding him on the other side of the sea.

⁹ N. Walter, 'Die Auslegung überlieferter Wundererzählungen im Johannes-Evangelium', *Theologische Versuche* 2 (1970) 93–107, 99 with note 34.

¹⁰ Cf. the evidence mentioned by U. Schnelle, *Christology*, 103; see also J. Konings, 'The Pre-Markan Sequence in *Jn.*, VI: A Critical Re-Examination', in *L'Évangile selon Marc. Tradition et rédaction* (2nd ed; ed. by M. Sabbe; BTheL 34; Leuven: Peeters 1988) 147–178, 164–166.

¹¹ Cf. J. Becker, *Johannes* 234, who pleads for a derivation of the whole text from the Johannine Signs-Source; similarly U.C. von Wahlde, *The Earliest Version of John's Gospel. Recovering the Gospel of Signs* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1989) 100f: 'First edition of the Gospel of John'.

The following verses, vv.22–25, look back to the already narrated miraculous crossing of the sea from a rather different perspective.¹² This confirmation of the miracle seems to be an addition and is only connected with the actual narrative by the designation of time in v.16a and the remark in v.17c; the proof of the miraculous crossing is therefore a later addition to the original sequence narrating the feeding of the five thousand and the miraculous crossing of the sea.

My thesis is that the Fourth Evangelist retells his tradition in order to form a ‘prelude’ to the bread of life discourse.¹³ This is evident when we recognise that the feeding of the multitude and the bread of life discourse have in common the important semantic fields ‘bread’ and ‘to eat’.¹⁴

II

When we examine the feeding miracle by itself first of all, we can follow Udo Schnelle in concluding that it ‘serves John as a demonstration of Jesus’ majesty’.¹⁵ Any reference to a concrete case

¹² For tradition and redaction in vv. 22ff and for some considerations on a possible historical context which provoked this addition cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 193–198.

¹³ For the musical term ‘prelude’ cf. e.g. H. Hering, art. ‘Präludium’, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 10 (1962) 1540–1543. With this term I would like to underline both the aspect of independence and the aspect of integration with the whole composition; the miracle sequence is preparation and introduction. Yet in no sense do I intend to establish a hierarchical view in which the prelude is made less important than the bread of life discourse.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., M. Labahn, ‘Between Tradition and Literary Art. Observations on the Use of the Miracle Tradition by the Fourth Evangelist’, *Bib* 80 (1999) 178–203, 190.

¹⁵ U. Schnelle, *Christology*, 108.

of emergency need is missing,¹⁶ as is mostly regularly presupposed in the various parallels narrating a miraculous multiplication of food.¹⁷

Therefore the feeding of the multitude does not take place out of compassion or some kind of emergency, as in the synoptic parallels; it rather takes place to show the sovereignty and majesty of the Johannine Jesus. On the other hand, John 6:2 takes up the healing miracles in 4:46–54 and 5:1–9a, in that the people follow Jesus because of the signs he has done for the sick (ἀσθενοῦντες).¹⁸ This is an important indication that the sovereign and mighty Jesus does not act as remote from the human lot, but as someone *who devotes herself to people and their existential needs*.

Assertions like John 9:3b or 11:4a–c are some kind of silent substantiation for Jesus' activity, which the reader may recognise afterwards or in the course of a new reading of the Gospel. The motif of the 'mountain' which the narrator makes Jesus and his disciples climb in John 6:3 underlines the character of this activity as divine revelation.

¹⁶ It cannot be excluded that there was such a reference to a case of emergency need in the tradition used by the narrator of the Gospel; cf. Mark 8:2 par Matth 15:32.

¹⁷ The many multiplication stories of food in folktales, legends, and fairytales (cf., e.g., M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 176ff, with lit. and examples) is normally but not always connected with the lack of food. Therefore, the basic need of food and the human experience of hunger lead into a broad phenomenology of multiplication stories, which appear anew 'independently of earlier stories again and again at all times': U.H.J. Körtner, 'Das Fischmotiv im Speisungswunder', *ZNW* 75 (1984) 24–35, 25.

¹⁸ See above page 148 note 3.

The close parallel between John 6:3 and Matth 5:1 need not be interpreted in literary terms.¹⁹ Rather the more general meaning of ‘mountain’ in the Gospel tradition has to be considered, which also comes to expression in Matth 5:1: ‘The concept ”mountain” signals: Here there occurs an Epiphany! Here God’s revelation makes itself known! Here Jesus appears as the revealer!’²⁰ Although the semantic field ‘mountain’ is not a regular feature in the Gospel of John, it should surely be read as a reference to a location where revelation took place.²¹ Two lines of interpretation may be pursued.

¹⁹ Matth 15:29: ... καὶ ἀναβάς εἰς τὸ ὄρος ἐκάθητο ἐκεῖ.

Matth 5:1: ... ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος, καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.

John 6:3: ἀνῆλθεν δὲ εἰς τὸ ὄρος Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἐκεῖ ἐκάθητο μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ.

²⁰ G. Strecker, *Die Bergpredigt. Ein exegetischer Kommentar* (2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) 26 (‘Der Begriff Berg ‘signalisiert: Hier ereignet sich epiphanes Geschehen! Hier tut sich Gottes Offenbarung kund! Hier tritt Jesus als Offenbarer auf!’); B.J. Malina/R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998) 126. More specifically L.T. Witkamp, ‘Johannine Features’, 47: The Fourth Evangelist ‘*may* have wanted to contrast Jesus with the Jewish teacher *par excellence*, Moses, from the outset’.

²¹ This interpretation of the mountain as the location for special revelation understands the mountain as the location of the revelation of Jesus as the *preexistent logos sent by God*, whose character becomes visible in the narrated feeding; this interpretation differs from the interpretation of the mountain as the location of the revelation of the law adopted by other authors, referring to Ex 19:20; 24:1f and Is 34:2–4: cf., e.g., F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 195. U. Wilckens, *Johannes* 96, also interprets the mountain as referring to the revelation on mount Sinai, although his definition of the location is more general, as a place for the reception of ‘important revelations of God’; by pointing out that this place is a ‘place where the Son of God is

First of all, the events about to be narrated are events in which revelation takes place. This signal is not only valid for the feeding but also for the bread of life discourse in so far as the feeding forms the *prelude* to the discourse. Secondly, the readers are reminded of the '*Arche*' of the signs, which serves to reveal the '*doxa*' of Jesus (John 2:11). If the 'mountain' is a signal of a location for revelation, John 6:5ff has also to be read in the light of 2:11 and of John 1:14 – familiar texts for the community to which the readers of the Fourth Gospel belonged. Therefore the feeding miracle is a revelation of the '*doxa*' of Jesus. That means that (1) the feeding miracle, 6:5ff, reveals the divine '*doxa*' of the revealer sent by God. It is also (2) a sign of the divine presence in Jesus, and it expresses (3) deep christological truth which transcends the earthly and material miracle. By *devoting himself to people and their existential needs* Jesus is the giver of authentic life (cf. John 6:30ff).

