

# Scripture

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## JESUS KING AND JUDGE ACCORDING TO JOHN 19:13<sup>1</sup>

Ever since Harnack the meaning of *ekathisen* in Jn. 19:13 has been disputed. Are we to take this verb as transitive: 'He (Pilate) made him (Jesus) sit,' or intransitive: 'He (Pilate) sat'? This question is not merely one of grammar. Its importance is far greater than that, for if the verb is transitive, the whole of the last scene in the trial of Jesus before Pilate (19:13-16) is given a new meaning. It is Jesus himself who is seated on the bench when Pilate exclaims: 'Behold your king.'

This new interpretation first appeared when Harnack published fragments of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*. In this we read: 'And they made him sit on a judgment seat, saying: "Judge justly, king of Israel"' (v. 7). According to Harnack we ought therefore to take it for granted that John, too, had already understood *ekathisen* transitively. This opinion has been maintained by a number of commentators from the beginning of this century to the present day. But others welcome it with reserve. They think that John was aware of the two meanings, transitive and intransitive, and that whilst directly he stated that it was Pilate who took his seat on the bench, he expressed himself in such a way that the text suggested the other meaning at the same time: to the eyes of faith Jesus was the true judge, a king sitting on his throne. But this latter solution is complicated, and it is hardly in accord with John's use of symbolism. It is therefore improbable and will hardly be retained. It is in its first form that we would like to examine the new interpretation more thoroughly and see whether it is possible to justify as the translation of Jn. 19:13: 'He made Jesus sit on the bench . . . and said to the Jews: Behold your king.'

What are the arguments for and against?

Here are the reasons given in favour of the intransitive sense, viz. 'He (Pilate) sat':

<sup>1</sup> This is a translation by J. O'Hara, of an article which first appeared in French in *Biblica* XLII (1960), pp. 217-47. With the kind permission of the author it has been somewhat abbreviated, and the excellent documentation has been practically omitted. Clearly therefore a critical assessment of Fr de la Potterie's interpretation must be made on the basis of the original article and not of this more popular presentation. (Ed.)

(a) *kathizō* in both the LXX and NT is more frequently used intransitively: apropos of John in particular, the only time the word occurs apart from the present place, in 12:14, it is intransitive (cf. 8:2). But to this we may well reply that the transitive use is well attested in the NT (Ac. 2:30; 1 Cor. 6:4; Eph. 1:20) and is therefore equally possible here. Moreover the fact that *kathizō* is only used twice in John (or three times if we include 8:2) weakens the appeal to 12:14.

(b) According to Blinzler<sup>1</sup> *kathizein epi (tou) bēmatos* is almost a technical term for a judge taking his place in court. This is correct, but it still remains true that the word is used transitively in the *Gospel of Peter* and in Justin. Why then should it be impossible for John to use it in the same way?

(c) It has been argued that if the verb were transitive John would have had to follow it with a direct object (He sat *him*) in order to remove the ambiguity. But we shall show that it is in keeping with John's style to omit the direct object after the second of two verbs which both govern it: in this case 'Jesus' governed by both 'brought' and 'sat.'

(d) Final objection: it is quite impossible from the historical point of view that Pilate would have installed Jesus on the bench in front of the Jews. It is inconceivable, they say, that a Roman magistrate should so forget his position as to use his own bench for staging a public mockery. We will come back to this point in the second part.

Here are the reasons put forward until now in favour of the transitive sense, viz. 'He sat (him)':

(a) It gives far greater dramatic force to Pilate's declaration 'Behold your king.'

(b) As we said at the beginning there is a very old tradition (Justin and *Gospel of Peter*) which understands the expression transitively, so that Jesus is mockingly presented as the judge of the Jews.

(c) If it is Pilate who sits on the bench, it can only be to pronounce sentence of condemnation. But in spite of Blinzler,<sup>2</sup> it is hard to see in 'Behold your king' any real charge which implies a condemnation.

None of these arguments is taken directly from the text: (a) derives from theological considerations; (b) from the history of the interpretation of the Passion story; (c) from the historical context of the trial. It is therefore understandable that many exegetes, concerned primarily with the interpretation of texts, find these reasons insufficient. But it is possible to add new arguments from the text itself, and this time they are strictly philological. We will give them in the first

<sup>1</sup> 'Der Entscheid des Pilatus—Exekutionsbefehl oder Todesurteil?', *MüTZ* v (1954), pp. 171–84 (cf. pp. 176–81); see also the same author's *The Trial of Jesus*, Cork 1959, pp. 237ff.

<sup>2</sup> cf. J. Blinzler, op. cit., p. 238

part. In the second we will try to answer the historical difficulties. Then we will show how the interpretation which takes the verb as a transitive is the only one to give coherent sense to the whole context, and bring out the full theological significance.

I THE TRANSITIVE SENSE OF EKATHISEN

I. Bonsirven<sup>1</sup> has already noted one philological argument: the reference to place *eis topon legomenon Lithostrōton*: into (or in?), the place called Lithostrotos, can hardly depend on *ekathisen epi bēmatos*. Rather it must go with *ēgagen* to express the point to which the motion is directed. In this way both actions, 'bring' and 'seat,' more naturally refer to the only direct object mentioned. The usual interpretation, which makes the reference to place depend on *ekathisen* (he sat *in* the place . . .) can hardly be defended from the grammatical point of view.

True they try to justify it from hellenistic usage, which often has *eis* (into) in place of *en* (in). But not all NT authors adopt this usage. Matthew and Paul preserve the classical distinction between the two prepositions. It is the same with John, as can be seen from a detailed study of all the examples of *eis* in his gospel,<sup>2</sup> and particularly where the same word *topos* is used. It is quite clear: John distinguishes the two cases perfectly. So in 19:13 *eis ton topon* implies motion and cannot be governed by *ekathisen*, a static verb; it must be linked with *ēgagen*. Now the reference to place at the end of the verse is separated from this verb of motion by the phrase *ekathisen epi bēmatos*; it can only indicate therefore the term of a motion which begins in *ēgagen* and finishes in *ekathisen*. Moreover this construction is found elsewhere in John.<sup>3</sup>

The two verbs therefore are closely linked and express one action, and a single motion. But this becomes very difficult if *ekathisen* be intransitive: Pilate brings *Jesus* outside; *he himself* sits down. In this construction the motion of bringing *Jesus* stops before Pilate's action of sitting down. But with this interruption in the sentence the construction becomes very harsh if we must still make *eis topon* depend

<sup>1</sup> J. Bonsirven, 'La notation chronologique de Jean 19, 14 aurait-elle un sens symbolique?', *Biblica* XXXIII (1952), p. 512

<sup>2</sup> M. Zerwick, in *Graecitatis Biblicae Cognitio*, Romae 1944, p. 17 states clearly that apart from Jn. 1:18 one could hardly find a text in St John where *eis* and *en* are used the one for the other. It may even be questioned whether 1:18 is an exception, for 'there can be no doubt that (it) is intended to mean something different from 13:23.' Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, n. 2308. A difference is also intended between 8:26 and 17:13: 'I speak to the world' and 'I speak, being present in the world.'

<sup>3</sup> cf. Jn. 9:7

on *ēgagen*, as grammar requires. On the other hand, if *ekathisen* is transitive, the sentence is carried along in a single continuous movement, for the two verbs govern the same complement placed between them : making Jesus sit completes the action of bringing Jesus outside.

2. The place of the complement *ton Iēsoun* between the two verbs brings us directly to the second argument. It has been claimed that if John were using *ekathisen* in the transitive and causal sense, he would have to add the complement *auton*. This however is to misunderstand John's style, though no-one seems to have pointed it out before. We may explain it like this : when two co-ordinated verbs have a common direct object it is almost always placed *between* the two verbs, and in this case it is not repeated pronominally after the second verb. We have found seventeen examples of this in the fourth gospel, and it is extremely significant that in the majority of these cases there is a variant reading in which the complement is repeated after the second verb : it has been added by copyists who found the shorter text obscure.

In the text we are studying therefore, *ton Iēsoun* is the direct object of *ekathisen* as well as of *ēgagen*. It is the whole of this action of Pilate, begun in the Praetorium, which ends *eis ton topon legomenon Lithostrōton*. Notice moreover that this peculiarity of style is not proper to the author of the fourth gospel. Surprisingly enough, of the three passages in the NT where this verb *kathizō* is unquestionably transitive, two of them have exactly the same construction : Ac. 2:30 (D) and Eph. 1:20. The resemblance between the first of these and Jn. 19:13 is striking. And they both show that the transitive use of *ekathisen* in Jn. 19:13 without the pronoun *auton* following, is no cause for surprise : in fact it is the normal construction. Jn. 19:13, taken transitively, is no more ambiguous than Ac. 2:30 or Eph. 1:20.