By means of a holistic view on John 6, which is signaled in John 6:1,²² the whole activity and speech of Jesus is a self presentation, which has the character of revelation. Whoever seriously seeks Jesus will be able to understand that Jesus is 'truly the Prophet' (6:14) and is manifest as such in his miracle. At the same time Jesus is an object of misunderstanding. The narrator makes this element plain by preserving from the tradition Jesus' refusal to accept the acclamation of him as king (6:15).²³ The people draw the wrong conclusion from the feeding miracle, which later John 18:36

near to the Father' he stresses elements which are important in my own interpretation of the 'mountain'.

²² See below p. 165.

²³ At the level of the older tradition the refusal of the acclamation may point to conflicts concerning the Christian interpretation of Jesus as the Messiah in the Johannine community or to conflicts with members of the Jewish synagogue.

particularly shows. Jesus refuses to let them make him a king who will fulfil their political and material expectations, because he is rather the king of Israel chosen by God as king of the kingdom of his father.²⁴ No one who is only concerned with the material side of eating the bread and who does not see the miracle as a Johannine sign is able to understand the deeper truth of Jesus' action (6:26).

Nevertheless, there is also some enhancement of the stress on the miraculous in the narration of the feeding miracle; this enhancement does seem to be a foreign thought for the Evangelist because he has probably added the reference to the two hundred denarii;²⁵ this amount would not be enough to feed the whole multitude. Compared with contemporary feeding stories – for example, the report of the wedding dinner of the Macedonian Karanos presented by Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* IV 128c–130d – this amount is unremarkable and seems to correspond to a lower social milieu, in which acute shortage of food is the reality. According to Tobit 5:15 and Matth 20:1ff one denarius is a day's wage in contemporary Palestine,²⁶ so that almost a year's wages of one labourer²⁷ is in

²⁴ After his refusal of the acclamation of the people we are shown how Jesus' majesty can be powerfully realised in the presence of his disciples by his walking on the water and his rescuing of the disciples out of their distress.

²⁵ The objection of v.7 collides with the question in v.9c. If bread to the amount of 200 denarii is not enough to feed the people, then the objection ἀλλὰ ταῦτα τί ἐστὶν εἰς τοσοῦτους; in the case of the scanty provision of only five barley loaves and two fish for such a multitude is far too weak, as J. Wellhausen remarked long ago, *Das Evangelium Johannis* (G. Reimer: Berlin, 1908) 28. Therefore v.7 is part of Jesus' dialogue with the disciples formed by the Evangelist; cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 89–94; especially 92f (for the addition of the 200 denarii).

²⁶ Cf. A. Ben-David, *Talmudische Ökonomie. Die Wirtschaft des jüdischen Palästina zur Zeit der Mischna und des Talmud I* (Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 1974) 303; during republican times one denarius is the highest wage

question. If in the social context of day-labour the miracle would have an almost utopian character,²⁸ had the story been told in another social context, possibly that of the city,²⁹ where the cost of living was much higher,³⁰ the narrator would have found it unavoidable to increase the amount, since two hundred denarii would not have sufficed.

By referring to the insufficient amount of money the narrator backs up the traditional reference to the insufficient available food (v.9), although this last reference now sounds rather weak in the text as we have it. The consequence of the feeding is very materialistic: all the people are so full, that there remains over a remarkable quantity of food, even more than they had had before (vv.12f). That the narrator does not see in this enhanced materiality, supported by the miraculous strands in the tradition, the true purpose of the miracle story is easy to see in his – re-worked – reaction of the crowd to the

of a day-labourer in the Roman empire; cf. H. Kloft, *Die Wirtschaft der griechisch-römischen Welt. Eine Einführung* (Die Altertumswissenschaft; Darmstadt: WBG, 1992) 185.

²⁷ E.W. Stegemann/W. Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte. Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christugemeinde in der mediterranen Welt* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1997), 90.

²⁸ B.J. Malina/R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Gospel of John*, 126, claim that the number of persons fed by Jesus exceeds the number of inhabitants around the Sea of Galilee and is accordingly hyperbolic in tendency.

²⁹ In the cities of the Roman empire the annual subsistence level is twice as high as in the countryside, in Rome even three times; cf. E.W. Stegemann/W. Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte*, 85.

³⁰ Cf. the references by S. van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (NT.S 83; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996) 136ff; one example is of a banquet for more than 40,000 inhabitants; this example shows the contrast with the New Testament feedings.

miracle; they focus on the earthly and material effect of the miracle and therefore try to *make* a king out of Jesus. But the one who is truly the Prophet coming (from God) into the world (6:14 which is the right-thinking perception that should have been taken of the miracle) is the only one who truly knows what he is about to do (6:6) in this narrative, and the one who should be recognised and accepted as God's gift of life. The action of the multitude stands in deep contrast to the action which is expected by Jesus and which is in accordance with Jesus' own ποιεῖν. Note the semantic line from a ποιεῖν planned by Jesus in 6b/c by way of a ποιεῖν he ordered in 10b to the ποιεῖν as the wrongdoing of the multitude in 15a. The multitude does not recognise Jesus as God's gift, and so their ποιεῖν is a false one, *orientated and bound by an earthly materialism*.

Nevertheless, there are some enhanced miraculous strands in the narrative, which could be misunderstood in a material way, but which are rather aiming to make visible a reflection of the divine *doxa* of Jesus. This is still true even though the feeding miracle is, in the composition of the Evangelist, also to be read as an hermeneutical introduction to the bread of life discourse. Both mighty deeds of Jesus form the narrative-christological foundation for the following discourse. The transitional passage John 6:(25b,)26–29 locks together in a subtle way the prelude and the opus: the feeding and bread of life discourse. The different perspectives are merged together. Without too much exaggeration, in the bread of life discourse one can see the bread miracle staged as a Johannine 'semeion', and staged by use of the medium of speech.