3. A final argument in favour of the transitive sense—or rather this time an indication—is that *bēmatos* is used without the article. This small detail is not without significance, as can be seen from the many hellenistic texts containing the word *bēma*. Limiting ourselves here to examples in which the word is preceded by *kathizein* we find that the formula *kathizein epi tou bēmatos*, i.e. with the article, is found in narrative passages speaking of the magistrate taking his place on his bench, namely the well-known and official place where he habitually exercises justice. The formula is used in this way in the NT, in particular of Pilate at Jerusalem (Mt. 27:19), Herod Agrippa at Caesarea (Ac. 12:21), Festus at Caesarea also (Ac. 25:6). But when the formula is used without the article, as in Jn. 19:13, the sense is no longer quite the same. The nuance differs according to context. In narrative passages of which there are several in Josephus, it is always a question

of a temporary tribunal, provisionally set up in this or that place to allow the Roman magistrates to dispense justice on circuit. This is what Pilate did in the stadium at Caesarea (*Bell.* II, 9, 3, s. 172). But in other contexts the absence of the article may have a different nuance : it may draw attention to the character or (juridical) nature of the place in question : a place where justice is dispensed. This latter nuance is particularly pronounced in a passage of Epictetus. In order to lead his disciples to prefer spiritual benefits to the glory of the consulate, the philosopher shows how trivial are the advantages handed out in this political career : ‘Twelve fasces, (the right) to sit on the bench (*epi bēma*) three or four times, to sponsor games at the circus etc.’ (IV, 10, 21). Clearly it is a question here, not of this or that particular bench, but of the consular bench considered in the abstract, and the judiciary function as such.

From all this it follows clearly that in the formula we are examining the presence or the absence of the article has precisely the sense that grammarians give it in general :

(a) *kathizein epi tou bēmatos* (with the article) describes a concrete action : the judge sits down on his bench (concerned therefore with the ordinary and official bench) ;

(b) *kathizein epi bēmatos* (without the article) may have two nuances which are not always clearly distinguishable : in factual narratives the article is omitted to express the fact that the judge takes his place on a bench (not the usual one). In other cases the formula stresses the *nature* of this action (in our case the *juridical* nature of the action) : ‘to be on the bench’ is equivalent to ‘to act as judge.’ Used transitively the formula would then signify : to install someone as judge.

If we apply this to the passages in Justin and *Gospel of Peter* which are significant for Jn. 19:13, and both of which use the formula without the article, we find in the *Gospel of Peter* : ‘And they clothed him in purple, and made him sit on a seat of judgment, saying : “Judge justly, king of Israel.”’ In Justin, the formula identical with Jn. 19:13 can be understood according to either of the nuances we have just distinguished ; we may translate : ‘Mocking they made him sit on a bench, and said to him : “Judge us”’ (*Apol.* I, 35, 6) ; this would underline the fact that the *bēma* on which Jesus was installed was not that of the Roman procurator. But we could also understand : ‘They made him sit *pro tribunali*,’<sup>1</sup> i.e. made him assume the position of judge (in general).

<sup>1</sup> In the papyri we find the stereotyped formulae *pro bēmatos* and *epi bēmatos*, both equivalent to the Latin *pro tribunali*. Here it is no longer a question of the concrete place to which plaintiff and accused go, but the *nature* of this place, its judicial character. Hence the absence of the article : a man is ‘up before the bench’ or hauled ‘before the judge.’

All this no doubt seems subtle. But we are bound to indicate that hellenistic texts express different nuances according as they use the formula with or without article, for it is this evidence which now enables us to determine the nuance of the verse in St John.

It seems legitimate to state the following conclusions. First there is a negative conclusion, confirming what we said before : the absence of the article rather suggests that it is not Pilate who sits on the bench. Neither of the nuances met with in the texts where the formula is understood in the intransitive sense applies accurately to the case of the Roman magistrate. If Jn. 19:13 be taken as part of a descriptive narrative, we would expect *epi tou bēmatos* as in Mt. 27:19, since it is at the Praetorium, the official residence of the procurator. If we take the expression as a technical and juridical formula (*pro tribunali*) it would seem to be introducing of necessity a judicial act, in this instance the condemnation of Jesus. But it is precisely this which is missing in the verses following : this point we will deal with later.

On the other hand if *ekathisen* has a causal meaning : if therefore Jesus is installed on the *bēma*, then the phrase makes excellent sense. If John uses the formula without the article, as in Justin and the *Gospel of Peter*, to portray Jesus seated on the bench, it is because it was of no importance to him to say that Jesus was installed on the *official* bench. What mattered much more to the evangelist was the *nature* of the place where Jesus was, and the fact that this place was a court. So its meaning hardly leaves room for doubt, even if it is difficult to translate exactly this expression with its precise nuance : when Pilate makes Jesus sit on the *bēma* he makes him take up the position and the function of the judge. Jesus is seated *pro tribunali* : on the bench : the platform on which he is installed is the eloquent symbol of his judiciary power.<sup>1</sup> We will point out later the considerable significance of this conclusion, both exegetically and doctrinally.

The three philological arguments we have given confirm each other, and make it practically certain that *ekathisen* in Jn. 19:13 is transitive. We will see in the third part that the exegesis and theology of this passage give valuable support to this interpretation. But we must first attend to an historical difficulty.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this objection may be made : in actual fact the platform where Jesus was put was the same one as usually served for the Roman magistrate, and therefore it is just the same as if *epi tou bēmatos* had been used. But as we have already remarked, the same reality may be considered from two different points of view. *pro tou bēmatos* : before such and such a bench, is not the same as *pro bēmatos* : before the bench in a general sense. Similarly here : if John had wanted to say that Pilate installed Jesus on his own bench, and therefore on the official bench, he would have written *epi tou bēmatos*. By omitting the article, he is drawing attention to the character of the place, and the function allotted to Jesus (without Pilate intending it). It hardly matters if, in actual fact, the official platform is used.

II THE HISTORICAL REALITY

It is especially Zahn<sup>1</sup> and Blinzler<sup>2</sup> who have raised this objection. It is unthinkable, they say, that Pilate should thus have made a mockery of his own sacrosanct symbol of power, the magistrate's seat, *sella curulis*, which the Acts call *to bēma Kaisaros* (20:15).

The objection is based on a misapprehension. They argue as if the *bēma* were the very seat of the magistrate itself, the *sella curulis*, and it is in this way that numerous commentators seem to understand the matter. If this were the sense of the words in our text, there would indeed be some difficulty; for one could not easily see Pilate publicly installing someone condemned to death on the official seat from which he himself administered justice. But the word *bēma* has a wider sense. It designates not the seat, but the semi-circular platform of stone or wood where the magistrate's government seat was placed and where the assessors and clerks took their places. By this very fact the difficulty almost entirely disappears. If Pilate makes Jesus sit on the platform in front of the Praetorium, there is nothing which obliges us to believe that he has made him take a place on the magistrate's seat itself; this is, in fact, somewhat improbable. Any seat would serve. To do the text justice it is sufficient that this seat be found on the platform from which Pilate addressed the Jews and from which he normally pronounced sentence.

Not only does the historical difficulty disappear, but it is the usual interpretation itself which has to answer a serious objection. Blinzler admits that if it is Pilate who takes his place on the bench this can only be in order to pronounce the death sentence.<sup>3</sup> But this sentence is not even mentioned in the remainder of the account, as most commentators agree. Does this mean that Pilate, in actual fact, did not pronounce the condemnatory sentence at all? That is another question. The very fact that the *bēma*—a necessary condition for judicial sentences—had been erected in front of the Praetorium makes it likely that there really was a condemnation by the procurator. This condemnation is undoubtedly indicated implicitly in v. 16, 'Then he delivered him to them to be crucified.'

The new opinion of Blinzler seems scarcely defensible.<sup>4</sup> Accord-

<sup>1</sup> Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Leipzig 1921, p. 646, n. 65

<sup>2</sup> J. Blinzler, *op. cit.*, p. 237, n. 3

<sup>3</sup> ' . . . in order to pass in due form, *e superiori* and publicly, in the presence of accusers and Accused, a verdict at variance with his convictions as judge but which, owing to the threat of the Jews, had become unavoidable.' *op. cit.*, pp. 237-8