The bread of life discourse unfolds the feeding miracle as an act of *communication*³¹ in such a way that anyone should have seen and

³¹ Although Jesus feeds the multitude in John 6:11 himself, he does not communicate directly with the crowd before the bread of life discourse. (Jesus asks his disciples to order the people to lie down for the meal.)

understood the miracle as a 'semeion' of the Son of God. This interpretation is supported by the 'postlude' (6:60ff); different reactions follow the miracle sequence and the bread of life discourse, which probably allow us to see a piece of the history of the Johannine community. The christology reflected in the discourse of Jesus as he re-presents the miracle in the medium of speech divides the Johannine Christians themselves and reveals a negative reaction comparable to the grumbling of 'the Jews' earlier (John 6:41f). Revelation has occurred, but it necessarily leads to opposition. Yet the real aim of the 'postlude' is not the opposition, but the confession of Peter.³² Peter formulates the Johannine christological confession as an answer to a question already asked in

Jesus' devoting himself to the people in action is followed by his devoting himself to them in the act of communication through his self revelation; Jesus reveals himself through the medium of speech in a discourse as the very same one who had previously revealed himself through a deed, that is, as the bread of God for the life of believers.

³² Differently J. Zumstein, 'Die Endredaktion des Johannesevangeliums (am Beispiel von Kapitel 21)', in id., *Kreative Erinnerung. Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (Zürich: Pano 1999) 192–216, 210 with note 40, who finds the role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel as a whole to be 'very pallid, indeed negatively presented' ('recht blass, ja negativ gezeichnet'). Such a view depends partially on the comparison with the portrait of Peter in the Synoptic narratives; however, is this reference a sufficient criterion for an estimation of the narrative role of Peter in John? For sure, in John's narrative, in John 1–20, Peter does not play a singularly positive role; his characterisation is rather nuanced between positive and (for the narrator) negative strands. (For a nuanced portrait of Peter as a character of the Johannine narrative cf. R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design* [repr. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 120f, who depends for his portrait especially on John 21). At least the narrative signals in John 6 are not calculated to limit Peter's significance in this chapter, a chapter which is crucial for the whole Gospel narrative and contributes so much to the nuanced characterisation of Peter in the Fourth Gospel.

the lead up to the feeding miracle,³³ John 6:5: ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat’ (NKJV)? This question was labelled as Jesus’ *πειράζων* (v.6), a testing question to which the ‘implicit reader’ should be ready to give an answer (see also below).

We have to return to the narrative signals provided by the Fourth Evangelist in his interpretation of the Feeding and the Walking on the Water sequence. The introduction constructed by the narrator using his feast-travelling-scheme and elements from his tradition contains a number of reader-guiding signals.³⁴ The people who approach and whom Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw are depicted as a multitude that followed Jesus. The motive of ‘following’ Jesus recalls the gaining of the first disciples in *chap. 1*, where the term

³³ For the motifs and structure of the miracle stories cf. G. Theißen, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten. Ein Beitrag zur formgeschichtlichen Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien* (6th ed.; StNT 8; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1990) 57–89.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. J. Frey, ‘Der implizite Leser und die biblischen Texte’, *ThBeitr* 23 (1992) 266–290, 281ff; M. Labahn, ‘Tradition’, 197f; U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2nd ed.; ThHK 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000) 26; id., ‘Ein neuer Blick. Tendenzen gegenwärtiger Johannesforschung’, *BThZ* 16 (1999) 21–40, 26. Schnelle defines the role of such signals as follows: A reader-guiding signal ‘is the intended role for the readers, the planned offer of a role for the possible readers, that results from the interplay of the perspectives laid down in the text and their realisation by the readers. It is only in the realm of the tension between these two worlds that a reading of the text becomes a truly productive process in which the difference between the offer of a role in the text and the disposition of the reader shapes understanding and so also shapes the accompanying sense’ (‘Es ist die intendierte Leserrolle, das gedachte Rollenangebot für die möglichen Leser, das sich aus dem Zusammenspiel der im Text angelegten Perspektiven und ihrer Realisierung durch die Leser ergibt. Erst im Spannungsraum zwischen diesen beiden Welten wird Lektüre zu einem wahrhaft produktiven Prozeß, in dem die Differenz zwischen dem Rollenangebot des Textes und der Disposition des Lesers Verstehen und damit auch Sinn schafft.’).

‘to follow’ appears frequently (1:37,38,40,43). The two disciples of John left the Baptist and *followed* Jesus because of John’s testimony (v.37); as followers they are searchers (cf. the question v.38b; cf. the people’s behaviour in 6:24,26!). They should come and see (1:39). Therefore, the following crowd – even though one is ready to see a difference between the following of the disciples and the following of the crowd³⁵ – is also portrayed as a searching and questing multitude, to whom the invitation to hear and to see validly applies. In cases where that seeing develops into recognition of the one sent by God, to belief, the following issues in entrance into life (8:12; 10:27f; cf. the promise in 12:26). So Jesus presents himself in chap. 6 to those who have seen his deeds (6:2; cf. 6:14,24) as bread for their life. Out of this arises a *didactic* function of this episode, which leads by way of the motif of ‘searching’ (cf. 6:24: ... ἐνέβησαν αὐτοὶ εἰς τὰ πλοιάρια καὶ ἦλθον εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ ζητοῦντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν) to the discourse.³⁶ Jesus reveals himself in his deeds and in his speech on the *intratextual level* to the *people* and on the *extratextual level* to the *readers*. The text offers to the readers possible reactions to the revelation of Jesus: (1) the misunderstanding of Jesus’ question by his disciple in 6:5f, (2) the materialistic and immanent action of the crowd as a political interpretation of Jesus’ deed, 6:15, (3) the grumbling of ‘*the Jews*’, 6:41, (4) the schism of the disciples caused by Jesus’ ‘*skleros logos*’, 6:60ff, and finally (5) the confession of Peter to the one who has life-giving words (6:68f). The revelation leads towards a decision of refusal or acceptance; wrong and contradictory reactions

³⁵ The difference is underlined by G. Schneider, art. ‘ἀκολουθέω’, in *EWNT* 1 (1992) 117–125, 119.