<sup>4</sup> 'Instead of saying, to register the guilt of the Accused: "He has made himself king of the Jews," he used the ironical words: "Behold, your king!" Hence he pretended to recognise the kingly claim of Jesus, whom he was being obliged to condemn as a political offender by saying in effect: This man guilty of high treason is your king.' *op. cit.*, p. 238

ing to him, the words 'Behold your king,' of v. 14, form part of the judicial sentence expressing the indictment drawn up by Pilate. It would be necessary to see in them the meaning 'this is a man who has passed himself off as king of the Jews.' Then in v. 16 would come the announcement of the punishment for the political crime which had just been pointed out. It might be thought that this interpretation also explains the solemn terms which introduce the scene in vv. 13b-14a, but the whole of this exegesis is forced. If v. 14b forms part of the sentence, how can Pilate still ask in the following verse 'Shall I crucify your king?' This uncertainty on the part of the magistrate clearly shows that at this moment his decision has not yet been taken. The declaration 'Behold your king' which goes before cannot, therefore, form part of the sentence itself; it has an entirely different sense. The fact that the formula of condemnation is not found in the gospel text has been strongly felt by the author of the *Acts of Pilate* (recension B), who adds to the gospel account a condemnation in precise legal form.

The conclusion seems inevitable. The words of v. 14b, 'Behold your king,' do not form part of the sentence of the Roman magistrate and are not to be connected to v. 16. Rather should they be joined to the foregoing verses (13-14a) where the expression *ekathisen epi bēmatos* is found. The two verses 13-14 form a closely knit whole and must be explained together. Let us therefore undertake this explanation from the point of view of the exegesis and the theology of St John.

### III EXEGESIS AND DOCTRINAL CONTENT OF THE PASSAGE

The verses we are examining pertain to the final phase of the trial of Jesus before Pilate (19:13-16); by the same token they describe its culminating point. The importance and gravity of the moment are forcibly emphasised by St John. The event occurs in the place called Lithostrotos, in Hebrew Gabbatha. The day, the liturgical setting and the time of the scene are similarly pointed out: 'It was the day of the preparation of the Pasch, about the sixth hour.' If these various circumstances are reported with such insistence, it can only be because the incident which follows holds an unusual significance in the eyes of the evangelist. Most commentators acknowledge this. But more frequently they see the importance of these verses to lie in the fact that in them is recounted the condemnation of Jesus.

But this explanation is improbable, for it forces us to acknowledge an evident flaw in the composition of the text and something really

illogical in the thought. In fact the solemn circumstances of which we have just spoken are the introduction not to Pilate's judicial sentence but to his declaration 'Behold your king.' The condemnation itself only comes at the end of the account in v. 16 (according to the common opinion), and even here it is merely suggested in a more or less indirect and implicit manner. In other words, there is no indication from the way in which the narrative has been composed that this is the point of the account. It is not on this condemnation as such that the attention of the evangelist is concentrated before all else. Thus the paradox is evident: four particular details emphasising the importance of a particular event; but the event itself John does not find necessary to point out clearly.

The error of the usual interpretation probably arises from the fact that it seeks merely to give an historical exegesis. That is to say, without concerning itself with literary problems, it seems solely to concentrate on the reconstruction of Jesus' trial. Because of this it pays attention to scarcely anything except the conclusion of the trial and Pilate's sentence. Hence the title usually given to the verses 'The condemnation of Jesus,' although the text has no mention of this condemnation. The passage is doubtless welcome to historical research, giving as it does four definite circumstances. In addition, the time given seems irreconcilable with that given by Mark (15:25), a fact which has from antiquity allowed historians to exercise all their sagacity in reconciling the two evangelists.

But apart from the exact reconstruction of the historical event, is not the individual interpretation which each author gives to this important also? It is this which allows us to discern which theological implications are contained in the account. To discover them it is necessary to pay attention before all else to the individual vocabulary of the author, to his choice of material, to his methods of composition and to the problem of the arrangement of the different pericopes within the larger units. At this price alone is it possible to discern the intentions of each author and the doctrinal themes which he brings out in his account.

In the present case we shall see that two doctrinal themes are intimately connected: that of the kingship of Jesus and that of judgment.

### *The Kingship of Jesus*

When we examine closely the construction of vv. 13-14 we see that the four circumstances of the scene have been grouped two by two, and underline all that goes before as well as what follows. The first two (concerning the place) are directly related to the verbs *ēgagen*

and *ekathisen*; the other two (the day and the hour), while being separated from these verbs grammatically (*en de . . .*), nevertheless refer to them as far as the sense is concerned. The four circumstances thus directly place in relief the words *ekathisen epi bēmatos*. But this expression is itself connected to the phrase 'and he said . . .', which ends the verse beyond the parenthesis of the four circumstances. The act of making Jesus sit on the bench receives its own commentary, so to say, in the words which end v. 14, 'behold your king.' And it is the action by which Pilate makes Jesus sit on the bench, as well as the circumstances of time and place, which gives to this declaration of the procurator a singular importance. It is, therefore, in v. 14b (with 15a) that the true centre of the pericope must be found.