³⁶ Cf. as well M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 49. 85.

are an important feature of John 6³⁷ and fit the programmatic introduction to the Gospel in the logos-hymn:³⁸ revelation occurs in

³⁷ P.N. Anderson, 'The Sitz im Leben of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context', in *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. by R.A. Culpepper; BIS 22; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997) 1–59, 24ff, interprets the misunderstanding by historical means, searching for a historical crisis in the background of the bread-of-life chapter: 'John 6 must have been targeted at correcting specific problems in the Johannine audience.' I would not dispute that the Fourth Evangelist has a 'specific audience in mind' (op. cit. 24). However, Anderson names four circles of problems, mirrored in chapter 6: a misunderstanding of the miracle (op. cit. 28ff), a dialogue with the synagogue (op. cit. 32ff), the '*threat of a second schism involving Gentile converts with docetizing tendencies*' (op. cit. 41ff [citation 41]) and the relation to '*mainstream church*' (op. cit. 50ff). The experience of opposition and of schism in the past history of the Johannine community (John 6:60ff) is certainly part of the Johannine narrative. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that the narrative as a whole is a dialogue in the sense of an actual crisis-handling. Moreover, the narrative goal of John 6, the confession of Peter, should not be understood as some kind of polemic. The thesis that Peter represents the mainstream-church does not become any more convincing by repetition. Although it may be true that the narrator had to correct christological misinterpretations with regard to the massive Johannine miracle tradition (cf. e.g. M. Labahn, *Jesus*, 210f), it is scarcely convincing to say that he corrects the interpretation as 'thaumas' of the Synoptic feedings (Anderson, op. cit. 28), of which he did not have a written text in front him (op. cit. 28f note 36).

³⁸ Cf. K. Scholtissek, 'Kinder Gottes und Freunde Jesu. Beobachtungen zur johanneischen Ekklesiologie', in *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments. Für K. Kertelge* (ed. by R. Kampling and T. Söding; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1996) 184–211, 197f with reference to John 1:11–13: 'The fate of the Son of God as unfolded in the narrative of the Gospel is summed up and explicated *in nuce* in 1,11 and 1,12f' ('In 1,11 und 1,12f ist *in nuce* das Geschick des Gottessohnes, das im Evangelium narrativ entfaltet wird, zusammengefaßt und gedeutet'). Cf. also the reference to the basic linguistic opposition ('semantic axle') of the Fourth Gospel made by F. Mussner in his article 'Die "semantische Achse" des Johannesevangeliums. Ein Versuch', in id., *Jesus von Nazareth im Umfeld Israels und der Urkirche. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (ed. by M. Theobald; WUNT 111; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 260–269, 262 *et passim*.

the face of opposition. Opposition to the revelation is a grievous problem in the life-experience of the Johannine community both in the discourse and in the whole of chap. 6.³⁹

Although stress is laid on the negative side in the suggested identifications of Jesus, the rejection of Jesus is not the implied aim of chap. 6. Although misunderstanding, opposition, refusal, and secession are possible reactions to Jesus' revelation, nevertheless these answers do not do justice to God's plan of giving life by the revealer he has sent. The *textpragmatical aim of John 6* is therefore that the readers should themselves repeat the confession of Peter by following the narrative line which leads from the indirect reference to Peter in v.8 to his confession in vv.68f.⁴⁰ Another hint of this intention is the interpretation of Jesus' question, v.5b–c, by the participle *πειράζων*. This 'examination' has a pedagogical function in the overall narrative of chap. 6.⁴¹ It opens up a perspective on the miracle worker, who does what he himself is, a theme he will unfold in the bread of life discourse that follows. He *gives* bread, because he *is* the bread of life (v.35).⁴² So the question in v.5 may be called

³⁹ Cf. H. Weder, 'Die Menschwerdung Gottes. Überlegungen zur Auslegungsproblematik des Johannesevangeliums am Beispiel von Joh 6', in id., *Einblicke ins Evangelium. Exegetische Beiträge zur neutestamentlichen Hermeneutik. Gesammelte Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1980–1991* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992) 363–400, 377.

⁴⁰ E.g. I. Dunderberg, *Johannes*, 130.

⁴¹ Cf. e.g., B. Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 241: 'It is ... intended to teach that the food of Jesus belongs to another level of reality'; L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (2nd ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 303f.

⁴² For Jesus as giver and gift and for the identity of giver and gift in ancient history of religion cf. J. Kügler, *Der andere König. Religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Christologie des Johannesevangeliums* (SBS 178; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999) 90ff.

an ironical question because it contains an allusion to a deeper understanding of the narrative.⁴³ It awakens the attention of hearers or readers and it also shows that what happens and is revealed has to be understood by disciples of Jesus if they are to be able to answer Jesus' question. From the point of view of the narrative stream of John 6, the fitting answer to Jesus' question, which one is able to give after attending to the revelation in deeds and speech, is to be found in the confession in v.68f.⁴⁴

However, this confession is not the last word in John 6, which is the reference to Judas who is introduced as the betrayer (6:70f); we have to take this final notice into consideration in order to understand completely this portion of the Fourth Gospel (see below).

The geographical structure of John 6:1–25a also provides reader-guiding signals. First of all the narrator makes clear by the sudden departure of Jesus to the 'shore on the other side' of the Sea of Genesareth that he has taken up another position than that of the feeding (6:1). By playing on the theme of the other shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1,17,22,25) the author directs the reader's attention to the shore where later the bread of life discourse will take place. This underlines once again the point that the miracle has

⁴³ For the characteristic of irony as *involving the making of allusions*, see K. Scholtissek, 'Ironie und Rollenwechsel im Johannesevangelium', *ZNW* 89 (1998) 235–255, 237, who illustrates this from Socratic irony.

⁴⁴ Employing the definition of K. Scholtissek, 'Ironie', 235, one can also claim that in John 6 '*the way to the "recognition" of Jesus*' ('*der Weg zur "Erkenntnis" Jesu*') may be understood '*as a way through deep momentous changing of role and ironic reversals*' ('*als Weg durch hintergründige Rollenwechsel und ironische Verkehrungen hindurch*').

to be read in definite relation to the discourse, and that the whole chapter (without 6:51c–58 and 6:23–24a⁴⁵) forms a narrative unity.

The assertion that the multiplication of loaves is ‘a purely earthly provision of food’ (‘eine rein irdische Speisung’) and therefore only ‘a contrast to the true supernatural heavenly food in the great discourse on bread (Joh 6,22ff)’ (‘ein Gegenstück zur wahren, überirdischen himmlischen Speise in der großen Brotrede [Joh 6,22ff]’),⁴⁶ accordingly does not satisfy me. Just as the Revealer shows himself to be the one who satisfies the hunger of the body, so is he, in that very fact, the one who is himself the bread leading to life for humanity. The miracle shows that the word about his being the bread of life is not meant as a vague and insubstantial promise, but has become (partly) real in Jesus’ miraculous deed. Yet anyone who ignores the reference to the deeper meaning of the miracle falls into the misunderstanding of interpreting Jesus’ role in a material-immanent and possibly in a political way.⁴⁷ The miracle of feeding itself, by showing how the existential need for food⁴⁸ is met by the sovereign action of the Johannine Jesus, is at the same time the presentation of a response to the deepest and most personal

⁴⁵ Cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 196.

⁴⁶ A. Heising, *Die Botschaft der Brotvermehrung. Zur Geschichte und zur Bedeutung eines Christusbekenntnisses im Neuen Testament* (SBS 15; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966) 78.