If John alone amongst the evangelists mentions that Jesus was momentarily installed on the bench, it is because this gesture held in his faith a profound symbolic and theological significance. It is necessary to recall how the whole Joannine account of the passion (18:33-19:22) is dominated by the theme of Jesus the king (*basileus*).<sup>1</sup> The term *basileus* appears in it as often as twelve times. The theme of kingship is first broached at the beginning of the first interview with Pilate (18:37, 'are you king of the Jews?') and finishes in the account of the placing on the cross: Jesus' cross is to John like a throne.<sup>2</sup>

In the trial before Pilate this theological motif develops in four movements. (a) In the first interview with Pilate (18:33-8) Jesus declares that he is a king and explains the true nature of his kingship. (b) In the scene of the outrages (19:2-3) John leaves out several details given in the synoptic accounts, but retains precisely those which serve to emphasise the royal dignity of Jesus: the crown of thorns, the purple garment and the words of the soldiers: 'Hail king of the Jews,' without, however, its being mentioned, as in Matthew, that they were spoken in mockery. (c) In vv. 19:4-7 (the *Ecce Homo* scene), which already anticipate 19:13-16, Jesus is presented to the Jews wearing the royal insignia, the crown and the purple (19:15) and Pilate says to the Jews 'Behold the man,' which probably evokes in the mind of the evangelist the title 'Son of Man.' (d) Lastly, our scene of the Lithostrotos (19:13-16), parallel to that of 19:4-7 but not merely equivalent to it; the second is an advance on the first. The 'Behold your king' of v. 14 takes up the 'Behold the man' of v. 5 and synthetises the whole content of this verse. This is the concluding scene of the trial, even from the point of view of the kingship

<sup>1</sup> cf. A. Feuillet, *Introduction à la Bible* II, Tournai 1959, p. 637

<sup>2</sup> cf. W. Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, Münster-Westfalen 1960, p. 31

theme. Pilate makes Jesus sit in front of the Jews and declares to them publicly 'Behold your king.' In John's eyes the words are unconscious prophecy, an official proclamation of the kingship of Jesus.

*Jesus judge of the Jews*

Yet it is another idea which is directly evoked by the symbolic gesture of Pilate which is described in v. 13. It is necessary to recall here the exact meaning of the expression *ekathisen epi bēmatos* which we have tried to establish above. John does not say that Jesus was installed on a throne (which would be the seat of a king), but that he is seated *pro tribunali*, 'on the bench.' He is therefore before the Jews in the attitude and function of a judge. Two themes are united here : that of Jesus' kingship (proclaimed by Pilate and rejected by the Jews) and that of the judgment of the Jews (symbolised by the magistrate's action, but in fact made real by the Jews themselves). This second theme is no less important than the preceding one and it is the close connection between the two that gives the passage all its importance in the structure of the fourth gospel.

More than once already John has spoken of the judgment of Jesus : 'The Father judges no one, he has given all judgment to the Son' (5:22). It is in his position as Son of Man that Jesus has been constituted sovereign judge (5:27) ; it is for judgment that he has come into the world (9:39). But it is important to understand clearly the true nature of this judgment of Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is exercised through the attitude of men themselves before the light and the truth. For St John, the judgment lies precisely in the rejecting of the light (3:19). It is because men refuse to believe in the words of Jesus that they are subjected to judgment (5:24). 'He who rejects me and does not receive my word has his judge ; the word which I have proclaimed will judge him on the last day' (12:48). Thus the judgment is nothing other than the rejection of the revelation brought by Jesus and the refusal to embrace his word of truth. Such a judgment is already condemnation, the *krisis* is a *katakrisis* ; but it is man himself who by his negative choice pronounces his own condemnation.

John must have been forcibly struck by the fact that this theme of judgment had here been evoked by an eloquent symbol. In the final confrontation with the Jews Jesus is their judge, since at this moment they complete their rejection of their King-Messiah. The dramatic power of the scene is heightened by the joining of the themes of judgment and kingship. Jesus has borne witness before men so as to be embraced by them with docility and faith (18:37), and this is to be

<sup>1</sup> On the idea of judgment in the fourth gospel cf. D. Mollat, art. *Jugement* in *Dict. de la Bible Suppl.* iv, 1379-85

the basis of his spiritual kingship. At the end of the trial Pilate openly proclaims the kingship of Christ before the Jews, but they have only one cry, 'Away with him, crucify him!' This is the choice which judges them. One can, therefore, realise how striking is the fact that, *at this precise moment, Jesus, silent before them, faces them as a judge.* He is their judge because they will not have him as their king.