⁴⁷ E.g. in the sense of a political messianic pretender (cf. p. 150 note 7).

⁴⁸ As mentioned before, John 6 does not depend on an actual case of emergency need like that recorded in Mark 8:2 par. On the other hand, the feeding does not happen quite apart human need as is clear from 6:2, a reference to the crowds following him because they saw him healing the sick. Nevertheless, the miracle is narrated the way it is with a more fundamental aim than that.

existential threat to human life:⁴⁹ the fact of death. God's gift of unlimited life, present in Jesus, is realised in a proleptic way by his offering basic food for the nourishment of humanity.⁵⁰ Therefore the doxa made visible in the miracle does not only point to the majesty of the miracle worker, but also to the divine doxa of the one who gives authentic life to every one who believes.

III

The second miracle, the narrative of Jesus' miraculous crossing of the sea, has been taken up into the present narrative nearly unchanged and seems to be of secondary importance for the present literary context. Nevertheless, the second element of the miracle sequence underlines the *trustworthiness* of the wonder-working Revealer⁵¹ by the account of the crossing of the sea and by what one can only say is an objectifying statement of the miracle in the elaborate set of confirmatory details in John 6:22–25a.⁵² This miraculous deed narrates something special about the revealer sent by God. He is depicted as having divine power over the perilous

⁴⁹ For 'dying' as a personal and individual experience cf. M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (9th ed.; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960) 240.

⁵⁰ Cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 38.

⁵¹ This is not only an aspect to be emphasized in the context of the redactional Johannine narrative, but was also an aspect of the narrating of the feeding miracle in the pre-Gospel tradition.

⁵² J.P. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea. Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52 and John 6,15b–21* (AnBib 87; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1981) 145, reminds us of the function of Jesus as saviour in the story of the walking on the water: 'the power of Jesus to rescue his disciples by walking on the sea authenticates the claim that he has been sent by God, his Father, to serve as the medium of eternal life for the world'.

chaotic forces of nature; as a ruler over the chaotic and life-negating power of water Jesus is portrayed in the fullness of the power of Jahwe.⁵³ By being the ruler over the life-negating power – John 6:16ff presupposes, like the synoptic parallels, a case of emergency⁵⁴ – Jesus reveals himself as the one who has come to give life. In this sense the crossing of the sea *together* with the feeding of the multitude forms the prelude to the theme of the bread of life discourse, in which Jesus introduces himself as God's true bread of life, which leads to life for those who believe in him.

The absolute *Ego-Eimi* of John 6:20 supports these considerations. First of all it is (1) a formula of recognition, with which the unrecognised and fear-producing figure walking on the sea introduces himself as the master of his disciples ('I am the one you left behind on the shore'). In the context of Johannine theology and especially the bread of life discourse Jesus introduces himself also (2) as the one who is vividly present for the sake of the believers. At the same time the *Ego-Eimi* prepares for (3) the self-revelation of Jesus as the bread of life: 6:35,48 ('Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς); 6:51 (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς); see also 6:41 ('Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ καταβάς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Some scholars assume that John 6:20 is primarily dependent on the self-revelation

⁵³ Cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 213f. This is also worked out by G.R. O'Day in her article 'John 6:15–21: Jesus Walking on Water as Narrative Embodiment of Johannine Christology', in *Critical Readings of John 6* (note 37) 149–159. She shows how the crossing of the sea fits into the narrative concept of the Gospel of John as 'narrated christology' (156). The content of this narrative christology culminates in the thought that Jesus works in the 'power of God' and so this narrative christology underlines the unity of the Father and the Son; John 10,30.

⁵⁴ Cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 30ff.

of God in the Septuagint: Ex 3:14.⁵⁵ Jesus does not introduce himself as God, but God's power is present in Jesus ruling the chaotic power of the sea. So we do not need to exclude (4) an allusion to the Old Testament identification formulas of God, but it should not be pressed into a self identification of Jesus with God.⁵⁶

The walking on the water narrative brings into prominence another underlying aspect; the narration specifies how Jesus is to be understood as '*basileus*' in contrast to the materialistic and political misunderstanding of him as '*basileus*' on the basis of the feeding miracle.⁵⁷ The Jesus who is manifest for his own people in his walking on the water in the power of God is presented as the true '*basileus*' of his father's heavenly kingdom in contrast to the arrogance of the ancient ruler ideology. This interpretation is supported by an analysis of the walking-on-the-water motif in ancient ruler ideology.⁵⁸ Equipped with divine power over the

⁵⁵ H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments 3. Hebräerbrief, Evangelien und Offenbarung. Epilegomena* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 168; cf. G.R. Beasley Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1987) 90, with reference to parallels in Second Isaiah.

⁵⁶ Contrary to G.R. O'Day, 'John 6:15–21', 155: 'Jesus identifies himself as wholly one with God'.

⁵⁷ For the idea that the mistaken *acclamation* of Jesus by the crowd is corrected by his walking on the water see also G.R. O'Day, 'John 6:15–21', 158.

⁵⁸ I have taken up the rich analysis of A.Y. Collins, 'Rulers, Divine Men, and Walking on the Water (Mark 6:45–52)', in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World. Essays Honoring D. Georgi* (ed. by L. Bormann, K. del Tredici, A. Standhartinger; NT.S 74; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994) 207–227 (see also P.J. Madden, *Jesus' Walking on the Sea. An Investigation of the Origin of the Narrative Account* [BZNW 81; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1997] 54ff) in M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 207ff. Compare the following examples which make different points, sometimes amounting to caricature: Dio Chrys. Or III 31;

death-bringing chaotic forces, Jesus lays claim to his father's heavenly kingdom by showing himself to be the God-given bread of life.

IV

Let us consider the bread of life discourse in relation to the overall structure of the chapter. The Revealer has revealed in deed and in word the aim of his sending, an aim that accords with his nature (note especially the Ego Eimi words: 6:35,48): to bring life to the cosmos.⁵⁹ One could say that the miracles legitimate his words, but his words also illustrate his deeds, with the emphasis on the feeding. The revelation in deed and word depicts Jesus as a preserver of life on earth, whose works function to reveal his divine '*doxa*', being a vivid picture through which we can see his ultimately valid gift of life. He is himself that gift of life *pro hominibus*, and everyone who participates in this gift of life by believing in the Johannine Jesus will have authentic life *hic et nunc* as part of the community of Christ. By speaking the words Ego-Eimi in the bread of life discourse the revealer offers himself as God's gift of life to those who believe because of that what they hear or read. Just as Jesus draws near to people in his deeds and words so God himself in this

Menandros Frgm 924K; Sueton Cal 19,3; 2Makk 5:21; see also Herodot VII 35.65; Lysias Or 2,29; Isokrates Panegyricus 88f; Sib IV 76–78; Josephus *Ant* 19,6. The critical reception of the ruler's walking on the sea (Dio, Menandros, 2Macc, Josephus) seems to go back to contemporary popular ideas which were present in ancient royal propaganda or royal legends.

⁵⁹ Cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 62f, in which is emphasised the central meaning of the Ego-Eimi of John 6:35 for the bread of life discourse: Jesus is the real bread of life given from God. By faith centred on Jesus – and made possible by God (vv.44f) – authentic life is given to believers.

bread of life comes close to mankind and is present to them in this Jesus to give authentic life.

Even though the Evangelist orientated his narrative from the beginning to culminate in the bread of life discourse, he did not subordinate revelation by deed to revelation by word. On the contrary, the bread of life discourse reaches back to and unfolds the christology that the Evangelist sees in the miracle of the feeding of the multitude itself. In the miraculous feeding of the multitude one can recognise that the Jesus who distributes bread is able to do so because he himself is the life-giving bread of life which is sent by God from heaven.⁶⁰ By elaborating this thought in the discourse the narrator looks back to the previously-given sign and interprets it. One could almost say that, in so far as the sign by its interpretation in the bread of life discourse is once again set before the eyes and the ears of the multitude, the request for a sign in v.30 is satisfied.⁶¹

If the discourse refers back to the miracles, the miracles are hermeneutically the prelude that introduces the discourse; Jesus' bread of life discourse is founded on an action which has become visible and is able to be grasped in historical time. The introductory miracle sequence bears the character of concrete loving attention and concrete salvation. This concrete action prepares the way for

⁶⁰ U. Schnelle, *Christology*, 197 has convincingly shown that v.33 already has the aim of identifying the bread from heaven with Jesus. This identification correspondingly holds also for v.32fin; the antithesis and the present tense *δίδωσιν* speak for it.

⁶¹ Cf. M.J.J. Menken, 'Some Remarks on the Course of the Dialogue: John 6,25–34', in *Bijdragen* 48 (1987) 139–149, 146: 'Their request (i.e., the request of the crowd) for a sign is answered', by his being himself 'the sign the crowd ask for'.

the sacramental *relecture*,⁶² which shows that Jesus' being the bread of life not only happened in fact once, but happens there again in the congregation when they partake of him in the eucharist.

Like the signs themselves the revelatory discourse leads to misunderstanding, opposition, and unbelief;⁶³ this observation supports the view that the discourse does not express the claim of the revealer any more intelligibly than his deeds.⁶⁴ Ismo Dunderberg understands this motif as a proof for the coherence of chap. 6. 'Unbelief does not only show itself among the people or among the Jews but also among many of the disciples.'⁶⁵ It has to be added that

⁶² John 6:51c–58 is in my view not an original part of John 6 but rather a later *relecture* of the chapter; cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 73–78 (on the methodological paradigm of 'relecture' cf. op. cit. 77 note 195 [lit.]). On the eucharistic language cf. L. Wehr, *Arznei der Unsterblichkeit. Die Eucharistie bei Ignatius von Antiochien und im Johannesevangelium* (NTA.NF 18; Münster: Aschendorff, 1987).

⁶³ Therefore it seems to me difficult to speak of a 'progression from faith based on visible signs (v.2 and v.14) to a faith based on the word of Jesus (v.68)' ('Progression vom Glauben aufgrund der gesehenen Zeichen [V. 2 und 14] zum Glauben auf das Wort Jesu hin [V. 68]'); so J. Beutler, 'Zur Struktur von Johannes 6', in id., *Studien zu den johanneischen Schriften* (SBAB 25; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998) 247–262, 254.

⁶⁴ On the divisive effect of the Johannine signs cf. M. Labahn, *Jesus*, 498f; id., 'Tradition', 201–203; see also R. Metzner, 'Der Geheilte von Johannes 5 – Repräsentant des Unglaubens', *ZNW* 90 (1999) 177–193, 192. It follows that the sign stories take their place naturally in the whole presentation of the sending of Jesus, which culminates in crisis, in 'taking one's stand and meeting the test' ('Stellungnahme und Bewährung'); cf. now e.g. K. Scholtissek, 'Antijudaismus im Johannesevangelium. Ein Gesprächsbeitrag', in 'Nun steht aber diese Sache im Evangelium...' *Zur Frage nach den Anfängen des christlichen Antijudaismus* (ed. by R. Kampling; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999) 151–181, 169.

⁶⁵ I. Dunderberg, *Johannes*, 131: 'Es ist nicht nur das Volk oder die Juden, bei denen sich Unglauben anmeldet, sondern auch viele Jünger'.

it is not only the deeds of Jesus that cause misunderstanding but also his speech. Dunderberg's general view is similarly correct: 'In John 6 a distinction is drawn between belief and unbelief within ever smaller circles of people.'⁶⁶ The circle of opposition contracts more and more, and finally reaches into the circle of Jesus' own disciples. The tendency of misunderstanding found in 6:15 (the acclamation of the '*anthropoi*' is refused) culminates in John 6:60ff by way of the grumbling of 'the Jews' (v.41), the grumbling of the disciples (v.60), and the final schism of Jesus' disciples (v.66). Peter's confession stands in sharp contrast to this sad progression (vv.68f).

Alongside the theme of a progressively narrowing circle of misunderstanding or opposition we should set the theme of the identification of the opponents. Chap. 6 is framed by conflicts in Jerusalem between Jesus and 'the Jews', which are in each case connected with the aim of killing Jesus. Both the absence of this plot against Jesus and the divergent location separate John 6 from its framing chapters. Nevertheless, it is striking that the same group of opponents that the readers have already met in the conflicts in Jerusalem is present in this chapter, too, with their denial of Jesus (6:41). This does not happen by chance. The bread of life discourse is located in the Jewish synagogue of Capernaum (6:59); in response to the question of the high priest later, Jesus will answer: 'I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in *synagogues* and in the *temple, where the Jews always meet ...*' (John 18:20; NKJV). With John 18:20 we may compare John 1:11. Jesus preaches in a free and understandable way in Jerusalem and in the synagogues of the countryside to all the Jews; but most of his *own* people refuse to accept the preaching of the 'logos' sent by God. Although there is some difference of aim in John 6, it is part of the line of opposition

⁶⁶ Op cit., 131: 'In Joh 6 wird zwischen Glaube und Unglaube in immer engeren Kreisen unterschieden'.