A passage in the scene on Calvary also finds in this way its full meaning. The notice on the cross made known in three languages that Jesus of Nazareth was king of the Jews. John adds that many Jews read this inscription, because the place of crucifixion was close to the town (19:20). Why this detail? One feels that the evangelist is constantly preoccupied by the attitude of the Jews in face of revelation. In this supreme moment of Christ's exaltation on the cross, he seems to imply by v. 20 that the public affirmation of the kingship of Jesus through the inscription on the cross was a last advance made to the Jews, a final opportunity left to them: they read the official proclamation that Jesus was king. But here too a refusal finishes everything; they officially demand that the procurator change the title on the cross.

If vv. 19:13-16 are placed in the whole context of the trial of Jesus, one is struck by the characteristic which appears often in St John and which has been called the 'irony' of the fourth gospel. On the human level Jesus is the accused, the one condemned by men; but on the symbolic level, on the religious plane of the history of salvation, it is in fact Jesus who judges men. Likewise the cross, instrument of torture and shame for Jesus of Nazareth, becomes for the King-Messiah an instrument of salvation and of victory. It is a typical example of those reversals of situation which one so regularly finds in St John.

### *The Circumstances*

In the explanation proposed above, the importance of the scene now appears in all clarity. We are indeed at the climax of the trial. This is why the evangelist has carefully noted all the circumstances of it: the place, the day in the cycle of the Jewish liturgical feasts and the time of that day.

We have then reason to ask whether these different indications of place and time have in John's eyes a symbolic and theological value. Many authors have thought so and indeed it is likely enough. But it is less easy to indicate in a precise way what this symbolism is. That is why this final section necessarily remains somewhat conjectural.

Of the two names, Greek and Aramaic, which designate the place where the scene unfolds, only the second can have been mentioned with a symbolic intention, the word *Gabbatha*. The exact nature of

its etymological derivation is still disputed, but it is certain that the word is related to the root *gab*, and 'denotes in a general way the idea of eminence, height.'<sup>1</sup> There is question, then, of a place called in popular language 'the height,' 'the eminence.' A designation of this kind is certainly in place if it helps to suggest the implications of the event as we have explained it; it is on this 'height' that Pilate publicly proclaims the kingship of Jesus before the Jews.

But the twofold time circumstance is much more important: 'Now it was the day of the preparation of the Pasch about the sixth hour' (v. 16). Let us first of all decide that it seems necessary to take these two indications as a whole, the second being only a further specification of the first. In other words, we need not seek to discover the sense of the sixth hour in general, independently of the Paschal context (e.g. by referring to Jn. 4:6 as does Lightfoot). Here we are concerned only with the sixth hour and its meaning on the day preceding the Pasch, that is, the fourteenth Nisan. On this point we are given precise information by a Jewish text, the 'Treatise on the Pasch' (*Pesahim*) in the Mishna and in the Babylonian Talmud. During the celebration of the Jewish Pasch, no leavened bread could remain in Jewish houses. According to Rabbi Meir (c. 130) it was permissible to eat leavened bread until the fifth hour of the fourteenth Nisan; Rabbi Yehudah allowed it only to the fourth hour. But all agreed that it was necessary to burn all that remained at the beginning of the sixth hour. A similar ruling existed for work. In Galilee all work ceased from the morning of the fourteenth Nisan, but in Judea one was allowed to continue work until noon on the eve of the Pasch. One can see that it was at the sixth hour of the fourteenth Nisan that the observance of the Pasch began at the very latest. Placed in this Jewish cultic context, the expression of John (19:14a) would mean that the moment when Jesus was installed on the *bēma* and Pilate exclaimed 'Behold your king' was the very time when the Jews began to celebrate the Pasch.

In giving this time indication John seems to have had a theological purpose. The Pasch which commenced at that moment was that which was to see the salvation of the world. Two major and complementary things point out the meaning of this in John's eyes: the proclamation of the Messianic Kingship of Jesus and the condemnation of the Jewish people. We are truly at a turning point in the history of salvation.

But is it not rather to the exaltation of Christ on the cross that one should attribute such importance? It seems to us that the two scenes of the Lithostrotos and Golgotha cannot be dissociated. The two are

<sup>1</sup> P. Benoit, 'Pretoire, Lithostrotos et Gabbatha,' *Revue biblique* LIX (1952), p. 548

closely linked to one another ; they develop exactly the same themes and ultimately have the same theological meaning : the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus (by Pilate at the Lithostrotos, by the inscription on the cross at Calvary) and the refusal of the Jews, which constitutes their condemnation (v. 15 at the Praetorium and vv. 20-2 on the cross). The Praetorium episode can be considered as a figurative anticipation of that of Calvary. Jesus is proclaimed king at the Lithostrotos, but he will find his true exaltation on the throne of the cross. Jesus seated on the *bēma* judges the world because the world rejects his kingship ; but it is by the refusal to accept the crucified Messiah that the world will consummate its condemnation. At the Praetorium matters were still at the level of a 'sign,' but on the cross the kingship of Jesus and the judgment of the world have become a definitive reality.

Recent studies have rightly underlined the juridical aspect of the fourth gospel. The whole life of Jesus is unrolled in the framework of a vast trial 'which brings Jesus Christ and the world to grips with one another.' If this is so, one can immediately understand the considerable importance of our passage in the development of this trial, because Jesus is there presented as judge of the Jews. The prologue indicates the dominant theme of the narrative : 'He came unto his own and his own received him not' (1:11). This rejection of the light and truth of Christ constitutes precisely the judgment and the condemnation of the world.

Can one say that for St John this judgment is accomplished at any particular moment in the life of Jesus ? Two texts allow an affirmative reply. Speaking of his elevation on the cross, Christ declared a few days before his passion, 'Now is the judgment (*krisis*) of this world : now the prince of this world is to be cast down' (12:31) ; and at the last supper, 'The prince of this world is condemned' (*kekritai*) (16:11). In these two texts the significance of the 'hour' of Jesus, the hour of his passion and exaltation, is indicated by anticipation. In the theological interpretation of John, the passion, death and glorification of Jesus form an indivisible whole : it is this group of events which Jesus calls his hour, the hour of salvation. This is why, thinking of the judgment of the world, Christ could speak of it as a present reality as early as at the last supper (16:11) and even from the beginning of the week of the passion (12:31). With even greater reason one can understand that during the passion itself the scene of the Lithostrotos can portray the 'judgment' of the world even if this judgment is not in fact accomplished until the cross.

The conclusion of this Praetorium scene, then, appears at the same time as the climax of the 'great trial' which occurs again and again throughout the whole gospel. In this trial it is the Jews who constantly

represent the world ; they are the true adversaries of Christ. The same is true of the Lithostrotos : the real antagonists present are not Jesus and Pilate but Jesus and the Jews. Jesus is represented here as the judge of the Jews, but basically it is the *krisis* of the world which is accomplished. The exceptional importance of the scene of the Lithostrotos is explained by the fact that here is revealed in a figurative way and at the symbolical level that which is to constitute the true meaning of the Cross and of the Pasch of salvation, namely the exaltation of the King-Messiah and the condemnation of the sinful world.

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CHOSEN IN HIM BEFORE  
THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

When we think about salvation, that is to say, the business of getting to Heaven, of being with God for ever, of being saved, we usually do so in personal terms either of ourselves or of other individuals. This makes the fact of predestination, met with so frequently in the apostolic writings, difficult to understand and it has often to be accepted by Christians simply as a mystery. It is a mystery, of course, but it need not be mystifying, and the purpose of this article is to examine, quite briefly, the part played by baptism in establishing and extending a redeemed community, the Church, in the hope that some light may be shed thereby, on one aspect at least, of a problem which continues to cause anxious thoughts in the minds of many ordinary readers of the Bible.

It is desperately important to each individual soul to be 'found written in the book of life' (Apoc. 20:15), and because this is so it is easy to forget the relationship which exists between all the redeemed, the 'great multitude which no man could number' (Apoc. 7:9). The fact is that the saved belong to a community and are saved as members of it, while the lost do not belong to a community in the same sense and it is as individuals that they are rejected.<sup>1</sup> If salvation is thought of in terms of community, predestination becomes much easier to understand, and many of the difficulties connected with it disappear. Two examples of this communal thinking by the Apostles, selected

<sup>1</sup> This is not meant to imply that those who are ultimately lost, if they belong to the visible Church, are not just as truly members of it on earth as those who are ultimately saved.