in the framing chapters. In the narrative flow of the Johannine Gospel the division among the disciples is introduced and set in the context of the conflicts in Jerusalem with an interpretative aim. The denial of Jesus by the 'schismatics' draws an analogy between their denial and the denial of 'the Jews' who did not believe in Jesus; therefore they too belong on the side of the 'kosmos' opposed to God.⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, the episode closes with a hint at the intention of Judas to betray Jesus. The judgment of the Evangelist is severe. Whoever refuse the proclamation of Jesus or of the community that preserves his proclamation and leave this community make themselves part of the world that is opposed to the envoy sent by God. Anyone who does not stay faithful to the confession of Peter is on the way to becoming a betrayer of Jesus like Judas. Such behaviour is foretold by Jesus and can be expected by the community. Opposition and the schism of some people or groups within the Johannine group are part of the future as foretold by Jesus, but that very foretelling makes the community safe because of his promise.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ As it is shown anew by U. Schnelle, 'Die Juden im Johannesevangelium', in *Gedenkt an das Wort. Festschrift für W. Vogler zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. by C. Kähler, M. Böhm, C. Böttrich; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999) 217–230, 'the Jews' are not a group which is regarded as unqualifiedly negative in the Fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, there is a strong negative tendency in most of the records of the relationship between the Jews and Jesus, which has to be taken into account in the analysis of the whole Gospel, although for semantic reasons each record has to be understood in its own context. On the different interpretations of the term 'the Jews' cf. K. Scholtissek, 'Antijudaismus', 159–164.

⁶⁸ This statement is made by analogy with the interpretation of the Johannine version of Peter's denial of Jesus (18:21, 28–32) proposed by F.J. Moloney, 'John 18:15–27: A Johannine View of the Church', *DR* 112

V

The refusal to believe of the groups in John 6 when confronted with the revelation of Jesus by deed and speech is a dark foil for the confession of Peter in 6:68f.⁶⁹ Peter confesses Jesus as the one who provides ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου. This represents a reference back to the bread of life discourse. The confession refers at first to Jesus' self-identification as the bread of life (6:35,48); it reflects also the

(1994) 231–248, 239 (cf. id., *Glory not Dishonour. Reading John 13–21* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998] 136). M. Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage. Ein Lösungsversuch mit einem Beitrag zur Apokalypse von J. Frey* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993) 198, speaks, in reference to Celsus (Origines, c.Cels. 2,34f), about the shame of passive endurance; in contrast with this, it is my view that the second aspect, the ability to dominate the situation by the knowledge of future events is not less an important feature, which underlines in christological terms the sovereignty of the one who is sent, and enables the community to take refuge in the divine promise that foretells both the experience of authentic life and the occurrence of schismatic events (6:61,65,71).

⁶⁹ J. Frey, 'Das Bild als Wirkungspotential. Ein rezeptionsästhetischer Versuch zur Funktion der Brot-Metapher in Johannes 6', (will appear in R. Zimmermann [ed.], *Bildersprache verstehen. Zur Hermeneutik figurativer Rede* [with a foreword by H.-G. Gadamer; Übergänge 26; München: Fink, 2000] 15f (*manuscript*), traces this aim with notable arguments back to the miracle sequence, although he does not lay any special emphasis on the participle *πειράζων*. He comes to the following conclusion, having taken into account further indicators in the bread of life discourse and in the reports of schism among Jesus' disciples: 'Part of the text-pragmatical function of the two miracles consequently consists in allowing the Johannine readers to identify themselves not with the crowd but with those disciples who receive Jesus' revelation, who hear his self-proclamation and, because of that, pledge themselves to him' ('Die textpragmatische Funktion der beiden Wundergeschichten besteht also u.a. darin, dass sie die johanneischen Leser veranlasst, sich in ihrem Verständnis der Wirksamkeit Jesu nicht mit der Volksmenge zu identifizieren, sondern mit jenen Jüngern, die Jesu Offenbarung empfangen, seine Selbstverkündigung hören und sich aufgrund derselben zu ihm bekennen.').

statements about the eternal life of believers (vv.39,40,44).⁷⁰ The narrative climax leads us to expect a ‘believing moment of decision’ (‘Glaubensentscheidung’) as the goal of John 6.⁷¹ The line of thought in chapter 6 involves the readers in a process of decision; they can, of course, refuse to accept Jesus like other characters in the narrative, but the aim is to invite them to repeat the confession of Peter as their own life-bestowing confession.⁷²

In the same way Michael Theobald specifies as the textpragmatic centre of the confession of Peter the aim that the community of hearers or readers should make as their own the confession⁷³ the ‘representative answer of Peter’ (‘stellvertretende(.) Antwort des Petrus’).⁷⁴ Theobald supplements this interpretation with the argument that the original text of 6:60–71, part of a *Grundschrift*, served to work out theologically for the readers of the Gospel the meaning of the scandalous events recorded here whereby Christ is

⁷⁰ A synchronic reading can combine this statement with the eucharistic passage in John 6:51c–58, but should not narrow the significance of the confession purely to the sacramental as J. Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte. Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte. Mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6* (SBB 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988) 216 tends to do.

⁷¹ E.g. J. Beutler, ‘Struktur’, 251, based on exegetical decisions which at times diverge from mine.

⁷² Cf. J. Frey, ‘Leser’, 287.

⁷³ For the character of the Gospel of John as an address to the readers see also R. Schnackenburg, *Jesus Christus im Spiegel der vier Evangelien* (Akzente; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1998), 246.

⁷⁴ M. Theobald, ‘Häresie von Anfang an? Strategien zur Bewältigung eines Skandals’, in *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments* (note 38), 212–246, 223.

betrayed.⁷⁵ *'It entails coming to terms with a scandal, the betrayal of Jesus into the power of death by one of his innermost group of friends'*.⁷⁶

There is some reflection of their own history in John 6. The 'we', which means on the intratextual level the circle of the twelve, has – as Jürgen Becker points out⁷⁷ – an ecclesiological meaning. By repeating the confession, the reader is lead into the Johannine community of believers which is a community that has to live out this confession in obedience to the command of love (John 13:34f), a community in which there is no place for schismatic actions.

VI

However, if chapter 6 does not close with a decision of faith, but with a reference to the 'traitor', it is selling it short to interpret this as merely a concession to the passion narrative.⁷⁸ Granted the episodic character of the narrative in John 6,⁷⁹ nevertheless the reference to Judas still stands in the textpragmatically emphasized important final position in the narrative. The explanation in v.70 which has in view, in contrast to other such comments in the

⁷⁵ Ibid. 222.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 230: *'Es geht um die Verarbeitung eines Skandals, der Auslieferung Jesu an die Macht des Todes durch jemanden aus seinem innersten Freundeskreis'*.

⁷⁷ J. Becker, 'Das Geist- und Gemeindeverständnis des vierten Evangelisten', *ZNW* 89 (1998) 217–234, 224.

⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. D.M. Smith, *John*, 164.

⁷⁹ For some reflections on this point cf. M. Labahn, *Offenbarung*, 44f.

narrative, rather less well-informed readers,⁸⁰ disturbs the point of John 6 a bit. Yet it is evident that *discipleship is described as being in danger*.⁸¹ Even with respect to the Johannine confession of Christ, a confession that the hearers and readers ought to adopt as their own, the circle of those who do not give in to misunderstanding and unbelief is yet again more narrowly drawn. Even that person who belongs to those confessing Christ as their source of authentic life (cf. ἡμεῖς in v.69; Peter represents the ‘twelve’ and therefore the [ideal?⁸²] Johannine community⁸³) is in danger of becoming a ‘traitor’,⁸⁴; that means, is in danger of leaving

⁸⁰ The reader-guiding signals and the refinements in John assume at least partially well-informed readers, as for example R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 212ff has very nicely worked out.

⁸¹ K. Scholtissek, ‚Antijudaismus’, 167, asserts correctly that the disciples in John do not form ‘a closed and unassailed company’ (‘eine geschlossene, unangefochtene Formation’). On the contrary the Evangelist puts a bar on ‘any precipitate certainty of salvation’ (‘jedweder vorschnellen Heilssicherheit’).

⁸² The term ‘ideal Johannine community’, which I use with some caution, attributes to the textpragmatic a characteristic of being designed to make an appeal; John 6 is addressed to a community or communities in which the Johannine confession is endangered, according to the view of the author of the Fourth Gospel.

⁸³ Contrary to the distinction made by R.E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple. The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist, 1979) 74f note 131, 82f. According to Brown the twelve are a group of outsiders, who can be identified with the apostolic group outside the Johannine community. In this chapter Peter represents the Johannine community through his Johannine confession and so is a person with whom the church loyal to Peter, yet outside this circle, should and could rediscover itself.

⁸⁴ The ecclesiological point is also recognised by J. Wagner, *Auferstehung und Leben. Joh 11,1–12,19 als Spiegel johanneischer Redaktions- und Theologiegeschichte* (BU 19; Regensburg: Pustet, 1988) 163, who links this with 1John 2:18ff; but this is taken by Wagner as reason (wrongly, I

the community of Christ and of forfeiting authentic life. If vv.60ff probably depend on *past* events in the history of the Johannine community (likewise seen adumbrated in the reference to the 'traitor': v.64⁸⁵), so vv.70f refer on the intratextual level to the community, and that means to the *present* community of readers. For that reason Judas is presented as εἰς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα, just as Jesus introduces the dialogue that leads to the confession of Peter with a question posed to the δώδεκα (v.67). So this negative climax, from confession to betrayal, enables us to see that the programmatic statement in John 20:30f presupposes a contemporary reality that has in view not only the experience of past schism but also a threat to Johannine faith in the *present*. This concern with the threat to faith shows at the same time that believers have to adhere to faith in their own lifetime: faith and the confession that springs from faith have to be verified by remaining *in Christ*. Faith means willingness to confess that faith and to verify the confession under persecution and in the face of death. This situation may be reflected in the late-Johannine text John 16:2 in which conflict with the surrounding Roman Empire may be mirrored.⁸⁶ So it cannot be excluded that the Johannine confession of Peter represents the confession of the *ideal* Johannine community the Evangelist aimed to build up by creating his Gospel, but which he did not meet with in the present.

VII

The Johannine bread of life chapter which tells in both deed and word the story of the authentic revealer in his coming for humanity

think) for ascribing the ecclesiological point to a redactional layer of the Gospel of John.

⁸⁵ Cf. D.M. Smith, *John*, 162f.

⁸⁶ Cf. M. Labahn, *Jesus*, 39f. on the term 'aposynagogos'.

and lets him speak for himself is '*paraklesis*' in a threefold sense of the word. (1) It shows the revealer sent by God as a revealer whose role is disputed. In order to *give fresh heart to the community*, the opposition to the Johannine preaching of Christ is shown to stand in continuity with the way of the revealer on earth. Although Jesus depicted himself in deed and word as God's authentic gift of life, he experienced opposition and rejection, and that opposition and rejection continue to be met in the circle of his own genuine disciples. (2) In order to *give fresh courage to the community* this chapter reminds them of the life-bestowing meaning of the sending of God's revealer, in which life the community participates by 'being in Christ' and by believing. (3) Last of all this chapter *speaks a warning to the community*. Even those who have recognised that the revealer provides *ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου* are in danger of going over to the side of the traitor, so that they have to bear in mind the warning to remain true to the revealer.

The later sacramental *relecture* of John 6 in John 6:51c–58⁸⁷ grounds this '*paraklesis*' at that point in the life of the community where they celebrate their hope, in worship. By this later reading of the implicit references to the Eucharist in John 6 (i.e., in John 6 without the later additions in 6:23c,51c–58)⁸⁸ in the light of the

⁸⁷ Cf. note 62 above.

⁸⁸ One can well argue that aspects of the Johannine sacramental conception (which in my view are present in the *relecture* John 6:51c–58) have had an effect not upon the feeding stories but upon the bread of life discourse: Cf. F. Hahn, 'Die alttestamentlichen Motive in der urchristlichen Abendmahlüberlieferung', *EvTh* 27 (1967) 337–374, 348f and 343. A further proof can be seen in the double statement John 6:35 that, contrary to the semantic context, adds the term 'to be thirsty', which refers indirectly to 'to drink', alongside of 'to eat', 'to hunger' (K. Scholtissek, 'Die Brotrede in Joh 6,1–71. Exegetische Beobachtungen zu ihrem johanneischen Profil', which will appear in *ZKTh* 2000, finds in this double conception a link with chapter 4 and explains John 6 as a kind of

celebration of the unity they had with the revealer who had returned to his father, the later readers referred explicitly to the place where this unity was achieved in an almost objective manner, to the celebration of the Eucharist. Here the exalted Christ gives himself as the bread of life.

'reécriture' of John 4). On the implicate eucharistic metaphoric cf. J. Frey, 'Erwägungen zum Verhältnis der Johannesapokalypse zu den übrigen Schriften im Corpus Johanneum', in M. Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage* (note 68) 326–439, 397. Nevertheless, the term 'to drink' is not mentioned explicitly, and the mode of the reception is 'faith' and not 'eating'.